

weekly **worker**



Militarily Iran and Israel are in different leagues. And, while Iran is reactionary, Israel is genocidal

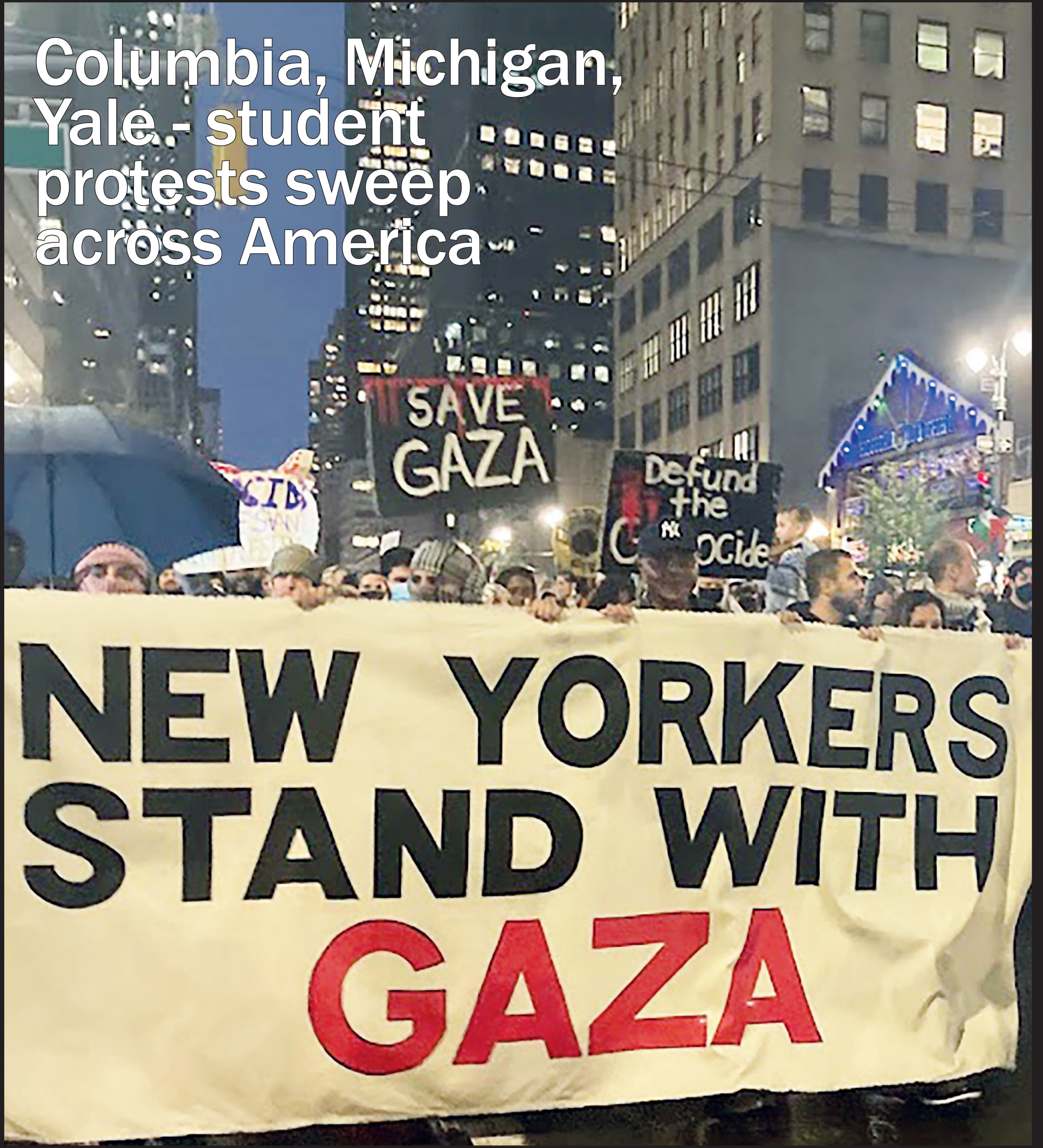
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No 1488 April 25 2024

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

Columbia, Michigan,
Yale - student
protests sweep
across America



LETTERS



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

No to boycott

On April 18 I attended a rather interesting talk hosted by the Communist Culture Club on communists and elections. In the discussion, comrade Alan Story disagreed with the whole notion of communists running in elections, proposing as an alternative an active spoiled ballot campaign. He talked about a large layer of the left - now being led at least in part by the Democratic Socialists of America - as an example of this tactic being used effectively. I strongly disagree with both the general point being made and that the example provided supports his case.

Story isn't speaking nonsense when he says that communist electoral campaigns resulting in tiny votes (and lost deposits in the case of British elections) can be demoralising. While there will generally be a core of committed activists eager to run such campaigns, running year after year to consistently gain only three-digit vote totals per constituency isn't going to be the most inspiring use of an organisation's time and resources. Part of this follows from the fact that communist politics don't yet have a mass appeal in society, so, regardless of the number of canvassing hours put into a campaign, there is going to be a fairly low number of people who will vote for a communist in most cases.

Another part, however, can be addressed by a shifting of priorities - as Edmund Griffiths pointed out in 'How we should contest' (*Weekly Worker* March 7), left groups in recent history have a tendency to stand far more candidates than their size and resources would allow, blunting their ability to mount a major campaign in two or three areas for the sake of an organisation putting its name in front of as many eyes as possible. The inefficiency of this from a resources perspective can certainly blunt its effectiveness over time. Those limitations need not be the case if left groups were willing to think seriously about what to do differently, so I don't think communists simply abandoning independent election campaigns is the answer.

Moreover, Story's proposed alternative of an active spoiled ballot campaign runs into the same potential drawbacks as the current electoral model, without the few benefits that running candidates can provide. Logistically, a spoiled ballot campaign would require boots on the ground in the same way as an election campaign in order to attract significant support. And, while a spoiled ballot campaign does have the benefit that it can be done in any constituency, whereas communist candidates can only be voted for in the constituency they're running in, without a significant campaign infrastructure the result will largely be the same - spoiled ballots running at a few hundred per constituency.

However, election campaigns allow communists to put their programme in front of voters and give groups an opportunity to explain how a communist would use their election to push that programme forward. It may not win a mass audience at this time, and some groups may camouflage their politics behind more 'acceptable' leftwing platitudes, but the opportunity to present a coherent alternative to capitalism and the rule of the

bourgeoisie is there in a way that doesn't quite exist in non-election periods. A spoiled ballot campaign, on the other hand, will by and large end up without much meaningful political content, aside from a register of dissatisfaction with the choices on offer. That doesn't actually do much for the advancement of communist politics.

With this in mind, it is worth considering the 'Michigan Uncommitted' campaign that comrade Story used as an example of what he considered an effective spoiled ballot intervention. In my view, the reality of that campaign - and many of the similar campaigns that have been launched in other states - are actually more like a traditional US election campaign in terms of the politics they are putting forward. Part of this is due to the specifics of presidential primaries for the major parties - the people actually being voted for are delegates pledged to the candidate whose names they're running under. Similarly, someone casting a vote for an 'Uncommitted' option will be contributing to the possibility of sending Uncommitted delegates to the Democrats' national convention.

As for the politics of the Uncommitted campaigns, they are running specifically on a platform of Palestinian solidarity and opposition to the Biden administration's support for Israel. These could be seen as insufficient from a communist perspective, but nevertheless are providing a clear platform for someone to vote for, rather than simply trying to get voters to cast an undifferentiated 'none of the above' vote.

As of writing, 27 Uncommitted delegates have been elected, and about a dozen more states have yet to hold their primaries, so there is the possibility of more. These delegates have an opportunity - assuming some coordination and political leadership, which an organisation like the DSA could take the lead on - to be a tribune for the Palestinian people and a potentially disruptive force at the convention, bringing some of the politics that will no doubt be expressed outside by protestors onto the floor of the convention itself.

In this way, despite the small numbers of Uncommitted delegates that will be attending, there is a chance for political agitation beyond the individual primary election itself that a spoiled ballot campaign is just not equipped to do - but a traditional election campaign at least could if it manages to win a seat here or there.

To end with another partial point of agreement with comrade Story, I also think that the Uncommitted campaign in the Democratic primaries has been inspiring and something we can learn from, and I am proud to have played a small role in the Uncommitted New Jersey campaign, as it has developed in the past month and a half. I do not think that it should be used to provide support for arguing against communists participating in elections with candidates and in favour of a spoiled ballot campaign. If anything, it is precisely the opposite.

Peter Moody
New Jersey

Vote for who?

My postal vote for the upcoming local elections arrived at the weekend. The council in Peterborough has been run by the Tories as either a majority or as the largest party since 2000. And it shows - not only in the steady running down of services and infrastructure, alongside increasing council tax (the maximum that

could be imposed without a referendum in some cases), but also in the staggering ineptitude in planning and allocation of funds and investments.

Recently a split has taken place amongst the Tory group, which arguably started as a coup against the toxic council leader. This led to the creation of 'Peterborough First', made up almost exclusively of ex-Tories and therefore involved to a greater or lesser degree in the running of the city in the past years.

Despite comments in the local press about this disastrous legacy of the Tory-led council, the Labour group have not ruled out forming an agreement, presumably a formal coalition or confidence and supply agreement with ... Peterborough First!

Even considering some form of coalition before postal votes had appeared on doormats shows that locally Labour has no real plan, no concrete policies to offer the electorate - not even a manifesto on the website. It seems they're simply relying on the anti-Tory mood to get them somewhere near power, and then sacrifice whatever platitudes they've offered to get it.

Perhaps the Labour group leaders have seen that many on the left in Peterborough have stated their intentions to vote Green, in protest at the state of the national Labour Party - specifically in regards to Gaza, the anti-Semitism campaign against Corbyn, and Starmer's outsourcing of policy to the Tories. A case can be made for the use of gesture politics, or 'lending your vote'; however, what it does show is the general weak state of the left.

Indeed, a case could be made for Peterborough being a microcosm of the national picture. The prospective parliamentary Labour candidate - parachuted in by HQ ahead of a popular local left candidate - is drifting on ambiguous, tedious and largely empty platitudes, which are deemed safe ground by Labour HQ, with a glaringly apparent lack of policies for the city or country. He too seems to be hoping that the anti-Tory mood will be enough to win him the seat.

So what are we to do, when there are no socialist (let alone communist) candidates in our local or indeed national elections, which are likely to take place later this year? Do we lend votes to the 'least bad' option? Do we abstain from voting? What do the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition or the Workers Party really represent and are they the option?

Following a very interesting aggregate meeting of the CPGB, where such questions, and more, were discussed, I look forward to the debates that are likely to take place in the pages of the *Weekly Worker* and at meetings around the country. Hopefully this leads to a rounded-out analysis of what elections are and can be; whether we participate and how; and how we incorporate that into building a mass communist party.

Carl Collins
Peterborough

Excellent

I thought Jack Conrad's article, 'Two election tactics', on the revolutionary strategy and tactics of the Bolsheviks from 1905 to 1917 - with a special focus on Bolshevik electoral strategy and tactics and how these were always subordinate to the "main task to develop the class consciousness and independent class organisation of the proletariat" - was absolutely excellent and Conrad at his best.

Although a little on the long side,

it was top quality, extremely well researched, and will hopefully do a great deal to demonstrate what Bolshevism, which later became known as Leninism and then Marxism-Leninism, was genuinely all about: ie, both the independent and leading role of the working class; and the true emancipation of the working class and working masses through socialism.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Polemic

Comrade Steve Bloom's letter, headed 'Republicanism' (April 18), usefully draws our attention to his opposition role on the International Executive Committee of the (Mandelite) Fourth International (formerly Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International) in the mid-1980s to mid-2000s.

I was unaware of this when I was a member of the British section, the International Socialist Group, in 1986-93, probably because of the extent to which the part of the leadership that was in contact with the FI's leading bodies did not feed information back into the section, except insofar as it suited their particular clique/faction interests. The point is an important one: we in the CPGB endeavour as far as possible to conduct debates in public; the FI's method of privacy produces not just secrets from the class, but also secrets from the membership - and even secrets of the top leaders from the formal central committee.

That said, the polemic in my article ('Deal with the arguments', February 22) was not mainly about the 1980s-2000s, but that comrade Bloom's argument for 'anti-schematism' was the common view of his and my own *youth* in the 1960s-70s USFI and its response - which he cited - to the Cuban revolution. And my article argued that this response can be seen from the subsequent history to have been false, and that 'anti-schematism' already produced false results in the period in which the FI majority pursued diluted Guevarism in the late 1960s-early 1970s, and in the period of the idea of the strategy of dual power and the 'new mass vanguard' developed after May 1968 in France, which reached a dead end in Portugal in 1974-76, before the mid-late 1980s turn to 'parties not delimited between reform and revolution'. Comrade Bloom does not respond to these arguments, or to my point about scientific method, that "anti-schematism itself becomes an untestable or 'unfalsifiable' claim".

Nor does his letter offer an answer to my argument that the mass-strike strategy or 'strategy of dual power', for which he relies on Rosa Luxemburg, and the insistence that it is wrong to make the political revolution the first step in the social revolution, are versions of Mikhail Bakunin's critique of the 'Marx party' in 1869-71, and that this approach has been tested repeatedly by left groups and failed over and over again.

As to a "bourgeois-democratic republic", there is an issue of substance between us, which deserves more in-depth argument than is possible in an exchange of letters. I think that the idea of "bourgeois democracy" is deeply misleading and prettifies the character of the capitalist rule-of-law regime, which is necessarily plutocratic-oligarchical. It often has monarchical elements (eg, the US presidency) and aristocratic ones (the judicial power), and only

limited and subordinate democratic elements.

Finally, I hope that he will read *Revolutionary strategy* and criticise it so far as is necessary. But his decision to polemicise against the US Marxist Unity Group comrades in complete ignorance of the book is startling, given that, first, MUG explicitly uses the book as a point of reference. And secondly, comrade Bloom's critique of MUG on the democratic republic is in part polemicising with Gil Shaeffer's 2021 *Cosmonaut* article, 'Democracy and socialism, the two edges of Marxism's knife', which in turn explicitly criticises the arguments of *Revolutionary strategy*.

The issue is the same point that I made at the beginning of my February 22 article about comrade Bloom's claim that he was "unable to check or document" my oral comments about Rosa Luxemburg - which would be thrown up as the first result of a Google search on "Mike Macnair Rosa Luxemburg". It is a sloppy method.

Mike Macnair
Oxford

Corbyn film

The film about Jeremy Corbyn that Glastonbury festival tried to ban is now to be made available online. The documentary *Oh Jeremy Corbyn - the big lie*, which was launched in January 2023, claims that the former Labour leader was targeted by a coordinated campaign to undermine him, which it says included false accusations of anti-Semitism.

Narrated by Alexei Sayle - with contributions from film director Ken Loach, former Corbyn advisor Andrew Murray, Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi of Jewish Voice for Labour and many others - the documentary was due to be screened at Glastonbury last year, but was dropped by the organisers after they were hit by an online smear campaign accusing the film itself of anti-Semitism.

After Glastonbury, the film was shown over 350 times in cinemas, halls, community centres and other venues across the country to thousands of people, despite attempts to suppress it. But the demand to see it is still growing, which is why we are now making the film freely available online, so that as many people as possible can see the truth about what happened to Jeremy Corbyn.

Events in Gaza have given the film a new significance. Given Jeremy Corbyn's long-time support for the Palestinian cause, Britain's response to events in Gaza would be very different if he'd been prime minister. No wonder that powerful people here and abroad wanted to ensure he never came close to entering 10 Downing Street.

The film is produced by award-winning, documentary maker Platform Films, which is now working on a follow-up production, *Big lie II*, which will focus on events in Palestine and their impact on British politics.

Platform Films has been making films since the 1980s and has produced programmes for the BBC and Channel Four. When it goes online, *Oh Jeremy Corbyn* will be added to Platform's YouTube channel. Here viewers will find a unique archive of over 300 radical films about social, political and trade union issues, all of which are now freely available.

Oh Jeremy Corbyn - the big lie is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXvaWz4gpTc.

Norman Thomas
Platform Films

IRAN

In the end of times

Militarily Israel and Iran are in different leagues. However, says **Yassamine Mather**, when it comes to popular opinion in the Middle East, Israel is completely isolated - apart, that is, from the ruling circles doing the bidding of the United States

Following Israel's retaliation on April 19 - an air base near Isfahan was hit - sections of the western media claimed that there is no threat of any major escalation in the simmering war between Iran and Israel. However, we have to remember that this conflict has a long history and will continue in various forms whatever happens. After all, Israel has been carrying out attacks (which it neither denies nor admits) for many years. However, now that Iran has moved from indirect to direct conflict with Israel, we have reached a new level, and this situation will not be resolved simply because at the moment there is pressure coming from the Biden administration to avoid a full-scale war.

Inevitably, during any such conflict we hear a lot of lies and fake news. The media has gone overboard with claims that 99% of Iran's drones and missiles failed to reach their target. While some of them never got beyond Iranian airspace, satellite images analysed by Associated Press show that some missiles did hit their targets - for example, the taxiway near hangars at Nevatim air base clearly suffered damage. According to the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, the hangars house C-130 cargo planes flown by transport squadrons.

Of course, slow moving drones are an easy target and a combination of US intercepts and Israeli Patriot missiles took a toll that Iran would have expected. Anything getting through would have been a bonus. Meanwhile, Iran's denial about the lack of damage inflicted by Israel are also false. Several investigations, including one commissioned by *BBC Verify*, confirm that the Isfahan base was damaged.

However, the *political* significance of the Iranian attack cannot be underestimated: it ended the assumption that Iran will not directly retaliate. Israel had boasted that its forces could kill as many physicists as they wanted. They could bomb the residences of Iranian officials - even the consulate in Damascus - and Iran will do nothing. The fact that several media outlets have indicated that, had it not been for US-UK intervention, Israeli air defences (the 'iron dome') would have been badly breached, is important. That is a claim repeated by commentators inside Israel too.

The numbers were dramatic: 170 drones, 120 ballistic missiles. Here it is difficult to judge whether one should believe Iran's propaganda that this was a calibrated attack - as opposed to Israeli and western propaganda that it was an all-out attack that was foiled. There are all sorts of other military scenarios being proposed by various institutes that the drones were really used to divert attention from the missiles.

There is also a claim - made by Iran, but repeated in Israel by several military experts - that the drones were used to take photographs of air bases, military and security compounds. I am not sure how true this is, but we should remember that, unlike Israel, Iran has no access to images taken by US satellites.

The governments of Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, etc condemned Iran's actions last week. However, what Iran did was popular in Jordanian social media - and on the streets in Gaza, where people were pointing



Israeli missile strike on Damascus consulate

out what was happening in the sky, and rightly referring to the fact that, for the first time, there were missiles in the skies not intended to destroy their homes, schools and hospitals, etc.

And there is no doubt that in terms of the Arab street, Iran has gained considerable support for what it did. However, when it comes to the long term, I agree with Moshé Machover that the post-April 19 pause by Israel might be very short-lived - it will look for new targets in Syria, in Lebanon and use cyber attacks, assassinations and maybe even more missile attacks on Iran itself. We know that on April 20 there was a major attack by 'unknown' military forces on the Hashd al-Sha'bi organisation (Iran's closest ally in Iraq) and the Americans are denying any responsibility. We can therefore assume it was Israel which was responsible.

Intensification?

Given the potential for war - or at least the continuation of the cold war between Iran and Israel - it is of some interest to look at the differences and similarities between the two countries.

Some of the data below was gathered by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, which points out (and I agree) that we should not trust everything in the statistics. What is beyond doubt, though, is that the surface area of Iran is approximately 80 times the size of Israel, while Iran's population is 88.6 million, compared to Israel's 9.6 million. In terms of economic data Iran's gross domestic product is said to be \$413 billion per annum, while Israel's is \$525 billion.

Interestingly, Iran claims that it spends 2% of its GDP on so-called defence, while Israel claims that 4% is what is spent by the authorities in Tel Aviv. Who knows? When it comes to air superiority, there is no question that Israel has the upper hand, with its 340 military aircraft. Some of these are F-15s, some are F-35s (my understanding is the number of F-35s is increasing). While Iran's 320 fighter planes are old, they include F-4s, F-5s and F-14s. In addition, when it comes to air defence, we have Israel's infamous iron dome anti-missile missile system developed by Rafael and part financed by the Americans - not to forget the US, UK, French, Saudi and Jordanian air support, as witnessed on April 13.

As in any conflict, we also have to consider the distance between the two countries, which in this case is 2,100 kilometres, so we can rule out a land invasion, while drones, and

even ballistic missiles take some time to reach their targets.

When it comes to naval military capability, Iran has made some advances, but is still a very long way behind. According to government claims, it has 220 ships. However, most of them are old, while Israel has much more modern missile and patrol ships and five Dolphin class submarines equipped with torpedoes and long-range cruise missiles.

We have already witnessed an ongoing cyber war between Iran and Israel and, as far as I can see, Israel is ahead in this field (although Iran is not that far behind). According to Israel's cyber security experts, since October 7 there have been 3,380 cyber attacks against Israel organised via Iran or its proxies. We know that Israel has organised cyber attacks against Iran's nuclear plants and in December 2023, it targeted petrol stations in Iran in a cyber attack aimed at blocking national fuel distribution.

And, of course, it is assumed that Israel has between 90 and 400 nuclear warheads, with the capability of delivering them by aircraft, submarine or its large number of intermediate to intercontinental range ballistic missiles. Of course, the Zionist state neither admits nor denies its nuclear capacity.

There is speculation that Iran has a sufficient uranium stockpile to create up to 10 nuclear bombs. However, so far there is no sign that it has put together a single nuclear weapon and, even if it does so, it will have to use missiles for delivery. Unlike Israel, Iran is, however, a signatory to the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty and its nuclear plants are regularly inspected by the International Atomic Energy Authority.

Of course, a nuclear confrontation is currently not on the cards, but we should not underestimate the crazy ideas of religious extremists ... some who occupy influential state positions. In Israel there is increasing talk of building the Third Temple on the Temple Mount in preparation for the coming of the Jewish messiah. Itamer Ben-Gvir, Israel's security minister, gives them his backing. Zionist Christians in the US, such as former vice-president Mike Pence - by definition ardent supporters of Israel - believe in the second coming of Jesus. He will rule the world from Jerusalem and see the Jews convert to Christianity. In Iran the regime itself is committed to its version of the end of times. They eagerly await the return of Mohamed al-Mahdi, the 12th Shia Imam.

Such ideas can potentially have a real, terrible, even cataclysmic effect ●

ACTION

Brum rise up - councils in crisis

Saturday April 27, 10.30am: Organising meeting, Birmingham and Midlands Institute, 9 Margaret Street, Birmingham B3. Launching the campaign, 'Brum Rise Up - Communities Against Cuts', to let Birmingham city council and the government know that cuts are not acceptable. Organised by Birmingham People's Assembly: www.facebook.com/events/72906277572580.

March for Palestine, shut down Rafael

Saturday April 27, 11am: Demonstration. Assemble outside The Beacon, West Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE4. March to Rafael factory on Scotswood Road. Shut down this weapons factory, responsible for killing children in Israel's genocide in Gaza. Organised by Shut Down Rafael Newcastle: www.facebook.com/events/1482769155609661.

Stop arming Israel - ceasefire now!

Saturday April 27, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Parliament Square, London SW1, then march to Hyde Park. Make this another massive display of support for ending the genocide. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/national-march-for-palestine-27-april.

What it means to be human

Tuesday April 30, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'The supply chain capitalism of AI: a call to (re)think algorithmic harms and resistance'. Speaker: Ana Valdivia. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/274842339039326.

May Day workplace day of action for Palestine

Wednesday May 1: Nationwide workplace day of action. Solidarity walkouts and protests demanding peace and justice for Palestinians. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

May Day open day

Wednesday May 1, 10.30am: Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Visit for tours, displays, second-hand books and other stalls, while the May Day march assembles outside. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/464.

London May Day march and rally

Wednesday May 1, 12 noon: Assemble Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. March to Trafalgar Square for rally. Stand in solidarity with all the workers celebrating May Day across the world. Speakers include Mick Lynch (RMT), Matt Wrack (FBU) and Daniel Kebede (NEU). Organised by London May Day Organising Committee: www.londonmayday.org.

Communist Culture Club

Thursday May 2, 7pm: Fortnightly online meeting. Communism of the past and communism of the future - with Camilla Power and Chris Knight (Radical Anthropology Group). Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

Boot the bailiffs out of Haringey

Saturday May 4, 11am: Public meeting, Living Under One Sun hub, inside Down Lane Park, Park View Road, London N17. Learn about the campaign to stop Haringey council using bailiffs for council tax debts. Know your rights if bailiffs come knocking. Followed by a picnic in the park. Organised by Acorn Haringey: acorntheunion.org.uk/boot_the_bailiffs_out_of_haringey_public_event.

Glasgow May Day march and rally

Sunday May 5, 11am: Assemble George Square, Glasgow G1. March to rally at Glasgow University Union, 32 University Avenue, Glasgow G12, with speakers, films and music. Organised by Glasgow Trades Council: www.facebook.com/events/470767755613134.

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.

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.

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.

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/wcmlibrary.

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.

USA

Columbia, Michigan, Yale

Daniel Lazare reports on the explosion of pro-Palestine campus protests sweeping America and how the authorities are once again resorting to the anti-Semitism big lie

Decades after students took over Columbia University at the height of the Vietnam War, the campus is emerging as a new battleground over Israel's war of destruction against Gaza.

The action began last week, when an anti-Zionist tent city sprouted on Columbia's South Field - a grassy expanse between the university library and the main administrative offices. Students chanted and chatted peacefully amid banners labelling the field a "liberated zone" and "Gaza solidarity encampment".

Simultaneously, Columbia president Nemat 'Minouche' Shafik was testifying at a congressional hearing in Washington. The former Bank of England deputy governor twisted nervously in her seat, as a succession of rightwing Republicans denounced a volcano of anti-Semitism that is supposedly erupting on college campuses and demanded to know what she was going to do about it. A cross-examination by Lisa McClain, an arch-conservative from the rural fringes of northern Detroit, was typical:

"What is your definition of anti-Semitism?" McClain began.

"For me, personally, any discrimination against people for their Jewish faith is anti-Semitism," Shafik replied.

Pointing out that Shafik had established a university task force to investigate anti-Semitism, McClain asked if members agreed.

"I-I-I'm pretty sure they would share that same definition," she said, looking more and more uneasy. The Michigan Republican then zeroed in for the kill:

McClain: Are mobs shouting, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" or "Long live the intifada?" Are those anti-Semitic comments?

Shafik: When I hear those terms, I find them very upsetting ...

McClain: That's a great answer to a question I didn't ask, so let me repeat ... Are those anti-Semitic statements, yes or no? It's not how you feel, it's ...

Shafik: I hear them as such, some people don't ...

McClain: Was that yes? Was that yes?

Shafik: We have a sent a clear message to our community ...

McClain: I'm not asking about the message. [Does] that fall under definition of anti-Semitic behaviour, yes or no? Why is it so tough?

Shafik: Because it's a - it's a - it's a difficult issue, because some people define it as anti-Semitic, other people do not.

After more hemming and hawing, Shafik finally gave in. Such slogans, she conceded, were indeed beyond the pale. "So yes," McClain said, "you do agree that those are anti-Semitic behaviour and there should be some consequences to that anti-Semitic behaviour. We're in agreement, yes?" "Yes," Shafik replied.¹

Shafik had gotten her marching orders. Returning to New York, she called the police less than 24 hours later and requested them to clear the field. More than 100 students were arrested on trespassing charges and hit with academic suspensions. Joe Biden, among others, issued a statement in support:

The ancient story of persecution



Columbia: tent protest

against Jews in the Haggadah [Passover] also reminds us that we must speak out against the alarming surge of anti-Semitism - in our schools, communities and online. Silence is complicity. Even in recent days, we've seen harassment and calls for violence against Jews. This blatant anti-Semitism is reprehensible and dangerous - and it has absolutely no place on college campuses, or anywhere in our country.²

Biden's false equivalence between pro-Palestinian protests and anti-Semitism was a sign of more repression to come.

Continuation

But a funny thing happened on the way to a police state. Within hours of the April 18 arrests, new tents began springing back up. By the morning of Monday April 22, the encampment was bigger than ever, as perhaps 300 or 400 students milled about or cheered and clapped at a spirited rally a few dozen yards away.

"Minouche Shafik, what do you say? How many boots did you lick today?" one chant declared. Said another: "Minouche Shafik, open your eyes, we charge you with genocide."

So chalk up 'one for defiance' in the face of a government crackdown. At least temporarily, the protesters had succeeded in calling Shafik's - and hence Congress's - bluff. They posted no threatening signs, engaged in nothing by way of racial or religious incitement, made no effort to interfere with university operations, and even posted a no-littering notice at the campground entrance. It was a far cry from 1968, when students occupied buildings and a photo of a moustachioed student radical smoking a cigar behind the university president's desk quickly acquired iconic status.³ Indeed, it was more like the mid-1980s, when activists erected a symbolic shantytown in solidarity with anti-apartheid protests in South Africa - not only at Columbia, but in numerous other schools as well.

So the tent dwellers were no more disruptive than previous protesters and probably a good deal less. On Monday evening, the first night of Passover, they even held a Seder complete with matzo and prayer books. So what possible reason could Shafik have to

call the cops a second time around other than the fact that protesters were occupying a patch of grass that on a fine spring day is usually filled with young people reading, tossing frisbees, or just plain hanging out?

The answer, of course, is Palestine. For all its conservatism, Washington by the mid-1980s had adopted a policy of "constructive engagement" with regard to the gathering anti-apartheid forces in South Africa. With Mikhail Gorbachev calling for "national reconciliation" in Angola and Soviet power rapidly fading, Washington sensed that events in Africa were going its way. Campus shantytowns were not only permissible, consequently, but even encouraged. More anti-communist than racist, Ronald Reagan made it abundantly clear that he did not care what kind of government took over as long as it was pro-US, pro-free market, and properly respectful of bourgeois privilege - which is exactly what the post-apartheid South African government turned out to be.⁴

But Palestine is different. Instead of bracing itself for Zionism's downfall, the Biden administration is backing Israel to the hilt, providing it with billions of dollars in the form of bunker-buster bombs and other types of military aid. With control of Persian Gulf energy resources a top priority since the 1980s, Washington is determined to stand by a military ally it regards as nothing less than irreplaceable. Biden's statement on April 21 therefore included a plank no less threatening than anything uttered by Republicans. In addition to denouncing an "alarming surge of anti-Semitism" - a surge for which there is so far little empirical evidence - it vowed to "aggressively implement the first-ever National Strategy to Counter Anti-Semitism, putting the full force of the federal government behind protecting the Jewish community".

What is wrong with countering anti-Semitism? Nothing, of course, except that Biden's national strategy adopts a highly-distorted concept devised by a Berlin-based, Israeli-backed group known as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which, among other things, defines anti-Semitism as "denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination: eg, by claiming that the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavour".⁵

This means that any argument to the effect that Zionism is predicated on racial, ethnic or religious discrimination against the native non-Jewish population is forbidden. Truth is no defence. It does not matter that Zionism has been saturated with anti-Arabism throughout its history. Anyone who dares say so is *ipso facto* an anti-Semite.

At the same time, equivalent statements by Zionists are A-OK. Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant is free to refer to Palestinians as "human animals", while Ariel Kallner, a Knesset member of prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party, can openly declare that the military operation in Gaza has "one goal: nakba! A nakba that will overshadow the nakba of 1948."⁶ While anti-Zionists are condemned for calling for a liberated Palestine "from the river to the sea", no-one objects when Likud says that "between the sea and the Jordan there will be only Israeli sovereignty" (to quote its 1977 founding platform). The same goes for Netanyahu. When he reiterated in January that "Israel needs security control over all territory west of the Jordan river", no-one in Washington raised the slightest objection.⁷ It is a case of one law for me, another for thee.

The Columbia tent protest is therefore in keeping with a classic tradition of civil disobedience that dares those in power to enforce policies that are obviously not just illogical, but unjust.

Not problem-free

This is not to say that the Columbia protests have been problem-free. On the contrary, protests over the weekend were marred by a small number of anti-Semitic or pro-Hamas outbursts - protesters shouting at Jewish students, "Go back to Poland", for instance, others calling on Hamas to "burn Tel Aviv to the ground" or a couple of young men, faces obscured by keffiyehs, shouting that October 7 "will happen not one more time, not five more times, not ten more times, not 100 more times, not 1,000 more times, but 10,000 times!"⁸

But such expressions seemed to be isolated and rare, while the latest round of protests have been scrupulously anti-racist. Pro-Hamas statements are absent. Instead, visitors to the encampment are greeted with a banner declaring, "Welcome to the people's university for Palestine". Meanwhile, "Resistance is not terrorism," said a sign hoisted by members of the Party for Socialism and Liberation at a sidewalk rally outside the locked campus gates. Members of a Trotskyist organisation known as the Internationalist Group held up another sign declaring, "CUNY [City University of New York] students say release the arrested protestors, drop all charges!"

Civil war

By Monday, according to no less an authority than the rightwing Anti-Defamation League, the movement was spreading rapidly, with encampments springing up at MIT, the University of Michigan, Stanford, and nine or 10 other schools across the US.⁹ Police arrested 45 students at Yale for trespassing and more than 150 at New York University - a 30-minute subway ride to Columbia's south. The revolt was also spreading inside Columbia, as the faculty senate prepared to censure Shafik for violating "the fundamental requirements of academic freedom"

and launching an "unprecedented assault on student rights". Fifty law professors signed a letter of protest and various affiliated institutions issued condemnations, while the American Association of University Professors, the faculty union, did as well.

Faculty members were particularly appalled that Shafik had disclosed information about investigations during her testimony that are usually confidential. One faculty member under investigation for supposedly making anti-Semitic comments is an adjunct professor of political science named Albert Bininachvili, who told *The New York Times* that the allegations were "completely unfounded, preposterous, absurd, ridiculous". He added:

I'm a devoted Jew, and I come from a practising Jewish family, and I have six members of my family who perished in the holocaust. Even today, when we're talking, several members of my extended family are living in Israel and serving in the IDF.¹⁰

Thanks to growing outrage, Shafik seemed to be skating on thinner and thinner ice.

But, while the protest wave is gathering steam, the counter-offensive is too. Robert Kraft, a Columbia graduate who owns the New England Patriots football team, announced that he would not donate to his alma mater until the protests ended. With elite US universities heavily dependent on billionaire contributions, such threats are enough to bring them to their knees.

After obtaining resignations by presidents of Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania last winter, congressional Republicans began hunting for another scalp as well. Led by Elise Stefanik, a Republican from upstate New York who is said to be on Trump's short list of possible vice-presidential running mates, they sent Shafik a letter asserting that "anarchy" was engulfing the Columbia campus. "As the leader of this institution," it said, "one of your chief objectives, morally and under law, is to ensure students have a safe learning environment. By every measure, you have failed this obligation."

Shafik is thus the latest university president whose head is on the chopping block. The civil war in America grows hotter by the day ●

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HEALTH

Lights going out

Dissatisfaction rates soar, surgeries close and new contracts are imposed on unwilling GPs - all part of the ongoing privatisation drive, writes James Linney

Spring has arrived, flowers are blooming and the winter's darkness is now just a memory. Not too long ago this change in season would have seen some easing of the pressure in the NHS - a fall in respiratory infections would be evident in both a reduction of hospital admissions and demand for appointments with GPs. Wards and clinics would still be very busy, but the work would feel slightly more manageable for a time. But those days are now long gone: the current reality is that our healthcare system crisis simply deepens with each passing season and it is now perpetually 'winter time' in the NHS.

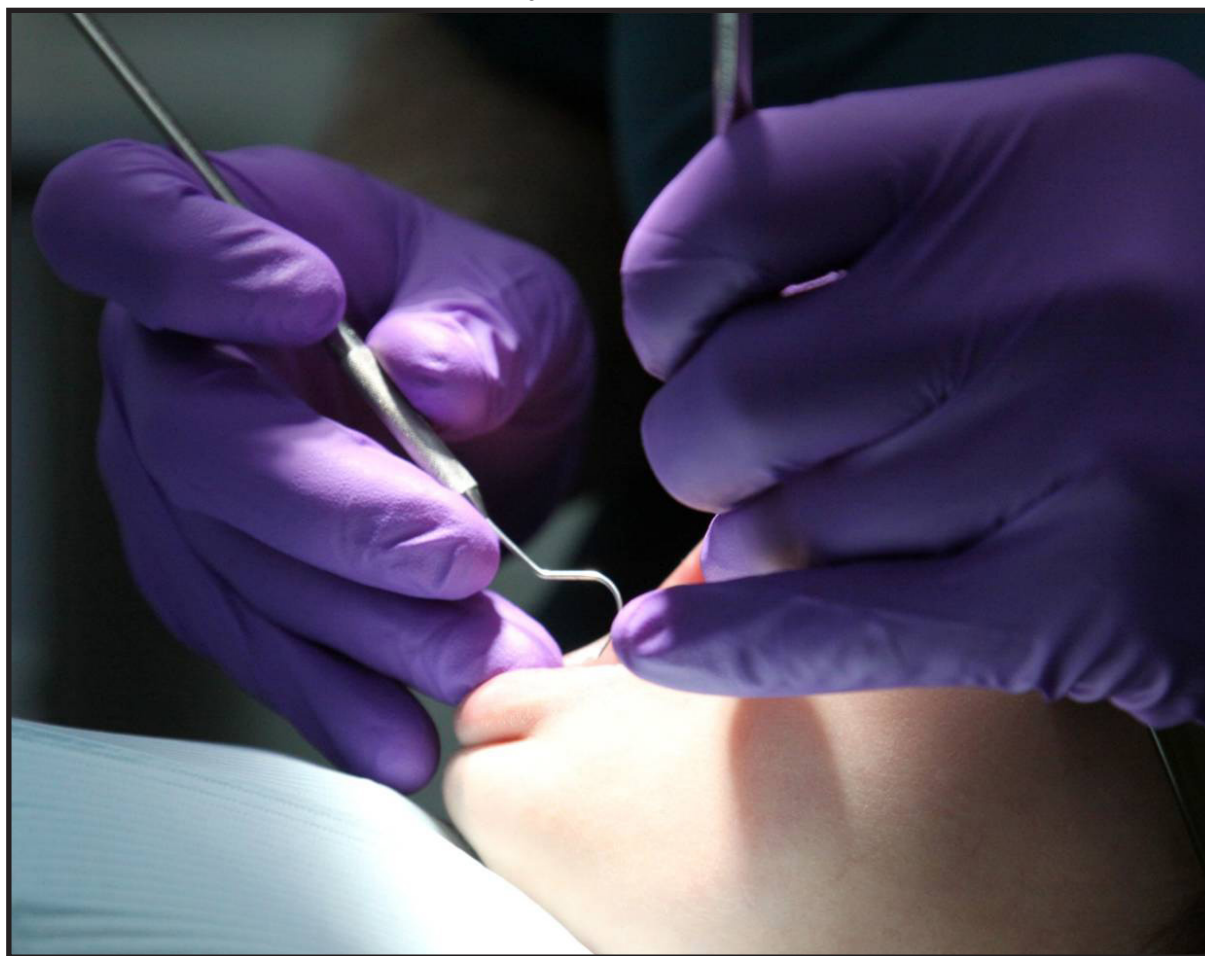
This crisis affects every aspect of care - accident and emergency (A&E) waiting times are longer than ever before, and similarly people are now waiting far longer for non-emergency hospital treatment, while there are staff shortages across the board. But the seriousness of the crisis is nowhere more clearly evident than in our GP surgeries and, with the enforcing of new contracts (see below), the future looks bleaker than ever.

The latest British Social Attitudes survey revealed that the public's satisfaction for the NHS is not surprisingly lower than it has ever been.¹ Fewer than one in four (24% of people) were satisfied with the NHS, compared to 29% in 2020. Satisfaction with the NHS has been falling steadily with every year of Tory government: it seems like a lifetime ago now, but it was only 2010 when satisfaction levels were as high as 70%.

The main reason given for dissatisfaction is precisely the long waiting times for GP and hospital appointments (71%) and, despite what the Tory-friendly media would want us to believe, 84% of respondents stated that the main issue is the NHS's major funding problems. This clearly confirms that the vast majority of the public hold the government responsible for the crisis, not the overstretched and overburdened staff.

As anyone who has tried to get a GP appointment recently will know, primary care is broken. Often people are spending hours on hold on the phone or having to call back day after day to secure an appointment - and these are the lucky ones. But even then there is no guarantee it will be any time soon - in February about 10% of people had to wait more than four weeks to see their GP.² There were a total of 30.5 million standard (non-Covid-19 vaccination) appointments³ - the equivalent of half the UK population. At the same time as people are struggling to get an appointment, primary care staff are burning themselves out simply by trying to get through each day.

There is clearly much more to the primary care crisis than the delay



Dentistry: already largely an NHS-free zone

in appointments. In fact part of the problem is that NHS England, along with the government, has increasingly focused solely on improving GP access. Appointment numbers are now closely monitored and they are increasingly having to operate like an emergency department - being forced to deal with every problem on the day rather than being allowed the autonomy to more logically plan their own patients' care.

GP surgeries are dealing with more appointments than ever - 50 million a year more compared to 2019, and this despite there being 1,862 fewer full-time fully qualified GPs since 2015. The arbitrary NHS England targets - whose point is only to try and make the government look good - are actually leading to a drastic fall in the quality of care, creating conveyor-belt healthcare, resulting in both harm to patients and a thoroughly disheartened workforce.

Contracts

April has seen the introduction of the Department of Health and 2024-25 national GP contract. This new contract is being forced on GP practices by NHS England - as with the previous one, which was imposed in 2019. GP practices have had no input into the terms: either they accept it or are forced to close.

The new contract sets out what

targets surgeries need to meet, what services need to be offered and what funding the surgeries are entitled to. Surgeries have very little autonomy in how the money is spent and since the introduction of primary care networks (PCNs) they have had to share out increasingly sparse resources with other surgeries in their area. PCNs are the latest incarnation of the Tory NHS primary care reforms and, like those before them, they have been a vehicle for new layers of bureaucracy, defunding and the outsourcing of services to the private sector.

GP contracts also set out the yearly uplift in funding, which has been locked in at very low levels since 2019 despite surgeries having to deal with the Covid pandemic, and high inflation rates, producing increased costs of living and sky-rocketing bills for building upkeep, heating, etc. This defunding led to 57 surgeries being forced to permanently close last year, meaning that since 2013, 474 GP surgeries across the UK have closed without being replaced.⁴

Despite this decline the new contract provides for only a 1.9% increase in funding - which is woefully below what is needed and will without doubt lead to more cuts in staff and surgeries permanently turning their lights out. The proportion of NHS funding spent on primary care fell to 8.4% in 2023-24 - a smaller share than in any of the previous eight years. When patients cannot get to see their GP, they get sicker and end up having to attend A&E, where they are sometimes facing waiting times of 12 hours or more! It is well established that proper funding of primary care significantly reduces healthcare costs in the long run, because inpatient care is so much more expensive. The only sensible conclusion then is that the new GP contract represents wilful underfunding of primary care in a blatant attempt to undermine the NHS as a whole.

The British Medical Association

(the largest union for doctors) has stated that at least an 8.7% uplift in funding will be necessary this coming financial year to make up for the deficit since 2019 - that is just for primary care to be able maintain the status quo and avoid more surgeries having to close their doors, being unable to pay for the staff they need.

BMA vote

Referring to the 1.9% uplift in this year's contract, the chair of BMA's GP Committee for England, Dr Katie Bramall-Stainer, rightly called such blatant defunding "an intentional, predetermined, strategic, non-evidence-based, ideological dismantling of NHS general practice".⁵

Just before its imposition the BMA held a vote, asking its GP members whether they accept the new contract and, with a 61.2% turnout, a whopping 99.2% of the 19,000 GPs said 'no' - no need to recount there! While this clearly reveals the growing anger primary-care doctors feel about their neglected industry, the vote does not change anything; the contract was still implemented and the government has so far ignored all calls by the BMA to rethink. The union's next move - likely some time later in the summer - will be to propose to its members a vote on some form of industrial action. Although the BMA has not yet indicated what such industrial action will look like, it is unlikely it will be in the form of walkout strikes, as we have seen from nurses, junior doctors and hospital consultants. Unlike those disputes, this is not about GP pay, but about the funding for primary care as a whole, so it is likely the BMA will propose a vote on GPs abstaining from some elements of the contract, thus reducing services and limiting the number of patients a surgery sees each day.

These types of action will lack the impact of seeing GPs on the picket line, but framing the industrial action

as about opposing the government's defunding of primary care is certainly preferable to it being just about GP pay. This will also limit the impact of the rightwing media, when they inevitably try to claim that any industrial action is just about greedy doctors. Of course, for now this is all just speculation, but in the meantime patients and staff continue to suffer, as primary care limps on.

The continued defunding is just part of the Tories' ideological attack on the NHS. Another is the persistent transfer of NHS services (and taxpayers' money with it) into the hands of those grateful private healthcare providers. It is a fair conclusion that this combination of deliberate neglect and privatisation by stealth is a way of setting up the NHS for the knockout blow - doing away once and for all with the 'free at point of care' service.

This could initially follow the disastrous example of NHS dentistry services - with the introduction, say, of a standard fee for essential visits to your GP or emergency department rather than an immediate switch to an American-style, insurance-based health service. If this is the plan, then the Tories certainly are not going to unveil it any time soon: they have too much on their hands with the looming general election, which they are almost certainly going to lose anyway.

This means then that most likely by the end of the year the NHS will be in the hands of Sir Kier Starmer's Labour Party. But, as I have previously stressed, this is not a situation to be celebrated by either staff or patients. Starmer and his shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, have so far taken every opportunity to reassure private health companies that they have nothing to fear in the event of a Labour government and that the use of private health will, if anything, increase.

Last week, in his article in *The Sun*,⁶ Streeting wrote on how Labour would approach the task of 'saving the NHS' and cutting waiting lists - ominously warning that no additional funding will be provided without the "major surgery" of reform. He also promised that "middle-class lefties" were not going to stop Labour from allowing private health companies to cherry-pick further NHS services. Perversely he went on to say that not to allow private companies more access to the NHS just because he had "principles" would be a "betrayal" of working class people. Given that Streeting has received more than £175,000 from donors linked to private health firms,⁷ I would suggest he pawned his principles and betrayed the working class a long time ago.

No clearer indication is needed of the kind of Labour Party Starmer has incubated ●

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UNITE



HMS Vanguard Trident sub: who cares that it is capable of wiping out millions? It was British made

My Zionist general secretary

Sharon Graham attacks Unite's own staff and declares her support for Nato and western imperialism, writes Tony Greenstein. So when are the SWP, SPEW and Counterfire going to stop supporting her?

When Sharon Graham was elected as general secretary of Unite in August 2021, most socialist groups welcomed her election and breathed a sigh of relief that Gerard Coyne, the darling of *The Sun*, had come last.

They did this despite Graham describing herself as "non-political". All that mattered was that she supported strikes. That Graham had nothing to say about capitalism, imperialism, racism was ignored. Her lack of any criticism of Keir Starmer too. It was as if Unite members had no life outside the workplace.

Typical was *Socialist Worker*, whose headline was 'Boost for left as Sharon Graham wins Unite general secretary election'.¹ Both the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party supported her candidacy - the SP was particularly enthusiastic.²

Graham has supported strikes - but to the exclusion of everything else: at the TUC conference in 2022 Unite actually supported a GMB motion calling for increased military expenditure.

Branch SE 6246

The first inkling that Graham was a Zionist came in June 2023, when Unite's south-east regional secretary, Sarah Carpenter, who has now been appointed as Graham's chief of staff, informed my branch (Unite SE 6246)

that she had asked for screenings of the film, *Jeremy Corbyn - the big lie*, to be cancelled, even though Carpenter wrote: "... whilst I seek further guidance. I have not had any instructions to cancel".

I wrote to her to ask why, if she had not had any instructions to cancel the film, she needed to seek guidance: "That suggests that you were advised to cancel the booking," I added. "Perhaps you would enlighten us as to who gave you this advice? Otherwise your need to seek guidance makes no sense."

On June 13 Carpenter wrote back informing me: "The issues covered in the film are pertinent to internal Labour Party matters and that is not the focus of our union." Carpenter's excuses were lies. The reference to "internal Labour Party matters" suggested that she was trying to please Starmer. My Unite branch passed a motion saying:

The film is about the orchestrated attack on Jeremy Corbyn and the socialist leadership of the Labour Party from 2015-19. We do not believe that the following issues are irrelevant to Unite members:

- increased privatisation of the NHS, which Starmer supports;
- public ownership of water, rail and the utilities;
- Zionism and apartheid Israel;

- the racist treatment of refugees;
- worker's struggles which Keir Starmer opposes; and
- Tory legislation restricting the right of protest and civil liberties.

I then discovered that the Campaign Against Antisemitism (widely believed to be an Israeli government proxy) was claiming credit for Unite having banned *The big lie*. The CAA wrote:

Following correspondence with Campaign Against Antisemitism, the Unite union has cancelled the screening of a propaganda film about the anti-Semitic former Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, that was due to be shown, alongside a book signing and talk from Asa Winstanley ...

Campaign Against Antisemitism commends Unite for its swift and decisive action to cancel the screening as soon as we brought it to its attention.

I wrote to Cartmail on August 30 2023 about this:

Your decision to take advice from the racist CAA ... as to whether *Jeremy Corbyn - the big lie* is anti-Semitic is an outrage ...

Why have your officials lied and lied about the banning ...?

Who has given you the right to decide what Unite members can or cannot see?

Clearly I had stung Cartmail, because within two hours she replied:

Your disagreeable attack is based on a falsehood. No-one in Unite took advice from the Campaign Against Antisemitism on *Jeremy Corbyn - the big lie*, nor indeed any other matter. I suggest you don't believe everything you read on social media or elsewhere.

Unite as a union is outstanding in both our commitment to anti-racism and solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Actions speak louder than words.

I then asked Cartmail if Graham had written to the CAA asking them to retract their false allegations against her. I received no reply.

Statements

When Palestinian resistance groups broke out of the Gaza ghetto on October 7 2023, Unite put out a statement (October 16), which, while it "unreservedly" condemned and expressed its "revulsion" at the violence by Hamas, could only "deplore" the beginning of Israel's genocide in Gaza.

By this time 2,750 Palestinians

had already died. Israel's minister of defence, Yoav Gallant, had made clear Israel's genocidal intent when he said: "I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel - everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly."

Israeli spokesman Daniel Hagari made it clear that "right now we're focused on what causes maximum damage". Numerous Israeli government ministers made genocidal statements.³ President Herzog of the Israeli Labor Party said on October 14: "There are no innocent civilians in Gaza."

Meanwhile Sharon Graham continued to do nothing. She refused, in line with the position of Starmer, to call for an immediate ceasefire.

On October 17 Peter Kavanagh, secretary for London and eastern region Unite, wrote a letter to Graham asking why there had been no Unite banner or speaker at the Palestine demonstration in London on October 14 and why Unite had done nothing to advertise that demonstration on its website.

No reply was ever received.

On October 26 an emergency executive meeting on Palestine broke up in disarray, having voted 24-14 against making any statement calling for a ceasefire.

Meanwhile, on October 27 Cartmail sent me another email stating:

The general secretary has been actively promoting that the union should put out a statement calling for a ceasefire ... She is also clear that the Unite position must be that we do not stoke division through anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism.

Why should British Jews be the pretext for not condemning genocide? Was Graham saying that Jews support genocide? This is the Suella Braverman/Sunak/Starmer line.

On November 1 I sent an open letter signed by 135 members of Unite to Graham demanding that the union call for an immediate ceasefire and take part in and publicise national demonstrations.

On November 3 Graham finally issued a statement calling for a ceasefire - although it failed to mention (still less condemn) Israel's genocide in Gaza.⁴

On December 19 166 Unite members sent another letter to Graham, pointing out that in the statement there was no mention of genocide, ethnic cleansing or the war crimes perpetrated by Israel, such as the bombing of hospitals or the murder of journalists, academics and doctors - to say nothing of the murder of children, which now stands at over 14,000.

Nor was there any mention of the fact that Israel had imposed a food, water and fuel blockade on the Gaza Strip, resulting in starvation.⁵ We wrote:

The statement treats the genocidal attack on the people of Gaza as equivalent to the break-out from the world's largest open air prison on October 7. Israel has occupied the Gaza Strip for 56 years imposing a suffocating siege on it since 2007.

Graham was happy to support dockers refusing to unload fuel from Russia

but not happy to support Palestinians under attack. Why? Because Graham is an unashamed supporter of western imperialism.

For four months after the November 3 statement Sharon Graham did absolutely nothing to campaign against Israel's genocide. There was no national Unite presence on the London demonstrations, no publicity for them, no transport.

This was why we organised a demonstration outside Unite HQ on March 11 to coincide with an executive committee meeting.⁶ About 50 Unite members attended.

At the meeting itself there were two motions on Palestine. Graham and her supporters ensured that they were not even discussed. She herself justified that by stating: "Palestine is not a service we offer members"! This one phrase sums up everything about Graham's rightwing politics and national chauvinism.

Sharon Graham is firmly wedded to the maintenance of capitalism. She simply wants workers to have a larger share of the imperialist cake. In this sense she is not even a reformist.

Solidarity?

On March 7 Israel bombed the headquarters of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) in Gaza City. In a statement, Basheer Al-Sisi from the PGFTU's secretariat spoke of how they had "lost thousands of members, union offices, facilities, and other institutions" as a result of Israel's "wholesale slaughter and forced dislocation - ethnic cleansing".

On March 25 Graham wrote a letter of solidarity to Shaheer Saeed, the PGFTU general secretary. At the time I assumed that this letter was genuine (but in the light of subsequent events it is clear that Graham had been looking to make a gesture of support for the Palestinians before launching an attack on the solidarity movement). I wrote:

... it is, of course, welcome that Graham has, at last, written expressing her solidarity with the

Palestinians in Gaza. But it is long overdue. It is also welcome that she has, *for the first time*, condemned Israel's "war crimes", but *we will never forget* that this only came nearly six months after Israel's attack and with deaths and injuries over 100,000.

In her letter Graham boasted that Unite had donated a paltry £50,000 to Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders). I wrote:

Let us hope that Sharon Graham's letter to the PGFTU is a sign that she has at last recognised that ... the union must revert to its traditional position of support for the oppressed, not the oppressor. I fear though that Graham's letter is about as far as she intends to go and that these are empty words.

Little did I know the depths of cynicism which Graham is capable of. The PGFTU HQ was bombed on March 7. Graham's letter was sent on March 25. Between November 3 and then she had done *absolutely nothing*. This letter was all that she did - and she had written it solely in order to say she *had* done something.

The very next day after the letter to the PGFTU Graham penned another letter to staff and officers. Its purpose was:

... to alert and inform you about a number of extremely troubling actions being undertaken by a tiny minority of individuals, inside and outside of our union.

Some of these individuals are linked to the past leadership and a small number are linked to groups who want us to make decisions detrimental to our membership and their jobs.⁷

It was written in the language of McCarthyism and its purpose was to witch-hunt the left and Palestine solidarity activists. But it was also aimed more widely at anti-war activists, who she deemed a threat to jobs. In other words, what happens in wider society, despite the growing militarisation, attacks on the right to protest and the decimation of the NHS, was irrelevant. Graham wanted to tie Unite's fortunes to the military-industrial complex alone.

Graham's letter claimed that those who try to get Unite to campaign over the issue of Palestine have been doing nothing more than weaponising attacks on her. She pretended that she has been at the forefront of solidarity with the Palestinians, falsely claiming that Unite had been "the first major union to publicly and unambiguously call for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza".

This was simply a lie. Unison had called for an immediate ceasefire on October 26 - it also condemned Israel for its attacks on civilians, unlike Unite's statement a week later.

Graham spent the rest of her letter suggesting that those who oppose sending arms to Israel were targeting the workers producing them. Instead of trying to persuade workers in arms factories to take action themselves or offering them union support if they refused to work on weapons to Israel, she attempted to pit those workers against Palestine solidarity and anti-war activists.

Graham was trying to instil fear in workers that, unless they were prepared to arm Israel, their jobs will be lost. Rather than supporting the diversification of production and turning arms factories into producing useful things like solar panels and wind turbines, Graham adopted the mentality of the most backward and reactionary section of workers - those who a few generations before might have believed that opposition to the British empire spelt doom for us workers.

Graham suggested that there is no contradiction for a trade union to hold a position of solidarity with Palestinian workers, while at the same time opposing campaigns that seek to prevent the production of arms for genocide in Gaza. In other words, Unite is in solidarity with Palestinian workers, but also in solidarity with those who produce weapons to blow them up! Graham took aim at those who "build networks inside trade unions to undermine the defence industry or demand the disbandment of Nato and Aukus [Australia, the UK and US]".

The US today is deliberately seeking confrontation with China, presumably with Sharon Graham's full backing. And, if a nuclear war results, how will that benefit Unite workers?

The NHS is suffering because military expenditure continues to rise. Health and social care, local government, transport all suffer because the capital-intensive arms industry sucks up billions.

It is time for those on the left who placed their faith in Graham to realise that being "non-political" was a euphemism for rightwing politics. Graham is a narrow-minded British nationalist, a supporter of imperialism, a warmonger and a Zionist, who has nothing to offer the working class.

Divisions

Unfortunately much of the left in Britain is unable to understand that racism and imperialism mean the working class allying with its bosses. In Karl Marx's day the burning question was British colonialism in Ireland.

Marx wrote:

Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps: English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the ruling nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself.

He cherishes religious, social and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the 'poor whites' to the negroes in the former slave states of the USA. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of the English rulers in Ireland.

This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers - in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organisation. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this.⁸

If you want a good example of the stupidity of Britain's left sects then you could do worse than read the Socialist Party's 'Unite and the movement against the war on Gaza',⁹ which ignores the criticism of Sharon Graham over Palestine and instead concentrates on disputes between the so-called United Left and Graham's supporters.

Industrial strikes do not by themselves challenge capitalism unless they are generalised and politicised. It is quite possible to combine industrial militancy with imperialism. The white South African working class was militant, as was the Protestant working class

of Northern Ireland. Israel's Jewish working class is militant, whilst fighting to reserve the highest paid jobs for Israeli Jews.

The so-called revolutionary groups like the SWP are guilty of economism - the belief that the economic struggle alone, for better wages and conditions, will of itself lead to the transformation of capitalism into socialism.

Sharon Graham has strongly supported strikes, but she has not done so as part of class-struggle politics. For her, capitalist society is the accepted framework in which industrial struggle is waged - hence her support for militarism and imperialist alliances.

Those who seek to generalise from industrial struggles into a confrontation with the state are to be condemned for threatening her members' jobs. International solidarity with other workers is to be condemned - even if, as is the case in arms factories, this leads to one set of workers producing the means of physically eliminating another set of workers.

It will be interesting to see whether her supporters in the SWP, SP, etc will now break from her at last or whether they are determined to go down with her!

The SWP had previously said nothing, but in the April 9 edition of *Socialist Worker* it published a letter - 'Let down by Sharon Graham's failure to lead over Palestine' - in which Graham is criticised for prioritising jobs in arms factories over support for Palestine. Given that the SWP's letters column never allows any genuine debate, this can be taken as a sign that the SWP leadership is alarmed by the direction Graham is going in - but is not prepared to say so outright. Sometimes one needs to be a Kremlinologist to decipher the SWP's position.

Counterfire has said nothing, but one of its supporters, Richard Allday, is a member of the Unite executive. When I posted on my blog criticism of Graham's letter to staff and her attack on Palestine solidarity activists, Allday was furious. He posted on the Unite for Palestine WhatsApp group: "I am getting tired of your unsubstantiated abuse being passed off as legitimate debate. You've called Sharon a racist. Provide concrete evidence or kindly shut up."

When Allday came under sustained criticism from other members, he finally admitted: "I accept that she has not spoken out on the current atrocity in Palestine. I wish she would. But that does not make her a supporter of Netanyahu, or of Zionism in general."

Allday is wrong. By her actions - banning a film on the 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunt and then doing her best to prevent Unite members giving solidarity to the Palestinians in Gaza - Graham has made it very clear that she is a Zionist.

As for the Socialist Party, it would appear that it is determined to defend Sharon Graham to the last ●

Notes

1. socialistworker.co.uk/news/boost-for-left-as-sharon-graham-wins-unite-general-secretary-election.
2. See www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/105952/11-01-2023/unite-the-union-elect-a-leadership-to-back-sharon-grahams-fighting-stance.
3. See *Al Jazeera's* useful article on this: www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/1/14/intent-in-the-genocide-case-against-israel-is-not-hard-to-prove.
4. See www.uniteunion.org/news-events/news/2023/november/unite-calls-for-an-immediate-ceasefire.
5. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67670679.
6. See www.left-horizons.com/2024/03/21/unite-members-lobby-nec-over-unions-inaction-on-gaza.
7. drive.google.com/file/d/1b7RHnBG0DwVwtQIAVbVhKuvd2MSZpyvL/view.
8. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/letters/70_04_09.htm.
9. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/122741/25-03-2024/unite-and-the-anti-gaza-war-movement.

Online Communist Forum



Sunday April 28 5pm

A week in politics - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

Sunday May 5 5pm

General election 2024 and communist perspectives - discussion and debate between the Spartacist League and the CPGB

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

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

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

ELECTIONS

Thinking through the options

Vote Labour to get the Tories out? What about the Greens and the various left candidates? **Mike Macnair** discussed the coming general election at the April 21 aggregate of CPGB members

This report is based mainly on my introduction, but incorporates material from the discussion. The second session was based on an introduction by comrade Jack Conrad on the history of CPGB's electoral policies since 1991; this was mainly educational in character, but also introduced the debate we are going to have with the Spartacist League (Britain).¹

We know the general election is coming, but we do not know when, or exactly what the shape of it will be. Hence, how we urge people to vote will have to depend on what actually shows up in the way of left alternatives to Labour, and what else politically shapes the election. So what I had to say was tentative and addressed to a general framework.

It is framed by three issues. First, the underlying principles. Second, the circumstances of this coming general election: in particular, the very large Labour poll lead on an absolutely negligible Labour Party 'offer'. Thirdly, what is there in the way of left options?

Principles

To start with the underlying principles: the working class needs political action - action, that is, with the view to enforcing the interests of the class in a general form, including through legislation. Famously, Marx gives the example of the Ten Hour Day Act 1847, and the difference between defending the interests of the workers in a particular industry and an endeavour for the working class to impose its interests as a class on the society as a whole.

Further, the working class party needs to look beyond capitalism. It is no good just to say we will defend worker interests within capitalism, because if we commit to the continuation of capitalism, we return to defending the *sectional* interests of a particular group of workers within the frame of 'British competitiveness'. Secondly, pursuing the general interest of the working class and seeking to get beyond capitalism involves minimum commitments to oppose the present constitutional regime: no support for government office or budgets without clear commitments to immediate transition to a democratic republican regime, in which the working class would actually rule.

And, thirdly, the working class needs an independent foreign policy. This was the argument of Marx and others in the formation of the First International in 1864. In modern times, this is mainly, though not exclusively, a matter of disloyalty towards our own regime: that is, of defeatism in relation to our own government's foreign wars. If we aim for the overthrow of the current constitutional regime in the interest of the working class, we have to be as disloyal to this regime as the opposition leaders who in 1640 invited the Scots to keep their army in northern England in order to force the king to the negotiating table, or those who in 1688 invited a Dutch invasion.

So the working class needs political action. And it needs in consequence a disloyalist party. It needs a political voice. And that means it needs organisation in order to create media that are not dependent on the capitalist class's advertising-funded press. A part of this political voice is electoral campaigning, and potentially an even more successful part would be actually winning seats - in which case workers' disloyalist MPs could act as 'tribunes of the people'.



James Gillray 'Monstrous craws, at a New Constitution Feast' (1787): Queen Charlotte, George, Prince of Wales, and King George III ravenously ladle guineas into their mouths from a bowl marked "John Bull's Blood"

My final point on the underlying principles is that Georgi Plekhanov made the distinction between propaganda, meaning trying to get across many ideas to few people, and agitation, meaning trying to get across a few ideas to many people. In that framework, direct electoral intervention is necessarily agitation. It may appear to be 'propagandist', in the sense that you can stand on the basis of a full party programme. But, when the CPGB stood four candidates in 1992 on the basis of more or less a full party programme, this was nonetheless, actually an agitational intervention that was trying to get across one single point: that the Eurocommunists had not succeeded in liquidating the Communist Party, which still survived.

The *Weekly Worker* is unavoidably a propaganda organ. It does not pretend to be an agitational paper, unlike the papers of the rest of the left, which almost invariably are propaganda organs that pretend to be agitational papers. But it can recommend agitational tasks to readers. This is what we are doing when we recommend votes or support to electoral campaigns.

This election

The polls show the Tories around 20 points behind Labour. There is some rise of votes for Reform UK on the right. On the other hand, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens are being given very little media space. So, fairly clearly, the capitalist media has roughly decided that the Tory government is coming to an end and the 'second eleven' under Sir Keir Starmer are to get an innings.

The Tories are still getting their

agenda covered. The latest is the endeavour to use a provocation to enforce more pro-Zionist policing of Palestine demonstrations. The Cass Review of treatment of trans children has become a big stick with which to beat so-called 'trans activists'. But none of these culture-war operations seem to be seriously hitting Labour's poll lead. Much can happen between now and the actual election, but it looks as though the Tories have had it and Labour is going to be the next government.

Let me give some background to this. David Cameron did not actually win the general election in 2010, but achieved a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, and then embarked on a course of fairly high-stake deployment of plebiscitary demagoguery as an effective way to deploy the Tories' 70% dominance of the press without actually facing elections. He comfortably won a referendum on electoral reform in 2011, defeating the Lib Dems. He won again on Scottish independence in 2014, but only fairly narrowly, and with a lot of help from the Scottish Labour Party. But then he was able to knife the Labour Party in the back on the day after the referendum by deploying English nationalist demagoguery, and achieve as a result a Scottish National Party wipe-out of the Labour Party in Scotland.

These plebiscitary frauds - doing over the Lib Dems, who got nothing for their government service except opprobrium for the coalition's 'austerity', and doing over Scots Labour - made the Tories pretty safe for the 2015 general election. But then the third plebiscitary scam, the Brexit referendum in 2016, was lost and, rather than seeing off the Brexit Party

threat, what we got was a decision to leave the European Union, against Cameron's wishes, who resigned.

Theresa May thought she was going to run a successfully Brexiteer-populist election campaign in 2017, but in fact lost the Tory majority, and struggled on for two more years, finally getting dumped in May-June 2019 in favour of the more overt right-populist, Trump-style politics of Boris Johnson. Johnson then won a thumping majority at the December 2019 general election.

But that was more or less immediately followed by the 'managed' economic crisis that was the Covid pandemic and lockdown. This in turn produced endless scandals around Covid management, largely about cronyism (which is the natural result of right populism's appeal to the *personal* virtues of the 'great leader'), both in the form of people escaping prosecution and of dodgy allocation of public contracts and related scams. And Johnson fell victim to that, and was dumped in June 2023. After the short-lived premiership of Liz Truss (July-September), we have had Rishi Sunak, and a succession of mini-political crises. So the Tories still have serious problems.

On the Labour side, Gordon Brown succeeded Tony Blair as Labour leader in 2007 against the wishes of Rupert Murdoch, who had wanted the succession to go to either a Blairite or directly to Cameron. In 2010 Brown was followed by Ed Miliband, also against the wishes of Murdoch, who wanted his brother, David Miliband, to become Labour leader. The party under Ed Miliband lost in 2015, and then the unexpected: the "morons" let in Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader.

There were a series of attempts to get rid of him; then the false hope given by the 2017 general election. But, at the end of the day, the anti-Semitism smear campaign did for Corbyn - together with Corbyn giving Starmer his head in relation to backing the Tory remainers' parliamentary manoeuvres to defeat or mitigate Brexit. So that it was actually both May's insufficiently populist style in Brexiteering and Corbyn's willingness to allow the Labour Party to become a tail to the Tory remainers which then allowed the decisive victory of Boris Johnson in 2019. Following that, Starmer comes in as the security services' man at the head of Labour in April 2020.

This is not a story of 'Revolution is about to happen right now'. The rise in strikes and in left ideas is very tentative, not a case of "the 'lower classes' do not want to live in the old way and the 'upper classes' cannot carry on in the old way" (Lenin).² But there is clearly an underlying, serious destabilisation of British politics, because on neither side of the main party equation have we got a clear stability or a serious political 'offer'.

Decline

Where is this structural problem coming from? The clearest symptom is Liam Byrne's 2010 "I am afraid there is no money left" note³ - which, though slightly overstated, symbolises the underlying situation of all UK governments in the recent past: there is very little room for more than cosmetic change. We start with the general decline of capitalism and then, within that framework, the specific decline of Britain; and within the framework of the specific decline of Britain there are more specific phenomena. The first is the failure of the Thatcher project, creating chronic problems, and the second is the difficulties presented to the UK by the beginnings of a turn against globalisation by the United States.

In relation to the decline of capitalism, we can contrast the relative decline of Britain taking place over the late 19th-early 20th century (which gives birth to the period of European territorial empires, but also massive scales of investment in infrastructure and substantial industrialisation outside of the European core) to the relative decline of the United States, which we can say begins effectively around 1970. So the US enters into its imperial decline much more quickly than the UK.

Secondly, the form of the US decline is that the USA spreads nothing but destruction rather than creating a colonial empire that protects its interests through non-tariff barriers, and so on, as the British did. The USA creates Lebanonisation, Somalification, Afghan warlordism, ex-Yugoslavia, the substantial destruction and failure to reconstruct effectively in Iraq, and so on and so on.

It is true that there is a spread of capitalism in south and east Asia, but this takes staid forms. There was a lot more directive planning involved in South Korea and the so-called East Asian tigers of the 1980s-90s than in prior capitalist development. Equally and obviously in China and Vietnam. The underlying rate of profit in productive industry and agriculture has fallen over decades, and the overall rate of growth tends to fall to significantly lower levels, and large sectors of the economy become dependent on subsidies and planning.

Within this framework of the global decline of capitalism is the

relative decline of Britain. Britain is a post-imperial power. It is driven - as Venice and Genoa were in the 17th century and the Netherlands in the 18th century - to financialisation.

It is mistaken to think that there is a *global* shift into financialisation. It is equally mistaken to think there's a *global* shift into 'knowledge industries'. The reality is that human beings still need to eat, have clothes, housing, infrastructure, water, electricity. Just a single example: the 'large language model' 'artificial intelligence' operations turn out to involve enormous consumption of electrical power for the server farms needed to run them. So the physical infrastructure and physical production remain present.

The dominance of finance in a country is actually always at the expense of physical production in that country, which is being done somewhere overseas; or appears as 'excessive taxation', because it cannot deliver the average rate of profit; or in some cases is not being done. For examples of the last, Biden's 'Inflation Reduction Act' has been largely about rebuilding infrastructure that has begun to fall down. The water scandals here, or concerns about the electricity infrastructure being inadequate for 'net zero', are similar.

British relative decline entails actual dependence on income from finance to make up for a structural deficit in the balance of trade. So, to start with, 46% of the food consumed in this country is imported. And there is a quarterly deficit in material trade of £49.9 billion from October to December 2023. That is partly reduced by a £34.9 billion surplus in export 'services' - particularly financial services, legal services, and so on - but the £15 billion gap is made up simply by borrowing, which is possible because the UK is a tax haven.

The Thatcher government keyed into the movement in the 1970s in US policy to financial globalisation, human rights and so on, which starts with the Nixon administration breaking the link between the dollar and gold in 1971, and a bit later movement from financial aid to Third World countries, into loans conditional on market opening. In Britain we got deindustrialisation starting in 1980 and the financial 'Big Bang' in 1983: the open acceptance that Britain was going to live off the income from the

financial services sector; that what we eat, and so on, is going to be paid for at the end of the day by the City's income.

This model started to weaken globally with the East Asian crash of 1997, the 'Long Term Capital Management' crash of 1998, the Russian debt crisis of the same year, and the 'dot-com crash' of 2000. The response of the central capitalist powers was to bail out the losses by printing money on a very large scale and by cutting interest rates to the lowest possible level.

This in turn triggered, as is inevitable, Bonapartist political responses in the countries that were being done over by the money printing operations - because, of course, that externalises the losses onto other countries. Hence Putin's administration in Russia shifting towards nationalism like the Koizumi and Abe administrations in Japan; the rise of the Modi Hindutva movement; Orbán in Hungary, in the early 2000s shifting from pure neoliberalism to nationalism, and so on.

In response to the 2008-09 financial crisis we get even more money printing, and the banks were leant on by government to keep 'zombie businesses' and 'zombie borrowers' afloat. And lockdown in 2020 was in effect a state-managed crash, which could be presented as being about dealing with the disease problem. But nonetheless it also involved massive money printing. If there had just been a financial crash in 2020 and money printing in response to that, the political legitimacy would have been much weaker than in response to Covid.

So we are now in a situation where the 1970s-1980s model of financial globalisation, deregulation, privatisation and financial engineering as a substitute for state action and taxation, is reaching exhaustion. And there are - in the United States in particular, but in number of other countries too - some significant moves towards reshoring of production, towards industrial subsidy, towards protectionism, and so on and so forth.

But the UK cannot escape, because the choice to accept full financialisation under Thatcher is irreversible. The old core UK industries are gone forever. There is no significant steel industry. The car industry is reduced to 'maquiladoras'

- assembly plants for vehicles whose core is manufactured elsewhere. The shipbuilding industry is reduced to small specialist operations. The arms industry is chiefly aerospace, specialist and focussed on exports to the Middle East. And so on.

The consequence in the first place is Conservative Party chaos: because nothing that the Tory government or any government can do is going to deliver anything other than that the UK has unavoidably to cling to financialisation and low-tax to attract hot money. It cannot take the road of reshoring and reindustrialisation. Hence Brexit fails to deliver. Hence the fact that privatisation descends into cronyism in the Covid crisis. Hence Truss's failed adventure. Hence the fact that no Tory leadership can obtain stable political authority.

But equally there is the fact that Starmer cannot offer a 'politics of hope' à la Tony Blair. Blair's politics of hope consisted of full-throated acceptance of the financialisation and privatisation model, and offering constitutional gestures towards political democracy in the form of devolution, human rights, and so on.

So we have an upcoming general election in circumstances where neither of the main parties can actually offer anything. They cannot say 'Brexit will solve it', because Brexit has failed to 'solve it'. They cannot offer Truss's policy of driving down the pound in order to drive up exports (as happened after 'Black Wednesday' in 1992), because we saw what happened when Truss offered that policy. All Starmer can offer is 'We're not going to be quite as bad as these bastards'.

Meanwhile, the United States is staggering towards breaking with financial globalisation - and 'staggering towards' is not a novelty. There were similar transitions in US policy in the late 1940s in the process of adopting the policy of the 'containment' of communism: there was political infighting in the United States about how to respond to the post-World War II world. The process of transition out of the 'containment' consensus of the 1950s-70s to the new policy of financial globalisation and 'rollback' of both communism and social democracy was an equally painful, not straightforward, process. And in the same way the USA is today painfully and not at all straightforwardly in transition towards reshoring, towards financial repression and towards increased centrality of the arms industry and war. Indeed, it is likely that great-power war or some similar crisis (like a new pandemic) will be necessary to overcome the political weight of the financial globalisation model in US politics.

The major step in this direction that we are living with right now is Ukraine. The pro-Ukraine war politicians and journoes are now more or less open in admitting that this is a war between the USA and Russia, and authors in *The Daily Telegraph*, advocating British rearmament, say we are at war with Russia. They argue that Zelensky is right to say that, if we are prepared have the Royal Air Force shoot down Iranian missiles for Israel, we should be shooting down Russian missiles for Ukraine. This is not something that the US or British government is itself as yet willing to openly avow, because this is seriously dangerous stuff.

The package that was just passed on April 20 in the House of Representatives is two-thirds in favour of Ukraine: \$61 billion, as opposed to \$26 billion for Israel, and \$8 billion for Taiwan and other US allies in the western Pacific. So the USA is shifting towards a war footing, as are its ideologues.

And the UK as a whole, and the Labour Party in particular, are

unavoidably in lockstep with the USA's war policy. This is partly because the substance of Brexit was precisely to say, 'We dump any idea of an independent European policy in favour of dependence on the United States'. But it is far more clearly because the meaning of the 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunt was to force UK politics into lockstep with the US policy. The same operation, thanks to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, was used to force German and French politics into lockstep with the US policy; in fact, it started in those countries before it reached the UK.

Left failures

What does this background pose about the nature of the coming general election, and what agitational issues should the left be trying to insert into the campaign?

The first, I think, is (just as in 1992, but for different reasons) that communism exists; that communism is an alternative. This issue is now posed by the utter failure of Corbynism, and the plain uselessness of projects of Keynesian renewal of British industry, and so on. It is posed by the inability of any wing of the political establishment to offer a way forward, precisely because the Thatcher project of national renewal has failed, producing chronic problems and, on the other hand, there is no way to 'return to the 1950s-70s'.

The second is the question of war and the US tie: the fact that Britain is in lockstep with the USA over Ukraine, over Gaza, over Israel attacking Iran, and has been dragged behind the USA over the 'China threat'. These are, I think, the one or two issues that the left needs to insert in any electoral intervention.

In this situation, what is the meaning of a Labour vote? In the first place, where the option is only Labour, Tory, Lib Dem, Green or SNP/Plaid Cymru, there remains a case for voting Labour. Around 2003 a good many leftwingers imagined that a vote for the Lib Dems could be an anti-war or 'left' vote. The 2010 Con-Dem coalition showed what such a vote really meant. The Greens, equally, have become supporters of Nato and the Ukraine war; their record in local government includes openly anti-working class policies in Brighton. The SNP has been in government in Scotland since 2007, and is similarly pro-Nato; Plaid is in the Welsh devolved government with Labour. As for Labour, it remains a bourgeois workers' party in spite of the radical defeat of the left, and, where no actual left alternative candidate is available, voting Labour can still be a vote for the idea that there ought to be a working class party.

In the discussion following my opening, comrade Jack Conrad made the point that we should consider conditional support tactics, where we place demands on Labour candidates as a condition of urging a vote for them. Comrade Carla Roberts endorsed this tactic. Comrade Carl Collins thought that a significant part of the left would be supporting Green candidates, and we needed to find some way of engaging with them; comrade Farzad Kamangar argued that nonetheless, we could not call for Green votes - among other reasons for their pro-Nato stance. Comrade Kamangar also endorsed the use of conditional support tactics, and argued that this could also apply to left-of-labour candidates: as, for example, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain contains a pro-Zionist wing, so that CPB candidates needed to be questioned on Gaza, the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign, and so on.

So what about left challengers to Labour? It seems clear that these are going to remain extremely fragmentary, and in consequence,

mainly feeble. I think there is a reasonable case for voting for candidates of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and equally for the Workers' Party of Britain where it stands. There is also a reasonable case for voting for candidates of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, while smaller groups too may be supportable: thus, for example, the comrades proposing to stand as Communist Future in Manchester.

All of this can be condemned by Labourites as 'gesture politics'. But actually political gestures are not always useless. The UK's participation in US military operations is now merely gesture, given Britain's military weakness, but such gestures are politically important (ones we communists disapprove of). John Brown's 1859 attack on Harpers Ferry arsenal, or Fidel Castro's 1953 attack on the Moncada barracks were political gestures, but historically very important ones. It would, however, be adventurist to suggest gestures of this sort in Britain today. But the left can, on a smaller scale and less adventurously, gesture in the next general election towards the Communist Party that is objectively needed.

What if in any constituency there are competing left challengers to Labour? My very provisional view on this is that candidates who are willing to use the name 'communist' are in principle to be preferred. This follows from the point above about the idea of communism as a central issue. Secondly, I think that the Workers Party of Britain is slightly to be preferred to Tusc. The reason is simply that, although both groups argue within the framework of 'socialism in one country', the WPB is stronger than Tusc on the question of anti-imperialism and anti-war. On the basis of the WPB manifesto and Tusc's 'draft core policies', the latter is also weaker, surprising as it may seem, on the question of political democracy.

In discussion, comrade Roberts argued that it was problematic to prefer candidates who used the word 'communist' because some would be open Stalinists, and that the social conservatism of the WPB platform, and George Galloway's long record of freelancing, made it problematic to prefer WPB candidates to those of Tusc. Jack Conrad made the point that it was unlikely that the issue would arise: the WPB and Tusc were likely to come to stand-down agreements. He also argued that *all* the left candidates would be standing on pretty appalling platforms, so that our calling for votes for them was a form of critical - highly critical - support. This point was generally agreed by contributors - as was his idea that CPGB comrades should involve themselves in whatever left campaigns were running in their own localities.

In responding to the discussion, I agreed with many of the points that had been made. I emphasised the point that left interventions in elections are about 'few ideas to many people', symbolism and gestures. It is for that reason that a vote for a 'communist' is a worthwhile gesture; and that a vote for the WPB has the merit of being clearly anti-war.

I reiterated that this is all fairly tentative, because we do not know who exactly will stand and where, what coalitions or stand-down agreements they may be, and so on ●

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Notes

1. This online meeting will be held on Sunday May 5 at 5pm. To take part go to communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register.
2. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch09.htm.
3. www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/may/17/liam-byrne-note-successor; see also www.newstatesman.com/politics/commons-confidential/2023/07/liam-byrne-labour-apology-no-money-note.

Fighting fund

Six days left

Thankfully, our April fighting fund got a much-needed boost with the help of *three* three-figure donations to the *Weekly Worker* (thank you, comrades SK, PM and GB!), which took this week's total to a handy £522.

Other smaller, but just as appreciated, contributions came from AN (£25), MM, DR and JF (£20 each), GD (£15) and TT (£6). Altogether they pushed the running total for April up to £1,931 towards that (sometimes elusive) £2,250 monthly target. So that means we still need £319 in, as I write, just six days.

But, of course, there are a whole number of our readers who really appreciate the *Weekly Worker*. Take comrade JF (mentioned above), who accompanied his donation with a message about last week's paper: "Great edition"! And, of course, he was not the only one. Comrade BT, in a note that came with his subscription, wrote: "How pleased I am to have come across the *Weekly Worker*. Just the sort of

political debate we need!"

And many of such comrades are determined to play their part in ensuring that we can continue fulfilling that role - which is why so many contribute to our monthly fighting fund. But now we need more of our readers to join in, so that we not only reach that much needed target, but go soaring past it, and as a result make up for some of the deficits we've suffered in recent months.

Comrades, please help us out, and make sure we receive your donation by Tuesday April 30. You can pay by bank transfer or PayPal (see below for the web link, giving you the necessary details) or by cheque - although you'll have to be very quick to make sure we get it on time! ●

Robbie Rix

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

OUR HISTORY

Applying Bolshevism globally

Comintern came into existence because of, on the one hand, the treachery of most of the social democratic parties and, on the other hand, the inspiration provided by the Bolsheviks and the October Revolution. However, as **Jack Conrad** explains, the main problem encountered in the early years was leftism - not least when it came to electoral strategy and tactics

On March 4 1919, within the Kremlin walls, from where the tsars of old Rus once ruled, the Communist (Third) International was formed as a world party of revolution. In the words of Gregory Zinoviev, its president, Comintern united revolutionaries across the world "on a common ideological platform".¹ This "common ideological platform", formalised in the resolutions and theses of its congresses and executive committee, in effect amounted to the generalisation and global application of the principles, strategy and tactics of Bolshevism, not least on the terrain of parliament and parliamentary elections.

One can quibble with Zinoviev's use of the term, "ideological". After all, what really united Comintern were its commonly agreed programmatic principles, aims and approaches, formalised in the resolutions and theses of congresses and meetings of its executive committee. Eg, it was quite possible for a Machist, a Muslim or an Old Believer to become a Communist Party member ... if they accepted Comintern's programmatic principles, aims and approaches.

Either way, Comintern's main internal problem during its early years was certainly not philosophical idealism. Nor was it right opportunism or centrism: that found primary expression in the so-called Two-and-a-half International and the rump Second International. No, the main internal problem was leftism.

Disgusted by official social democracy's degeneration, which culminated in the great betrayal of August 1914 - that is, when parliamentary fractions in Germany, Britain, France, Austria, etc voted for the war budgets of their 'own' governments - there was, understandably, a widespread and deeply held belief amongst many honest partisans of the working class that to avoid such a fate it was vital to stay clear of the modern-day Sodom, the bourgeois parliament, and the Gomorrah of bourgeois elections.

Such boycottist sentiments were born of a genuine fear, and not only characterised the 'left' communists, but also the influential International Workers of the World in the US and other syndicalists, including in the workers' committee movement in Britain. A deal of patient effort was expended by Comintern in the attempt to overcome this "infantile disorder" and wean comrades away from the seemingly safe abstractions and certainties of purity politics: ie, if you do not touch parliamentary politics, you will not get contaminated by them (some extended that to trade unions, but we shall not deal with that here).

It should be added that the "infantile disorder" - the subtitle of Lenin's famous 1920 *'Leftwing' communism* pamphlet - was, of course, a reference to Comintern, as a newly hatched organisation, its many politically inexperienced adherents ... but also a good number of politically experienced, politically hardened leftists who rallied to Comintern in the *mistaken* belief that the Bolsheviks were politically experienced, politically hardened leftists too.²

Amongst those leftists criticised by Lenin (born 1870), were Anton



Founded in the expectation of imminent global revolution

Pannekoek (born 1873), Herman Gorter (born 1864) and Otto Rühle (born 1874). In other words, Lenin, the old man of Bolshevism, was also criticising, trying to correct, his contemporaries. And, of course, 'infantile' leftism has a long history, going back to the founder of modern anarchism, Mikhail Bakunin (born 1814), and before him to agrarian socialists: eg, Gerrard Winstanley (born 1609). Indeed we can trace 'infantile' leftism all the way back to Jesus, an apocalyptic revolutionary, and the many other such primitive communists of classical antiquity.

Left anchorites

Lenin's *'Leftwing' communism*, had nothing to do with establishing some sort of a doctrine of Moscow infallibility. Indeed he expected Russia soon to fall behind, when it came to taking the lead in the world revolution and providing a model to be emulated (well, initially at least). As the Russian Revolution was increasingly forced onto the defensive, the *emergency* measures - mostly necessary for sheer survival - became the norm to be emulated. Eg, banning opposition parties, prohibiting factions and suppressing press criticism.

'Democracy' was thereby, however, given as a free gift to the capitalist class in the west and their politicians and paid persuaders ... and has been used against us ever since to considerable effect. Capitalism and democracy are still nowadays claimed to be synonymous, where, in

fact, they are opposites. The 'natural' form of capitalist democracy is not 'one person, one vote' - a concession imposed on an unwilling ruling class - but the 'one share, one vote' of companies and corporations.

But let us take up the main thread. Lenin's *'Leftwing' communism* and Comintern's resolutions directed against leftism were designed to unite, in the most effective way, the forces of revolution *for* revolution against the bourgeois state, "the bourgeois parliamentary system" included.³ An angular, but perfectly correct, formulation. Remember, in the UK we have prime ministerial government, the monarch in parliament and that goes hand-in-hand with the House of Lords; in the US, besides the monarchical president and the House of Representatives, there is the Supreme Court and the Senate, presided over by the vice-president; etc. Put another way, the bourgeois parliamentary system is full of checks and balances *against* democracy.

Those leading Comintern well knew that we can never overthrow the bourgeois state and establish the rule of the working class by isolating ourselves from parliamentary sins and temptations like Christian anchorites - till, that is, capitalism does us the favour of collapsing in some sort of final crisis. Such a perspective would reduce the communist movement to an impotent sect. Illusions in parliamentarism among the masses have to be overcome by *using* parliamentarism - ie, revolutionary parliamentarism. Indeed, revolutionary

parliamentarism can become a weapon in the class war, and one of the sharpest, most potent weapons at that. Communist MPs can use parliamentary immunity to say what would otherwise be unsayable. Communist MPs can use their authority to arouse extra-parliamentary actions and protests. Communist MPs can table bills and propose amendments to popularise demands, such as a popular militia, the repeal of anti-trade union laws, the abolition of the monarchy, etc. Comintern was undoubtedly correct here.

True, Comintern's revolutionary parliamentarism came with a certain fetishisation of soviets. Take the 2nd Congress of Comintern, meeting over July 20-August 6 1920. Its resolution, 'The Communist Party and parliament', insisted that the "state form" of socialism had to be the proletarian dictatorship and the "soviet republic".⁴

The dictatorship of the proletariat does not, of course, mean the opposite of democracy, as is often claimed by bourgeois philistines. No, it simply means - well, according to orthodox Marxism - the decisive rule of the working class majority. Not the dictatorship of the Communist Party, that is for sure (though things were clearly slipping in that direction practically in Russia from 1918 onwards because of objective circumstances, and from around a slightly later date an equal slippage happened in the minds of most communist leaders internationally,

because they sought to both faithfully excuse and emulate their Russian mentors).

As for soviets, they are simply the Russian word for 'council' - specifically a system of delegated representation from workplaces, barracks, battleships and urban and rural localities. However, working class rule can take many different forms: eg, the 1871 Paris Commune was based on the city's 20 *arrondissements*.

Socialism could never come about peacefully through a quiet Wednesday afternoon vote in a bourgeois parliament - that was rightly taken as axiomatic. The task of the working class was therefore to shatter the bourgeois state and consign its key elements to the dustbin of history: the standing army, the police, the privy council, MI5, civil service mandarins, appointed judges, the monarchy, the established church ... all such shite must go.

Incidentally, it is worth adding that Comintern wanted to "destroy" the local capitalist state as well, and replace it with "local soviets of workers' deputies".⁵ Transforming the likes of the London County Council into a long-term strategic asset went completely unexplored, and so did transforming the House of Commons, as seriously envisaged by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Immediately following the October Revolution in Russia the atmosphere was ecstatic, heady and not a little delirious.

None of the soviet stuff, nor the shattering of the bourgeois state, raised objections or hackles from the 'left' communists, not least their veteran, authoritative, thinkers. This was not the case, though, with the generalisation of Bolshevik parliamentary experience - from the 1906-07 duma elections to the 1917 elections to the Constituent Assembly - as a model to be adopted by the world communist movement as a whole.

It was "obligatory", said the Comintern resolution, for the leading party of the proletariat to use every legal position open to it, not least parliament. In fact it should be used as an "auxiliary centre" in the Communist Party's revolutionary work.⁶ Parliament, as the Bolsheviks had shown, provided an excellent means to gauge popular support, expose the bankruptcy of the existing regime, educate the masses in the basic differences between the competing political parties and disseminate key revolutionary ideas.

Understandably, therefore, Comintern was absolutely opposed to the 'left' communist minority which wanted to boycott parliamentary elections because of moral scruple and supposed high revolutionary principle. Such a position was "naive and childish" and "does not stand up to criticism".⁷ Primarily, only when "conditions are ripe for an immediate move to armed struggle for power" would a boycott be "permissible". Unlike our parliamentary roadists, the 2nd Congress of Comintern was firmly of the view that parliament was of "comparative unimportance". The "struggle for power lies outside parliament".

The present-day opportunist left groups, who claim to adhere to the Comintern tradition, but who cannot countenance communist unity - eg, the *Morning Star's* CPB, the SWP,

SPEW, the RCP (Socialist Appeal), etc - should admit that Comintern energetically promoted the "unity of all communist elements". However, it did so not on the basis of "parliamentary tactics: rather the acceptance of the principle of armed struggle for the proletarian dictatorship".⁸ Note, none of the above 'parties' raise, promote or even privately entertain the minimum demand for a popular militia to replace the standing army.

Indeed, it should never be forgotten that Robert Griffiths, general secretary of the *Morning Star's* CPB, has actually forbidden his members from advocating a popular militia in Britain - or anywhere else, for that matter - unless specifically approved of by his cringing leadership. CPB members are also told, in that exact same spirit, to familiarise themselves with the home office's list of banned organisations. So 'yes' to uMkhonto we Sizwe in apartheid South Africa, 'no' to the IRA in the Six Countries of Northern Ireland, 'yes' to the NLF in Vietnam, 'no' to the YPG in Kurdish Syria.⁹ Clearly, Mr Griffiths has undergone a very strange journey from revolutionary Welsh nationalism to home office 'official communism'.¹⁰

Parliamentarism

When it came to revolutionary parliamentarism, Comintern presented its national sections with a 12-point check list, which puts the Socialist Campaign Group, the Democratic Socialists of America, Die Linke, Syriza, Nupes, People Before Profit, etc, etc, to shame.

In our view these 12 points retain their essential validity. They should still be observed by communist organisations, their MPs and candidates. We can summarise them thus:

1. The central committee and the Communist Party must "systematically inspect" the quality and organisational abilities of its parliamentary fraction.
2. Candidates and MPs should have proven loyalty to the party.
3. Communist MPs must accept the discipline and decisions of the central committee.
4. Communist MPs must combine legal with illegal work.
5. Communist MPs must "subordinate all their parliamentary work to the extra-parliamentary work of their party". The "purpose" of communist parliamentary work is "propaganda, agitation and organisation".
6. Communist MPs must play a leading role in mass street demonstrations and other revolutionary activity initiated by the working class.
7. Communist MPs must not behave like social democrats and "build up business connections with their electors."
8. Communist MPs are not "legislators" seeking agreement with other legislators. They are party agitators in the "enemy camp". Communist MPs are "responsible not to the atomised mass of voters, but to the Communist Party".
9. Communist MPs must make speeches intelligible to the average worker.
10. Working class communist MPs must not be intimidated by parliament: they must speak, even if it is "straight from notes".
11. Communist MPs must not only expose the bourgeoisie: they must also expose reformists and centrists.
12. Communist MPs only deserve the name 'communist' if they "show ceaseless hostility to the bourgeois system and its social patriotic lackeys".¹¹

United front

Comintern's 3rd Congress set itself the task of winning the majority of workers to communism. Because the revolutionary wave ushered in by the October Revolution had begun to ebb, this could no longer be done through

a direct challenge to the misleaders of social democracy and the "traitors in the trade union bureaucracy". Manoeuvre was needed - namely the "united proletarian front" tactic.¹²

What was meant by that was communist parties putting forward and taking the lead in fighting for a programme of immediate demands, which would answer the pressing needs of the mass of workers. Through such an approach a united front "from below" could be created, which would erode and break down the hesitations, reservations and prejudices of the mass of workers concerning the communists.

At the 4th Congress, Zinoviev noted that the "retreat of the proletariat has not yet come to a stop".¹³ What this meant was that the workers' united front, outlined in skeletal form at the 3rd Congress, "is now more relevant than ever".¹⁴ The united front from below was therefore complemented with a "united front from above". To further the struggle for the united front from below - in other words, to open up the mass of workers to the influence of communism - it was legitimate "to negotiate with the scab leaders of the social democrats", to propose a united front between leaderships.¹⁵

Yet, in spite of the fact that the resolution on tactics stated that "the united front tactic has nothing to do with the so-called 'electoral combinations' of leaders in pursuit of one or another parliamentary aim", the possibility of communists using their parliamentary strength in order to form what was called a workers' government was considered.¹⁶

Comintern outlined five types of workers' governments. The first was a "liberal workers' government", of the Labour Party type, including, we might add, one headed by a Tony Benn or a Jeremy Corbyn. The second was the social democratic kind of government seen in Germany after World War I. Both were "illusory". After all, despite occasional chatter about socialism, such governments are, in reality, committed to running capitalism in the interests of the working class (an impossibility, which explains why they were described as "illusory" by Comintern).

Despite that, today we find all manner of opportunists calling for a vote for Sir Keir Starmer's Labour Party in the name of moving towards a workers' government. The social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty comes to mind. It wants the labour movement to push, prod and even force the expected government of Sir Keir Starmer, Rachael Reeves, Wes Streeting and David Lammy into a position where it will "tax the rich to rebuild public services" (and carry out a whole wish list of other radicalish economic demands).¹⁷

Far from attempting to expose Sir Keir's Labour Party, holding out such an unlikely, implausible, surely absurd possibility is intended, in fact, to foster illusions and reconcile militant trade unionists to auto-Labourism. After all, the AWL and Labour front bench have so much in common. Both insist that the 'main enemy' is not at home, with the government, the state machine and the capitalist class, but is to be found in Moscow, in Beijing or in Tehran. Both want to 'arm, arm, arm Ukraine', because we need to 'stand up to the evil of Putinism'. Both want a capitalist two-state 'solution' in Israel/Palestine. Both back the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' big lie used in the Labour Party to purge the left and now being deployed to besmirch the giant pro-Palestine solidarity marches. Etc, etc.

Of course, communists would be ready to back a Labour government, including with purely parliamentary arrangements, but only to the degree that it really attempted to advance the interests of the working class - say, by pledging to repeal all anti-trade

union laws, get rid of the standing army, withdraw from Nato, abolish the monarchy and the House of Lords, nationalise banking, insurance and infrastructure, introduce measures of economic planning ... and so on and so forth.

Civil war

Such a government, however, would, argued Comintern, have to be supported by "combative workers' organisations" and "must lead to a bitter struggle with the bourgeoisie or even to civil war".¹⁸ Even tame experiments such as Salvador Allende's 1970-73 government in Chile led directly to "civil war", albeit of a decidedly one-sided sort. The left parties, the trade unions and the working class masses were more or less totally unarmed, the army was not ... and general Augusto Pinochet and his military junta proceeded to imprison, torture, kill and disappear thousands upon thousands.

However, to state the obvious, governments of the liberal Labour and social democratic sort are by no means "inevitable".¹⁹ There are other roads.

Hence the three other kinds of workers' governments - those which Comintern called "genuine". They were a government of workers and poorer peasants; a workers' government with communist participation; and, lastly, a genuinely proletarian workers' government, which, in its "pure form", can only be "embodied in the Communist Party".²⁰

Zinoviev himself strongly argued that to establish a workers' government, it would first be necessary to "overthrow the bourgeoisie" and therefore the workers' government of the 'liberal workers' government' form represented the "least likely path" to working class state power.²¹

The Communist Party would perhaps, under certain specific circumstances and with definite guarantees, support a coalition government with a view to furthering the struggle against the state apparatus and thereby bring about working class rule. The case of the Bolshevik-Left Socialist Revolutionary coalition in 1917, which resulted in a government of workers and poorer peasants, is an example.

Applied to a coalition of workers' parties, this would require a firm, public, binding commitment to carrying out the full minimum programme of the Communist Party. That would include, as a most "basic task" of such a workers' government, "arming the proletariat, disarming the bourgeois counterrevolutionary organisations, introducing [workers'] control of production, shifting the main burden of taxation onto the shoulders of the rich, and breaking the resistance of the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie".²² In short, a civil war - hopefully over in 24 hours, hopefully virtually bloodless, hopefully so uneven when it comes to force capability, that it brings decisive victory to the working class.

Frankly, though, the 'workers' government' slogan was a product of frustrating times, coined during a period of forced retreat from what had previously been thought of as a world situation where the proletariat stood on the brink of taking state power more or less everywhere. Certainly the slogan was full of ambiguities. Even according to its authors, it had "dangers".²³ It could, for example, easily become an excuse for stagism, lesser evilism or auto-Labourism.

Majority

However, there is no mystery about what Comintern was out to achieve. Communist parties found themselves in a minority, sometimes an extreme minority: ie, not much more than a group of a couple of thousand.

The fight for a workers' united front around elemental issues and,

after that, the workers' government slogan, were designed to achieve class unity around the communist parties. Labourite and social democrat leaders, who preferred unity with the liberal bourgeoisie to unity with the communists, would be exposed, would drain members, supporters and voters to the communists, till the poles were reversed. Instead of the communists being in the minority, they would be in the majority and the Labourites and social democrats would find themselves mere irrelevant rumps - as with the Mensheviks in the Russia of autumn 1917, who for all practical purposes could therefore be largely ignored.

Under such circumstances everything hinges on our combat organisations, splitting the enemy's state machine - crucially the army - and assessing the international situation. We would have to ask ourselves searching questions, such as: 'Can the big countries of Europe coordinate with us?'; 'Will the working class movement in America be able to hold back counterrevolutionary intervention?'; 'Can we in Europe inspire Africa, Asia and Latin America?'

If the answers to such question are positive, we would surely risk all and go for state power. However, if the answers were negative, we would be well advised to wait, to hold back, to patiently bide our time till things have been changed for the better.

On the other hand, sometimes life does not give the luxury of choice. We might be forced to take a gamble and make a leap into the unknown. We shall see ●

Notes

1. G Zinoviev, 'Paris - Bern - Moscow', in John Riddle (ed) *Founding the Communist International: proceedings and documents of the 1st Congress March 1919* New York NY 1987, p306.
2. Lenin's pamphlet was written for the opening of the 2nd Congress of Comintern. Printed almost simultaneously in Russian, French, German, Italian and English, it was handed out to delegates as they arrived in Moscow.
3. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 28, Moscow 1977, p458.
4. A Adler (ed) *Theses, resolutions, manifestos of the first four congresses of the Third International* London 1980, p99.
5. *Ibid* p100.
6. *Ibid* p101.
7. *Ibid* p102.
8. *Ibid* p103.
9. 'Protocol for all party members' *Unity* September 6 2021.
10. For a brief overview of Robert Griffiths and his political career, see M Fischer 'Welsh road to British road' *Weekly Worker* March 26 1998: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/233/welsh-road-to-british-road.
11. A Adler (ed) *Theses, resolutions, manifestos of the first four congresses of the Third International* London 1980, pp103-05.
12. *Ibid* London 1980, p301.
13. Quoted in EH Carr *The Bolshevik Revolution* Vol 3, Harmondsworth 1977, p440.
14. A Adler (ed) *Theses, resolutions, manifestos of the first four congresses of the Third International* London 1980, p395.
15. *Ibid* London 1980, p396.
16. J Riddell (ed) *Towards the united front: proceedings of the 4th Congress of the Communist International, 1922* Chicago IL 2012, p1161.
17. Editorial: 'Our demands and a workers' government' *Solidarity* March 20 2024. Revealingly, the war budget, Nato, the House of Lords and the monarchy go unmentioned. And, naturally, there is no thought of a mass Communist Party. Everything is framed by Labourism and auto-Labourism.
18. J Riddell (ed) *Towards the united front: proceedings of the 4th Congress of the Communist International, 1922* Chicago IL 2012, p1160.
19. As claimed in an article, 'Could a Labour government lead us to socialism?', published in the *Morning Star* under the name 'Marx Memorial Library' (March 2 2024). The anonymous MML author answers their article's question with a blunt 'no', but then says, "we're unlikely to get socialism without one". A line, note, surely at variance with the CPB's programme, *Britain's road to socialism*.
20. J Riddell (ed) *Towards the united front: proceedings of the 4th Congress of the Communist International, 1922* Chicago IL 2012, p1161.
21. *Ibid* p25.
22. *Ibid* p1159.
23. *Ibid* p1160.

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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Legalise all
recreational drugs
but educate and
socialise too

A very Tory ban

With Labour support, the Tories' smoking ban is likely to pass - but, on historical evidence, prohibition is hardly likely to work, says Paul Demarty

Those of us old enough to remember - if you'll forgive me - the fag-end of the John Major government (1990-97) have ample reminders of those cheerful days at the moment.

Discipline, at the time, was in freefall, with the Tories at sixes and sevens over the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, the proto-Brexiters being led from the back benches by Margaret Thatcher. One figure after another was forced out by financial and sexual scandals. It was quite a spectacle.

Major retreated to the last redoubt of the bourgeois politician, to be avoided unless absolutely necessary: policy. He announced a grand 'back to basics' campaign, to restore something like moral fibre to the nation (a quest rather undermined by David Mellor 'making the beast with two backs' in his Chelsea strip). He privatised the railways, which is still going just swimmingly. Most famously of all, he announced the creation of a special telephone hotline that you could ring to find out why some traffic cones were where they were - which presumably focus-grouped well among grouchy motorists, but has since become a byword for total political desperation.

Red meat

So it is with Rishi Sunak, who is likewise throwing whatever he can at the problem of his apparently imminent electoral doom. There are, of course, his endless ill-starred attempts to stop migrants crossing the channel. That is red meat for the core voters. Then there is the perfectly dysfunctional piece of triangulation: his partial smoking ban, which would ban the sale of tobacco products to anyone born after 2009.

There is a rationale for such a ban, naturally. Smoking is - we are told - bad for you. Vaping, included in the ban, is probably better on many points, but there is not yet enough data by half to call it safe, and there have been problems with dodgy off-label imports (the prevalence of sickly sweet-flavoured variants also makes it more attractive to youngsters, who often then 'graduate' to cigarettes - just as people graduate from alcopops to beer and wine). Since the mere trifle of millions of people dying is of no real concern in our neoliberal age, there is also the strain put on the national health service, and the huge price tag of treating smoking-related illnesses.

As a *political* move, however, it seems less than shrewd, merely because it has the effect of highlighting how divided the Tories are. Liz Truss, on her grand book tour - and apparently incapable of reflecting for even five minutes on her own disastrous tenure in No10 - denounced it, as did Kemi Badenoch, who broke cabinet discipline to vote against it on the second reading.



Dirck Hals 'Gentlemen smoking' (1627)

Dozens of Tories, all told, found this all rather too much a case of nanny-state overreach, and so - as we noted earlier - the success of the bill is in the gift of Sir Kier Starmer's Labour (therefore making it useless as an incentive to vote Conservative *rather than* Labour).

That support has been forthcoming so far. It was, after all, Tony Blair's government - Starmer's most obvious model - that banned tobacco advertising, and then smoking in public buildings and workplaces. Much the same rationale was given then. It was a Tory government which later enforced uniformity of packaging on tobacco products, and banned sale in small quantities - first packs of 10 cigarettes and then enforcing a minimum of 25 grams on packs of rolling tobacco. The logic of all this points towards a total ban, but nobody seems to have the courage to go out and just do it.

Failure

Why not? Never stated, but surely in the backs of people's minds, is the total failure of prohibitionary regimes to deal with any other drug. Before the full prohibition of heroin in this country, there were a few hundred heroin addicts. We know this, because there was one reasonable way to get heroin: by prescription. Once the trade was in the hands of the definitionally unregulated criminal underworld, many thousands were rapidly hooked, and they could look forward not to blandly packaged dope of a known strength, but a succession of variants of brown street powder adulterated to an unknown degree.

There is also the notorious case of alcohol prohibition in the United States - a thoroughgoing social

disaster that, likewise, probably increased the general spread of dangerous drunkenness, blinded many with dubious bathtub spirits, and turned the Mafia from a petty protection racket into a formidable national organisation.

There is therefore the very real question of the workability of this ban. As some Tories have noted, enforcement is down to people on the desk of every corner shop in the country. Are they expected to try and work out, in 2039, whether a customer is 29 or 30? Will they bother? There is a Hobson's choice character to all these restrictions. Either they do not actually reduce legal consumption or they shift consumption to the black market.

The prevailing argument against the ban is of the 'give me liberty or give me death' stamp. This is, of course, very old. In 1929, Edward Bernays, the nephew of Sigmund Freud and pioneer of modern public relations techniques, was commissioned by American tobacco companies to increase the popularity of smoking among women. The scheme he came up with was astroturfing a demonstration of women in New York City, brandishing cigarettes as 'torches of freedom' and associating smoking with the then fashionable 'flapper' subculture. A decade ago, I visited Frankfurt, where tobacco advertising was still legal; I saw a billboard advert that depicted a taxi driver, leaning against his cab, lighting a cigarette. The caption: "Five minutes of freedom".

This is a rather strange view of freedom, on closer examination. There is a hint of the proposition associated with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer that capitalism

divides popular life into two domains: that of work, where there is no illusion of anything other than domination; and leisure time, which is a world of pseudo-freedom, increasingly administered by an overbearing culture industry. Thus, according to the Frankfurt School, the Frankfurt cabbie's precious "five minutes".

In the present debate, this feature is brought out quite well by the conservative writer, Peter Hitchens, who supports the ban:

Four years ago, the London government went quite mad, closing schools, churches, bars and workplaces, instructing the population to stay at home, ordering us to wear squares of cloth over our faces and to avoid standing too close to each other ... But when the current government sought to enact a new law, that anyone born since January 1 2009 would be banned forever from buying cigarettes, a large part of Tory London rose like lions after slumber, enraged and militant.¹

He further notes that the same Conservatives railing against this encroachment are perfectly happy to join Hitchens in rejecting the right to do as one wants with one's own body in the case of all the drugs that are presently illegal, not to mention abortion. This all strikes him as perfectly ridiculous, and he concludes by predicting that:

If British conservatism is true to form, I shall probably die, some years hence, in a country where free speech, habeas corpus, jury trial, the right to silence and the rest are forgotten and dead, but

where we all still retain the sacred right to wheeze and splutter our way to an early, cancerous grave.

Profit motive

Though he is an ex-Trotskyist, Hitchens does not remember enough of his former Marxism to draw the obvious explanation for this inconsistency. Tobacco - and alcohol, for that matter - are both demonstrably more dangerous than many popular recreational drugs currently criminalised: one could name, for the sake of argument, ecstasy, psilocybin and (provided it is not smoked, but vapourised or eaten) marijuana. Under capitalism, however, legality tends to reproduce itself, since it tends to produce powerful vested interests in the substances concerned, with a lot of money to throw at lobbying. (As a counterpoint to the money spent on treating lung cancer and heart disease, the tobacco industry can cite the considerable sums earned by the exchequer in large sales taxes on tobacco products).

Communists do, in fact, embrace as a starting point the freedom to do as one wants with one's own body. Drugs should be legal: end of story. That goes for nicotine, too. The health risks and associated costs cannot be forgotten; but even that must be problematised. After all, it is not smoking-related illnesses that have crippled the NHS, but deliberate political choices to run it as lean as possible and privatise it by stealth. In the absence of serious, positive social policy to ensure the availability of healthcare, we get this sort of busybody intrusion into people's lives.

That said, tobacco presents a glaring example of how *badly* the profit motive interacts with the perfectly natural human desire for subtly or drastically altered states of consciousness. The relentless, cynical marketing; the campaign over decades to suppress and belittle evidence of smoking-related illness - both are clear evidence of the incentive to drive people to an early grave in the name of profit. Much the same could be said of the criminal enterprises pushing illegal drugs, and the legalisation of marijuana in many jurisdictions around the world has done nothing to reverse the drift towards stronger and riskier cultivars.

We cannot, therefore, *end* with bodily autonomy. A socialist society would destroy the criminal organisations and tobacco and booze conglomerates alike by legalising drugs and socialising production.

But socialising production would entail deciding, also, what *not* to produce. The replacement of tobacco crops with something more useful, or even just more fun, would be a good start ●

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Notes

1. www.compactmag.com/article/british-liberty-goes-up-in-smoke.