

# weekly **worker**



**Revolutionary parliamentarism  
vs opportunist parliamentarism  
and the Bolshevik curia triumph**

- Letters and debate
- Elections: left options
- Israel using Iran as cover
- Ukraine's \$60bn package

No 1487 April 18 2024

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10



**SWP's police defending us  
from threatening, abusive  
and insulting behaviour  
and communications**

**Does JK Rowling really  
deserve to be arrested?**



## LETTERS



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

## Republicanism

In his article, 'Deal with the arguments' (February 22), Mike Macnair offers a polemic against what he characterises as "Steve Bloom's argument against democratic republicanism as a central political objective of Marxists". This gets my viewpoint wrong, however. Mike and I and the Marxist Unity Group (MUG) in the USA have no disagreement that "democratic republicanism" (understood correctly as referring to a workers' or socialist republic) must be "a central political objective".

The problem I see, and have been discussing in the pages of *Cosmonaut* (MUG's online theoretical journal), is that MUG - in its literature and theoretical expositions - has elevated the fight for a democratic republic to the central political objective, eclipsing all others. Its approach also begins to develop a theory which suggests that actually achieving this 'democratic republic' is an absolutely necessary first step in any transition from a capitalist state to a workers' state - a prerequisite to even beginning to struggle around other tasks that a workers' republic will need to engage.

Taken together, in my judgment, these two elements generate a process of schematic thinking - ie, of beginning to view the world through the distorting lens of a specific revolutionary theory about how the world *ought* to look (and ought to behave). Whenever revolutionaries allow our theories to shape our view of the world, rather than the other way around, it makes the world as it actually is - a world which almost always confounds our theories - far more difficult to assess properly. That's true because when we look at events through a distorting lens

we tend to see what we expect to see, even if that's not what's actually happening. I have developed and documented all of this in my letters and articles for *Cosmonaut* in recent months. Readers of the *Weekly Worker* can review and judge how well I have expressed my concern at [cosmonautmag.com/?s=Steve+Bloom](http://cosmonautmag.com/?s=Steve+Bloom). Responses by various supporters of MUG are also listed there.

A good chunk of Macnair's article is spent berating me for following the anti-schematic method of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. This, too, represents a false polemic in my view. I spent two decades (more or less) in the leadership of the FI, starting in the mid-1980s. During this time the FI majority launched what turned out to be a disastrous orientation toward building "broad mass parties" rather than what was characterised as the "sectarian" kind of cadre organisations we had been focused on in the past. I think Mike and I would have a similar balance sheet on this experience, which has essentially led to the liquidation of the FI as a principled revolutionary formation.

I believe I generated a pretty substantial record during the time I was part of the international leadership, attempting to combat the errors being made in one country after another, calling for balance-sheet discussions and more. But that's not the main issue of concern for us today. Mike is correct to note that the turn toward "broad mass parties" was promoted *in the name of* rejecting the "schematicism" of the FI's historical self-conception. But a wrong turn by the FI majority in the *name of* combating schematicism hardly justifies a subsequent rejection of any and all efforts to combat it. It would be as if we rejected communism and Marxism because the USSR degenerated while promoting these ideologies (in name only, of course). Despite the *misuse* of anti-schematicism by the FI

we should still maintain a vigilant effort to avoid schematic thinking in our own political praxis.

One thing Macnair corrects me on is valid: "The consequence of this analysis is that comrade Bloom is just plain wrong to argue that Soviet power in Russia leapt over the stage of the 'democratic republic'." Here we get to the ambiguity in the words, 'democratic republicanism', that I hinted at above. I repeat: we have no dispute that democratic republicanism must be "a central political objective" for Marxist revolutionaries. At the same time we have to remain acutely aware that we are talking here about a workers' or socialist democratic republic, not a bourgeois-democratic republic.

It's obvious to me at this point that there isn't a unified understanding on this question within MUG itself. Some members are using 'democratic republic' to mean 'socialist democratic republic', while others really do envision a mere extension of bourgeois democracy. This ambiguity is played out in some of the discussion by different MUG members in *Cosmonaut*, including in their replies to me. It is also clearly manifest in the book published by MUG last year: *Fight the constitution: for a democratic socialist republic* - despite the use of the word 'socialist' in the title.

Because I am on the outside looking in, I have come to a full understanding of this division within MUG only recently, and only with some difficulty. Before I understood I made the mistake of treating a viewpoint held by some (we are fighting for a bourgeois-democratic republic) as if it was held by all, and this was the source of my error that Macnair corrects in the quote above. My statement about soviet power in Russia is not accurate in relation to those who are clearly advocating a 'socialist' or 'workers' democratic republic. Soviet power only leapt over the stage of a *bourgeois* democratic republic in Russia. By no means did it jump over the stage of a *workers'* democratic republic.

Finally, I will note the theme of Mike's article, which is captured in its headline: his complaint that I fail to deal directly with the arguments in his book. This came as a surprise, since I didn't even know that the book existed until I read this article. I do plan now to read the book and I will offer Mike my specific thoughts about his arguments when I do. My guess is that I will find myself in agreement with most of what he has to say - since I certainly agree with the basic thrust of what Mike writes in his subhead 'Republican'.

Steve Bloom  
email

## Extremism

Another Easter Parade in Derry, with men in combat uniform, teenage boys carrying crates of petrol bombs, IRA signs prominent on lampposts. But this isn't the extremism much heralded recently by the British government - therefore no police intervention.

In the aftermath of George Galloway's victory in the Rochdale by-election, Rishi Sunak thought fit to outline Britain's growing extremism in an impromptu speech outside No10. People winning a seat in parliament in a democratically run election is seemingly a new form of extremism. Or was it that all the mainstream political parties were soundly beaten? Is this new extremism really a change in voting behaviour away from the 'moderate' mainstream parties who support genocide, towards more "extremist" candidates and parties who want

an end to all genocide around the world? Hard to say.

So contrast the masked petrol bomb-wielding youths to this by-election victory in Rochdale - it's the latter that has the British government in a tizzy. When at least half the leadership of the Saoradh republican group are predictably and largely Special Branch-controlled, the police helicopter hovering overhead must be just for public consumption. The British security state needs Saoradh as much as Saoradh need their green, white and gold paraphernalia. Without this Irish republican charade, the British security establishment would struggle to justify its huge security apparatus and budget that it needs for the real challenges that lie ahead.

Once people start demanding workplace democracy; once people are aware of the dominance of finance and how companies like Blackrock can dictate global investment, and how society is racing towards technocratic governance; once millions of people are cancelled and can't work, buy or sell in a world where all cash has been removed from circulation, then the 'security' cum repressive infrastructure we see in today's world - surveillance helicopters, surveillance this, surveillance that - will really be let loose on the people.

I think we need a state not to surveil us and prevent progressive change, but to run the utilities, public transport, health, education and banking, so that it works in our interests and not the interests of elites.

Louis Shawcross  
Co Down

## Come together

I've received a very disturbing email asking for support from the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (Deim25) on Germany. The email (below) is self-explanatory and marks a very alarming new trend that could so easily be the future of so-called 'freedom of speech' norms in the 'democratic' west.

This extreme action by the German government should encourage us to put aside our bickering as communists and join around the many things the various communist fractions agree on. If we don't come together now, I fear the socialist press, which is the only free press left, may be restricted also. I look forward to any comments about this Diem25 email:

"Together we can and we must prevent a new dark chapter in Germany and Europe!

"Since last weekend we know that we are not just facing an ordinary election campaign, but an epic fight against injustice and oppression in Germany.

"On April 12, the Palestine congress in Berlin was stopped without any legal basis. The police informed the organisers and us that the ministry of the interior has imposed a ban on political activity in Germany against the participants ... Under this ban, they are not

allowed to enter the country or even appear via video at conferences or demonstrations.

"The occasion? A conference to discuss the suffering of Palestinians. The specific reason? As the police themselves admitted, there were no prohibited statements at this conference. It's simply a farce that shows the means used to silence all those who speak out against the oppression of the Palestinians by Israel and criticise the bloody war of revenge that has been going on for months.

"We will, of course, continue and we will not accept under any circumstances that people who speak uncomfortable truths are punished in any way for doing so. Without freedom of speech, there is no democracy, no freedom and no peace."

Paul Williams  
email

## Shallowness

Your paper repeatedly misuses and bends the quoting of Marx, Engels and sometimes Lenin (when you are not favouring the renegade Kautsky) - usually with small snippets, taken out of context - but the recent piece by Daniel Lazare rubbishing the turmoil and revolt in Haiti as nothing but "drug gang criminality" is the most egregious to date ("Drug war denialism", February 28).

Quite apart from its sneering dismissal of an astounding uprising, which has toppled a western-serving, unelected president and humiliated Washington and its 'allies', its attempt to harness Karl Marx to this insultingly reactionary put-down takes the biscuit for misrepresentation - or should I say sophistry?

The thrust is that Haiti is in trouble primarily because of a drug-running culture, which somewhat misses out the devastating world capitalist crisis and specifically 500 years of the most brutal oppression and exploitation. There was Spanish feudal imperialism, French bourgeois rapaciousness (possibly even worse), then the repeated barbarities imposed by the US - from the early 20th century US marines invasion and occupation to the horrors of the Papa and Baby Doc dictatorships, and subsequent US coups, earthquakes, UN chaos. And now we have the imposition of a bunch of corrupt, potentially-killer, Kenyan police (if this latest nonsensical proposition can get into the air at all).

Astoundingly Lazare's answer is the legalisation of drugs, to supposedly undercut the trade which he asserts is the cause of the turmoil (to restore 'stability'? In whose favour?). His authority for this is some weirdly located fragments of Marx from his writings on the British Opium Wars on China - which, Lazare asserts, show Marx was in favour of drug legalisation. This must be the most topsy-turvy reading ever - and one demonstrating either complete idiocy, petty bourgeois idealist blindness or total cynicism (and likely all three).

Just about the most famous aphorism attributed to Marx is that

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday April 21 5pm

**Israel and Iran: war spiral provides cover for ethnic cleansing and genocide**  
**Speakers: Moshé Machover and Yassamine Mather**

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

Sunday May 5 5pm

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

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

## Communist University

Saturday August 3 to Saturday August 10 (inclusive)

International Student House, 229 Great Portland Street, London W1  
(nearest tube: Great Portland Street)

Cost: Full week, including accommodation in en suite rooms: £250 (£150 unwaged). Solidarity price: £300.

First/final weekend, including one night's accommodation: £60 (£30).  
Full day: £10 (£5). Single session: £5 (£3).

Make payments to account 'Weekly Worker'. Account number: 00744310.  
Sort code: 30-99-64. Please quote payment reference 'CU2024'

Email your booking, stating single or double room, to: [office@cpgb.org.uk](mailto:office@cpgb.org.uk)



“religion is the opiate of the people” and its meaning is glaringly clear - that being kept in a state of philosophical numbness is the greatest weakness for the working class. And, just to make it clear, Marx refers frequently to the “stupor” that opium and other drugs keep people in, including in the cited articles; anyone trying to read this as Marx’s “toleration of the opium trade” in the abstract has obviously been smoking too much of something themselves.

If the whole of the material from Marx’s 1858-59 articles are read - where he ventures that the Chinese emperor’s mandarins should lift their ban on opium - some very specific circumstances become apparent. Through savage wars Britain had violently imposed the contraband import of opium and most of southern China was already in the grip of addiction, so that unbanning it would have had little impact for the moment. But what it would have done was to completely bankrupt the British opium trade and potentially send shock waves through the entire Anglo-Indian economy - the illicit opium trade having become “one sixth of its total state income”.

In this way Marx was presenting specific tactics for battling against piratical British colonialist capitalism in this situation, not advocating the use or toleration of opium as such, nor suggesting that legalisation in general was a way to remove the debilitating and corrupting effects of capitalist culture. Drug reform is just that - reform - and concentration on reform heads attention away from revolution.

Meanwhile characterisation of the events in Haiti as part of the “drug war” simply reflects the bourgeois press accounts (and the imperialist agenda feeding them), which wants to write off the ‘gang’ culture as nothing but kidnap and rape criminality.

Like in Mexico and Ecuador, etc, the degenerate, corrupting nature of American imperialism in fostering grotesque criminality and violence is obvious. But it is clear that there are different threads in the ‘gangs’ (hidden by the bourgeois accounts) and notably those around Jimmy Chérizier’s G9 coalition, which emerged from local defence committees and at least claims to stand against the chaos (which surely you would favour, since you so often make a point about ‘arming workers’ militias’?).

He may be just a demagogue, and he may be what he claims: a revolutionary trying to emulate Che Guevara, Thomas Sankora and others. But the very fact these are the assertions being made, and that much of the turmoil presents itself in a political anti-imperialist form, indicates there is something much deeper going on here.

But your view, limited to contempt for the “easily bribed” poor masses, demonstrates once again that your anti-proletarian, petty bourgeois shallowness is a million miles from revolutionary understanding.

**Don Hoskins**  
EPSR

## Get out!

On April 14, several residents and supporters of Palestine Action disrupted Somerset council’s ‘property and investments sub-committee’ meeting for over 30 minutes, before the councillors closed the meeting to the public.

The following day a local resident submitted a question and demanded the immediate eviction of the Israeli weapons firm, Elbit Systems, from the council’s property - Aztec West 600 in Bristol. This was followed by locals handing out pictures of injured and killed Palestinian children during the ongoing Gaza genocide. Residents also held a banner with the names of dozens of Palestinians who have been killed by the Israeli military using Elbit’s weaponry, whilst taking it in turns to disrupt the meeting to make their demands heard.

Over the past three months, residents have disrupted three council meetings over its continued complicity in the Gaza genocide. Locals have also twice sprayed red paint across the council’s town hall - on one of such occasions, they also locked on to blockade any access to the premises.

Somerset council are the landlords of Aztec West 600, which is actually the headquarters of Elbit Systems UK. Due to financial concerns, the council have made plans to sell Aztec West 600 as part of a wholesale move to dispose of their commercial investments. However, residents have repeatedly demanded that the council follow their legal and moral obligations to immediately evict Elbit from the property before disposing of the site.

Elbit Systems is Israel’s biggest weapons manufacturer, supplying 85% of Israel’s military drone fleet and land-based equipment, in addition to missiles, bombs and bullets. As part of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, Elbit “ramped up production” for the Israeli military, who use the company’s services “extensively”. Since October 7, the Israeli military has killed well over 33,000 Palestinians (40% of whom are children), while almost 80,000 have been injured and the majority of Gazans have been displaced.

The council have said they will meet with Elbit Systems UK to discover what is happening at Aztec West 600 before taking any further moves to evict the company. During a court case, Alan Wright, vice-president of sales at Elbit Systems UK, revealed that the premises is used for “systems integration” of weaponry for their customers.

Despite Elbit Systems UK being wholly owned by Elbit Systems Israel, the company often attempts to disassociate themselves from their parent company and global brand. However, during Elbit’s annual investor conference of 2024 in Israel, Elbit Systems CEO Bezalel Machlis stated that all Elbit companies in the UK are a significant part of the Israeli weapons firm - they frequently work with their counterparts in Israel and share technology. In the same conference, a video was displayed of Elbit workers saying they feel like “civil soldiers” and regularly engage in ongoing debriefs with the Israeli military during the use of their weapons in Gaza.

**Palestine Action**  
email

## Dance of death

I’ve been casting a mind’s eye over current global developments - most particularly at those indescribably grotesque, beyond obscene *danses macabres* from Israel and the so-called Palestinian Authority, centred on the televised mass murder in Gaza. In turn, the USA, UK, EU, Lebanon, Iran, Saudi Arabia (not to forget the United Nations) are making their syncopated moves on that dance floor of death.

How wonderful it is to see Marxist/communist entities acting out those counterpart roles of ours. Those of incessant backbiting around internalised obsessions; of grossly introverted and incessantly unproductive ideological nitpicking (of that sectarianism gently nurtured to levels of cult-like derangement). Seemingly all of which is determinedly pursued as part of some peculiarly revered self-mutilation - followed closely by complete objective destruction.

Anyway the gods of global capital will be looking on with glee at this fiesta of non-futurism (crossbred with bonanzas of anti-hopefulness!).

**Bruno Kretschmar**  
email

## Alien Christians

I recently discovered that some astronomers believe that our galaxy contains about 200 billion planets. I was shocked because I was expecting a far lower number (even though the highest estimate is 400 billion).

This is the background to my theory that the *Bible* and Christianity is telling us about a coming alien invasion of Earth, presented as a religious narrative by the ancient prophets and today’s clergy, and religious people in general. According to the Christian narrative, the reason for the invasion is to prevent humans wiping themselves out in a nuclear armageddon.

**Tony Clark**  
email

# ACTION

## Stop arming Israel - boycott Barclays Bank

**Saturday April 20:** Nationwide day of action. Demand the British government stops arming Israel. Demand Barclays stops bankrolling Israel’s attacks on Palestinians. Join your local action.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign:  
[palestinecampaign.org/events](http://palestinecampaign.org/events).

## Bristol radical history festival

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

## Save Gaza - stop the genocide

**Saturday April 20, 1pm:** March to Bradford City Hall. Assemble at Thornbury Roundabout, Bradford BD3. Stand in solidarity with Palestine, demand a ban on all weapons trading with Israel. Organised by Bradford Friends of Palestine:  
[www.instagram.com/p/C5ky\\_T3orTf](http://www.instagram.com/p/C5ky_T3orTf).

## Stop arming Israel, stop bombing Gaza

**Saturday April 20, 1.30pm:** March and rally. Assemble opposite Lewisham Islamic Centre, 363 Lewisham High Street, London SE13. March through Lewisham to a rally at the clock tower. Organised by Lewisham and Greenwich CND:  
[cnduk.org/events/stop-arming-israel-lewisham-march-and-rally](http://cnduk.org/events/stop-arming-israel-lewisham-march-and-rally).

## The fight for Palestinian liberation

**Saturday April 20, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, Meli Cafe, 142 Northumberland Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1. Introduction, covering settler-colonialism, Zionism and the British state, by Anindya Bhattacharyya, followed by discussion. Organised by Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century:  
[rs21.org.uk/events](http://rs21.org.uk/events).

## Palestine and the crisis of democracy

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

## What it means to be human

**Tuesday April 23, 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: ‘Shifts in kinship from matrilinearity to patrilinearity in a Nicaraguan Miskitu village’. Speaker: Mark Jamieson. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group:  
[www.facebook.com/events/938344364255541](http://www.facebook.com/events/938344364255541).

## Defend the right to protest

**Thursday April 25, 6.45pm:** Public meeting, Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1. Police restrictions on peaceful marches are an attack on democracy - end the intimidation, arrests and Islamophobia. Speakers include Fran Heathcote (PCS). Organised by Greater Manchester Stop the War:  
[www.stopwar.org.uk/events](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events).

## Revolution, class and party

**Thursday April 25, 7pm:** Online session in the fortnightly ‘ABC of Marxism’ course, presented by Ian Spencer. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?:  
[www.whymarx.com/sessions](http://www.whymarx.com/sessions).

## 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/729062775772580](http://www.facebook.com/events/729062775772580).

## Ceasefire now - stop arming Israel

**Saturday April 27, 12 noon:** National demonstration, central London - details to be announced. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events).

## May Day workplace day of action for Palestine

**Wednesday May 1:** Nationwide workplace day of action. Local solidarity actions demanding peace and justice for the Palestinians. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](http://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](http://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. Organised by London May Day Organising Committee:  
[www.londonmayday.org](http://www.londonmayday.org).

## With banners held high

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

## CPGB wills

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

## Fighting fund

# Play your part

With just under two weeks of April still to go, we have now received £1,409 towards the *Weekly Worker* monthly fighting fund target of £2,250. In other words, we still need to raise another £841 in the remaining 13 days.

In the last week a very useful £551 came our way, thanks to some excellent contributions from our readers and supporters. When it comes to standing orders and bank transfers, number one on our list was comrade KB, who came up with his monthly £170! Then there was MM with his £75 and PB with her £70. Others who used this method were TR (£40), OG (£24), GS (£20), SS (£15), SA (£12) and CC (£10).

Then we had those three monthly donors via PayPal - RL and US comrade PM (£50 each) and MZ in Italy (£10). And, finally, how could I forget comrade Hassan, who handed his usual fiver to one of our team?

So now I’m pretty confident that we can raise what we still

need in the time that’s left, even though there’s less than a fortnight still to go. I know that there are several quite substantial standing orders still to come, while no doubt a few other comrades will want to make sure we get there!

There’s still time to send us a cheque (yes, we still get one or two of those!), while other means of helping us out can be seen on our website (see below). Please play your part in making sure that the *Weekly Worker* can continue fulfilling its essential role of campaigning for a single, democratic-centralist, Marxist party - and promoting debate amongst the entire left on how that can be achieved ●

**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](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate)



## LAW

# Further criminalising speech

Tory opposition to the Scottish ‘hate crime’ act is about protecting their ‘traditional right’ to stir up hatred. Once it was Jews and Huguenots. Now it is illegal migrants, trans activists and marchers who oppose genocide in Gaza. But, asks Mike Macnair, what the hell is the SWP doing with its call for prosecutions?

From, April 1, All Fools Day, the Scottish government’s ‘Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021’ came into effect.<sup>1</sup> The three year delay in bringing it into force is *purportedly* because of the need for the creation of a specialist police unit to handle cases.<sup>2</sup> It seems likely that in reality the Scottish government attempted to kick the can down the road until the controversy surrounding it had dissipated.

If so, no such luck. The fact that it criminalises “stirring up hatred” against transgender people, as well as other groups, produced a demonstrative insult to transgender women from the author, JK Rowling, ending with the challenge, “Arrest me”. The wide publicity given to this by the media produced, in turn, 7,000 complaints to the police under the act in the first week - most of them plainly intended to expose the new law as an ass.<sup>3</sup> The Tories in the Scots parliament have tabled a vote to repeal it.<sup>4</sup>

## Common ground

Commentary on this development has displayed a curious common ground between the rightwing think tank, Policy Exchange, one of whose senior fellows, Michael Foran, has complained of ‘misunderstandings’ of the act, and *Socialist Worker*, which instantly responded on April 2 that Rowling *should* be arrested (only to draw back slightly on April 9).

The act is a short one, and the controversy has been (probably wrongly) mainly about section 4. Sections 1-2 concern the “aggravation” of crimes in general by “prejudice” - defined as being motivated *wholly or partly* by “malice and ill-will towards a group of persons” on the basis of a list of characteristics similar to the ‘protected characteristics’ under the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, race, colour, nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origins, religion or, in the case of a social or cultural group, perceived religious affiliation, sexual orientation, transgender identity, variations in sex characteristics. Where this sort of aggravation is found, the court trying the case is required to take it into account in sentencing and to record it.

The list of protected characteristics, here and elsewhere, strikingly does *not* include sex: misogyny is not to be an ‘aggravating factor’. Section 12 gives power to the Scottish ministers to amend the act by regulation to add reference to sex. I have not delved far enough into the legislative history to have a clear understanding why this choice has been made.

Section 3 creates a new offence of “racially aggravated harassment”, analogous to the excessively wide harassment liability under section 26 of the Equality Act 2010. The definition of “racially aggravated” is analogous to that of “aggravated” in section 1, so including conduct *partly* motivated by “malice and ill-will”; the criminalised “conduct” includes speech; and “harassment” of a person includes causing the person alarm or distress”. I flag up all these points because we have repeatedly seen anti-Zionist protests characterised as “harassment” under section 26, and the cases that have occurred of no-platforming of ‘gender-critical



JK Rowling: does she really deserve to be arrested?

feminists’ at universities have also been on this basis. The only real limit on the offence is that “conduct” requires “two or more occasions”, unlike section 26.

Section 4 creates two crimes of “stirring up hatred”. Subsection (1) is specific to *ethnic or national* issues:

A person commits an offence if (a) the person

(i) behaves in a manner that a reasonable person would consider to be threatening, abusive or insulting, or

(ii) communicates to another person material that a reasonable person would consider to be threatening, abusive or insulting, and

(b) either

(i) in doing so, the person intends to stir up hatred against a group of persons based on the group being defined by reference to race, colour, nationality (including citizenship), or ethnic or national origins, or

(ii) a reasonable person would consider the behaviour or the communication of the material to be likely to result in hatred being stirred up against such a group.

Subsection 2 is narrower, in that it does not include the word, “insulting”, and that it requires an *intention* to stir up hatred. But it is also broader, in that it covers all the “protected characteristics” other than ethnic or national ones:

A person commits an offence if (a) the person

(i) behaves in a manner that a reasonable person would consider to be threatening or abusive, or

(ii) communicates to another person material that a reasonable person would consider to be threatening or abusive, and

(b) in doing so, the person intends to stir up hatred against a group of persons based on the group being defined by reference to a characteristic mentioned in subsection 3.

The remote ancestor of both crimes is the notorious section 5 of the Public Order Act 1936 - “threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour with intent to provoke a breach of the peace or whereby a breach of the peace is likely to be occasioned.” ‘Justified’ as directed against Oswald Mosley’s fascists, the bill that led to the Public Order Act was introduced a bit more than a month after the battle of Cable Street in October 1936 (which showed

a different sort) were targeted again in the 1790s; Irish immigrants and homosexuals in the later 19th century; the Jews again in the early 20th century (including the *Daily Hate Mail*’s support for Hitler in the 1930s<sup>8</sup>). In the 1960s it was people of west Indian origin, in the 1970s ‘Pakis’, in the 1980s local governments ‘promoting homosexuality’.

And so on and on, down to today’s dishonest hate campaign against ‘trans activists’ and, in parallel, the extraordinary fraudulent campaign against *illegal* immigrants, conducted in order to conceal the Tory government’s decision to massively increase *legal* immigration with a view - explicitly - to undercutting wages.

Given this background, it might be surprising to find Michael Foran of Policy Exchange, previously of the Catholic-politico-legal ‘Common Good Project’, defending the act from ‘misunderstandings’, which he argues are the fault of the public statements of the police and government ministers: in particular, that

If a government minister brought on radio to explain and defend the act can’t unequivocally tell you that misgendering isn’t a crime and says that’s a matter for the police, you can’t blame people for thinking it might be a crime.<sup>9</sup>

Now Foran’s article is *mainly* a part of the Tories’ hate campaign against ‘trans activists’ who are alleged to be victimising their opponents. This is the usual problem of bullies with power accusing their nearly-powerless opponents of bullying them.<sup>10</sup> But it is still important that he is not arguing for a radical free-speech policy or for taking down the act. The explanation is that - as I have already said - the existing ‘hate crime’ and ‘harassment’ legislation has proved to be a powerful weapon in the hands of the state’s fraudulent ‘Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism’ smear campaign. Toryism deploys freedom of speech only in support of *Conservative* speech, as I have pointed out before in relation to the ‘free speech in universities’ legislation.<sup>11</sup>

## SWP turkeys

It is not surprising, but merely depressing, that *Socialist Worker* is unwilling to maintain a clear defence of freedom of speech, including freedom of objectionable speech. As I said, the paper’s instant reaction was to see the issue as *merely* one of trans rights: “You don’t have to think the act is perfect to recognise what Rowling and her Tory supporters are trying to do. They hope to pose as friends of ordinary people, while ramping up anti-trans hatred”. And “Rowling ended her social media posts with a challenge to the Scottish government - ‘arrest me’, she said. She thoroughly deserves for her wishes to be granted.”<sup>12</sup>

A week later, the paper seems to have *partly* recognised that such ‘hate speech’ controls are extensively used as a weapon against the left and against the oppressed themselves. The article begins with a defence of the act against the idea that it is a threat to free speech, arguing that

similar laws already exist - such laws haven’t crushed debate. Mark Walters, professor of

criminal law at Sussex university, pointed out that ‘stirring up of hatred’ provisions are not new to Scotland: “Stirring up racial hatred has been on the statute [statute] books since 1965. Statistics show that there are very few prosecutions for such offences each year. Between 2006 and 2016, there were just nine cases,” he said.<sup>13</sup>

Walters is a specialist in ‘hate crime’,<sup>14</sup> and the comment as quoted pays no attention to the deployment of ‘harassment’ and related liabilities to shut down debate round Palestine ...

The author of the article, or the editor, has had their attention drawn at least slightly to the history:

Infamously the Public Order Act of 1936 - supposedly introduced to deal with Oswald Mosley’s fascist Blackshirts - was only rarely used against fascists. Instead it was used against the left, to attack strikers, anti-war activists and pickets.

And more fundamentally, there’s a problem in trusting the state to wage a fight against oppression. The capitalist state is deeply racist and sexist and shouldn’t be trusted to defend trans people or any other oppressed group. It’s the cops who decide when it’s appropriate to arrest someone.

But the SWP still concludes that the act is to be defended:

That doesn’t mean we should rip up laws - such as limited forms of equality legislation - which have been won by struggle. But we shouldn’t rely on laws from above to provide remedies - it is struggle that wins advances.

In the midst of the ongoing ‘anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism’ smear campaign and Tory efforts to characterise Palestine protests as ‘hate marches’, this is truly turkeys voting for an early Christmas. ●

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## Notes

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2. [www.scottishlegal.com/articles/police-scotland-readies-itself-for-activation-of-hate-crime-law](http://www.scottishlegal.com/articles/police-scotland-readies-itself-for-activation-of-hate-crime-law).
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12. ‘JK Rowling and the goblet of hate’ *Socialist Worker* April 2.
13. ‘Transphobic attacks ramp-up after new Scottish hate crime laws’ *Socialist Worker* April 9.
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LEFT

# Selective memory syndrome

Paul Demarty admires George Galloway's grand ambitions, but warns about a complete inability to deliver. Meanwhile, a forgetful SWP sticks to 'strikes and streets'

This year, it seems, is a good time to launch a left challenge to Labour.

There is the small matter that Labour is widely expected to wipe the floor with the government, thus reducing any worries about unduly splitting the vote. There is the total confusion and cowardice the party leadership has displayed in relation to the Gaza genocide - shifting clumsily from one message to the next in an attempt to keep in sync with the equally flaky messaging out of Washington DC. Then there are the thousands of honest activists either purged or demoralised into resignation.

Indeed, the problem would seem to be that we have *too many* supposed challengers. There is the perennial Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, which reliably manufactures humiliations for the Socialist Party in England and Wales and its allies. There is George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain - still in the latest honeymoon period following his victory in Rochdale. There is We Deserve Better - basically a giant bank account for Owen Jones to sluice donations to whoever he happens to like, as far as one can tell. And so it goes on.

We suppose it is a good thing, then, that some kind of gathering was held of such people in Blackburn, under the name 'No ceasefire, no vote'. Present, to make barnstorming speeches, were Galloway himself, Salma Yaqoob (who formerly chaired Galloway's Respect venture), Craig Murray (who is standing for the WPB in Blackburn), and Andrew Burgin of Transform, along with a great number of councillors who have resigned from Labour in recent months, from up and down the country. It is a motley crew, all right.

Looming largest over the proceedings, however, was Galloway himself. It is hardly surprising. He is, after all, in parliament, doing his level best to roast the *genocidaires* of both sets of benches. It is a bigger deal than being a councillor in anyone's book. His pitch was modest in scope, and typically grand in delivery. (Whatever the hell else he is, Galloway is more or less the last remaining parliamentary orator of the old school.) The slogan, 'No ceasefire, no vote', might be the only thing everyone in the room agreed on.

## Not voting Labour

After some good tub-thumping material about not voting for Labour, for "genocide Starmer", he quietly got down to business. Of course, the WPB would support independent challengers to Labour. But was that the best that could be expected? Why should such candidates *not* instead stand as WPB? He accepted that there were major political disagreements - he mentioned trans rights, trade unionism (presumably aimed at the sort of petty bourgeois elements that used to stand for Respect), and net zero. Any one of these, he noted, could be a matter of such great feeling that people might not want to stand under the banner. Yet the advantages of striking with one fist could not be downplayed. He promised that the WPB would stand hundreds of candidates - so many they could not be ignored or be refused access to the leaders' debates. And, if the WPB had a candidate who it thought had a better chance of winning than some independent,



George Galloway: his Workers Party is on a high after Rochdale

then it could not guarantee that they would stand down.<sup>1</sup>

Will it work? Perhaps. Unfortunately, people are often too much in love with their own local standing, and will worry that a national affiliation - especially with such a major target of mainstream opprobrium as Galloway - might leave them on the hook defending things they do not agree with. It was plain enough, from the detail of his speech, that his target audience was primarily Muslims alienated from Labour: his rather ornery social conservatism is plainly directed at making such alliances. Holding that together with disaffected ex-Labour leftists (especially when combustible matters like the trans rights argument are involved) may prove difficult.

In any case, it offered an opportunity for others on the left to stick their oars in. One force less than impressed with Galloway's initiative is the Socialist Workers Party. In advance of the conference, Charlie Kimber, who edits *Socialist Worker*, used the pages of his paper to argue that "George Galloway's politics are not what the left needs".

His concerns are, first of all, that *Searchlight* - the anti-fascist outlet - had discovered a number of individuals with dubious far-right pasts among Galloway's Rochdale council candidates. Billy Howarth has apparently been involved in "anti-grooming" activities with a somewhat anti-Muslim bent; *Socialist Worker* subsequently discovered that John F Collins, meanwhile, has likewise been coming out with rants about Sadiq Khan's "Muslim mob", and apparently took Israel's side in the immediate wake of October 7. Exactly what attracted them to the banner of a man who routinely slips into Scottish-accented Arabic in

speeches remains a mystery. (Collins has stood down in favour of a Liberal Democrat.)

There are then those policy issues Galloway alluded to. Kimber states:

Abandoning migrants or trans people in order to grub up a few more votes fractures the working class and strengthens rotten ideas. We need a left that fights for Palestine - and also takes up other issues. And the most important direction for those who have marched over Gaza is still in the streets, building the movement, not the ballot box.<sup>2</sup>

As a portrait of the very strange mix one finds in Galloway's organisations, one could do worse than comrade Kimber's, of course. He could further have looked at the WPB's official programme, called *Britain deserves better*, which is quite a bizarre hodgepodge: a special section on Palestine is immediately followed by one on properly funding the armed forces; there is even an appeal to the police, with promises to restore numbers, liberate them from the "cultural engineering ... of the middle class state" and provide "greater statutory independence from political interference".<sup>3</sup>

Despite the inevitable disclaimers in those dodgier sections - that the police should not be used to interfere with political speech, and the army should be for defence, not foreign adventures - there is a strange tension there. The police have always been used against political dissent: they were more or less invented by Robert Peel (who even gets a shout-out) to do so more efficiently than the upper-class rabble of the yeomanry. The police harassment of Palestine activists in recent months is not

some perversion of their mission by 'middle class social engineers': it is their basic mission. 'Tough on crime' talk is the thin end of the political-policing wedge. "We are not soft-hearted liberals who believe that everyone is capable of redemption," the WPB authors write; the pope might want to have a word with the famously Catholic Galloway on that one.

## Regression

There are two basic problems with Kimber's response. The first is the most substantive: his alternative, natural for an SWP lifer, is 'the streets, the streets, the streets'. This is actually a hopeless regression, even compared to Galloway's rather crafty speech. Having made his single-issue pitch, he went on to argue that people ought to join his banner, at least in part because there is more to life than foreign policy, important as that is. He even rehearsed his Brexitism, to quiet but noticeable applause. As strange as the WPB manifesto is, it is at least a fairly thorough document - indeed too florid by half for the genre in style (that is why I am not allowed to write the CPGB's *Draft programme!*). Beyond the bread and butter, and the law and order, it even has a (fairly decent) section on football; and surely it is the only socialist programme ever to give an approving nod to K-pop.

The 'real' struggle - in workplaces and on the streets - has for too long served as a substitute for any programme in the SWP's world. Thus even its political criticisms - on trans rights and migration - are shallow, and amount to an attempt to create a *cordon sanitaire* around what are essentially liberal approaches to these questions. They are preferable to Galloway's open conservatism,

but wholly inadequate.

The inadequacy is aptly demonstrated by our second objection. This is not, after all, George's first rodeo. It is just over 20 years since Respect was founded. His allies in those days were none other than the SWP. The SWP, meanwhile, used its relative numerical strength to hold the line against any policy that would overstep the bounds set by Galloway. CPGB members at the time made something of a sport of proposing standard leftwing policies - on abortion, on the monarchy and many other things - sometimes in the exact words used by *Socialist Worker's* regular 'Where we stand' column. SWP members, including comrade Kimber, voted them down one by one.

We do not bring this up as a cheap gotcha. The trouble with shallow, anarchistic anti-electoralism is that it is inadequate for even the immediate political tasks of the movement. But, having convinced themselves of the inevitable corruption of electoral politics, and then of the necessity of *doing* electoral politics nonetheless, the SWP leaders reached the conclusion that only opportunist corruption would make it worthwhile. Thus the bonfire of principles that the Respect-era SWP could only think of as shibboleths. Anarchism and right opportunism are twins (or better perhaps Jekyll and Hyde) - two pathological poles of the same personality.

So George Galloway has the better of the SWP merely by having *some kind* of party project, but that party project is, alas, hopeless. If today is a good day to steal a protest vote from Labour, it also seems on some level to be a good time for 'Tory socialism', inasmuch as there are a lot of attempts to make something real out of it. Conservative social politics have, indeed, melded with socialistic economic politics in some contexts: we think perhaps of Latin American leaders like Bolivia's Evo Morales and Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador. In Europe, it remains a marginal taste, but a fairly common one - from the WPB and even the rump Social Democratic Party in this country to, say, the ex-communist, anti-Semitic far-rightist, Alain Soral, in France, whose movement at least for a time included some French Muslim elements.

The problem is ultimately not simply the one mentioned by Kimber, that such "Tory socialism" divides the working class (though it does, and that really is a problem): it is that it *assumes* a national road, and thus cannot ultimately deliver on the leftwing part of the programme. If you vote for social democracy and social conservatism, but get only the social conservatism and economic disaster due to the revenge of the global institutions, why not just vote for the right? The combination is prevalent because it is readily *thinkable*, and not as incoherent as - let us say - a utopian vision of an ideal society.

It fails because it is utopian - however 'practical' a man like Galloway may think he is being ●

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## Notes

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## ISRAEL

# Netanyahu's war wish

A provocation like the attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus has long been expected, says **Moshé Machover**. War with Iran would provide the cover needed for the mass expulsion of yet more Palestinians

What follows is a slightly abridged version of an article published in the *Weekly Worker* on February 9 2012.<sup>1</sup> It is being republished to remind readers that Netanyahu has long held plans to perpetrate ethnic cleansing under the fog of a regional war involving the US. I believe that the analysis presented here remains valid.

One thing is beyond any doubt: a major aim of Israel's foreign policy is the overthrow of the Iranian regime. What is not generally understood are the motives behind this aim, and the present Israeli government's preferred means of achieving it. In this article I would like to say something about the motives, and then explain why prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's preferred means is war, and is likely to ignite a major conflagration.

In a previous article,<sup>2</sup> I quoted a *Jerusalem Post* report, headed 'Iranian nukes mean end of Zionism', on a conference in Israel's Institute for National Security Studies.

Two points in this report are particularly noteworthy. First, one of the experts, a former chief of the Mossad (Israel's counterpart of MI6 and the CIA), was talking about the prospect of Iranian nuclear *capability* rather than actual production and possession of nuclear weapons. As all experts are well aware, there is no evidence that Iran has a programme for producing such weapons. This is as true today as it was in 2008.

Second, contrary to Israeli and western hype, both experts do not claim that Iran was actually planning to attack Israel, let alone subject it to a nuclear holocaust. The former Mossad chief is dismissive of the scaremongering propaganda alleging that Iran poses a credible military threat to Israel. Ephraim Sneh, a former brigadier general and senior Labor Party politician, did mention the (purely hypothetical) prospect of Iran producing nuclear weapons, but even he believes that the threat it would pose to Israel is political rather than a direct military one.

Indeed, Israel's worry regarding Iran is the real political threat it poses to Israel's regional hegemony, not the imaginary threat of being attacked by the Islamic Republic. Possession of nuclear capability is certainly a component of this political threat, inasmuch as it would contribute to Iran's diplomatic muscle in its dealings with other Middle-Eastern states and with the US. But it is only a component. Even without the nuclear issue, the Zionist state has a clear interest in replacing the present Iranian regime by one compliant with global US hegemony.

## Divergence

As far as this aim is concerned, the interests of the US and Israel were in complete agreement. But, as regards the means, there appeared to be a divergence between the Barack Obama administration and the Netanyahu government.

The US, smarting from the wounds of its adventurous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, would like to avoid an outright open military conflict with Iran - a state that can inflict serious damage on its attackers. Moreover, in the present economic climate a sharp rise in the price of oil - an inevitable concomitant of war in the Middle East - may have catastrophic consequences for the global capitalist economy.



Secretary of state Blinken with Israeli war cabinet

But there were increasing signs that Netanyahu and his then defence minister, Ehud Barak, were considering - against the advice of some of their military and intelligence experts - a provocation that would lead to a major war. This caused the Obama administration serious worry: they did not wish to be dragged into such a war by their Israeli junior partner.

On January 20 2012, while on an unadvertised and little noticed visit to Israel (no press conference, no public statement), general Martin Dempsey, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff,

told Israeli leaders ... that the United States would not participate in a war against Iran begun by Israel without prior agreement from Washington ... Dempsey's warning, conveyed to both prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak, represents the strongest move yet by president Barack Obama to deter an Israeli attack and ensure that the United States is not caught up in a regional conflagration with Iran.<sup>3</sup>

His warning seemed to have fallen on deaf ears. On February 2, Associated Press reported:

US defense secretary Leon Panetta won't dispute a report that he believes Israel may attack Iran this spring in an attempt to set back the Islamic Republic's nuclear programme ...

He noted that Israel has stated publicly that it is considering military action against Iran. He said the US has "indicated our concerns".<sup>4</sup>

I believe that this was not just sabre-rattling on Israel's part. There is reason to believe that Netanyahu was seriously considering a provocation designed to trigger a major Middle-East conflagration, despite the enormous risks that include Iranian retaliation, causing the loss of many Israeli lives.

To explain Netanyahu's reckless calculation we need to turn our attention to Zionism's nightmare: the Palestinian 'demographic peril'.

By now most people are aware that the present Israeli government has done all in its power to torpedo a so-called 'two-state solution'. What is less well known is that opposition to a sovereign Palestinian state in any part of Eretz Yisrael is not a mere quirk of a rightwing Israeli government, but a deep-seated and fundamental principle shared by all mainstream Zionist parties.

## Either - or

In 1975, general Moshe Dayan put it like this:

Fundamentally, a Palestinian state is an antithesis of the State of Israel ... The basic and naked truth is that there is no fundamental difference between the relation of the Arabs of Nablus to Nablus [in the West Bank] and that of the Arabs of Jaffa to Jaffa [in Israel] ... And if today we set out on this road and say that the Palestinians are entitled to their own state because they are natives of the same country and have the same rights, then it will not end with the West Bank. The West Bank together with the Gaza Strip do not amount to a state ... The establishment of such a Palestinian state would lay a cornerstone to something else ...

Either the State of Israel - or a Palestinian state.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, for mainstream Zionism any admission that "the Palestinians are entitled to their own state because they are natives of the same country and have the same rights" would undermine the legitimacy of the Zionist state, and eventually its very existence.

This has remained a cornerstone of Israel's political strategy. For this reason, no Israeli government has ever signed a legally binding commitment to accepting a Palestinian Arab state. This applies, in particular, to the Oslo Accords of 1993, which the second Rabin government co-signed with the Palestinian leadership under Yasser Arafat. In this treaty there is no mention of a Palestinian state. This was not an accidental omission: when presenting the Oslo Accords to the Knesset for ratification - on October 5 1995, a month before he was assassinated - Rabin pointedly

stressed that what Israel was going to insist on was a Palestinian "entity which is less than a state".

Many observers have been puzzled by Israel's adamant rejection of any Palestinian sovereign state, however small, west of the Jordan river. This seems terribly short-sighted. For, if the whole of pre-1948 Palestine is to remain under Israeli sovereignty, that would mean that Israel would have to rule over a hostile Palestinian Arab people. In effect, the whole of that territory will be one state. Right now there is a rough numerical parity between the two national groups. Since no large-scale Jewish immigration is expected, and since the natural rate of increase of the Palestinian population is higher than that of the Hebrew population, the former will considerably outnumber the latter within a few decades. Surely, the Palestinian majority cannot indefinitely be denied equal rights; but equal rights would lead to the demise of the Jewish state. For Zionism this 'demographic peril' is worse even than a sovereign Palestinian mini-state. So it would seem that by sabotaging the creation of such a state, Israel is heading for what its own ruling ideology regards as the abyss.

This apparent contradiction disregards a third option: neither a two-state solution nor a single state with an Arab majority, but 'population transfer'. Large-scale ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Arabs would result in a single state in the entire territory, with a large Jewish majority, which is the ultimate aim of all mainstream Zionist parties.

But implementing ethnic cleansing on a sufficiently large scale - while technically quite easy, as explained by the Israeli military theorist, Martin van Creveld,<sup>6</sup> - is politically very tricky. It cannot be done in normal, politically tranquil circumstances. It requires what in Zionist parlance is called *she'at kosher* - an opportune moment of major political, and preferably military, crisis.

Interestingly, quite a long time ago, on November 16 1989, a junior minister in the Shamir government made precisely this point in a speech delivered at Bar-Ilan University, a hotbed of clerical ultra-chauvinist Zionism. The *Jerusalem Post* of November 19 1989, quoting a tape-recording of the speech, reported that the deputy foreign minister (roughly equivalent to parliamentary under-secretary of state in Westminster) "... has called for Israel to exploit political opportunities in order to expel large numbers of Palestinians from the [occupied] territories". He told students at Bar-Ilan University that

... the government had failed to exploit politically favourable situations in order to carry out "large-scale" expulsions at times when "the damage would have been relatively small. I still believe that there are opportunities to expel many people".

Oh, the name of that junior minister: Benjamin Netanyahu!

## Worth making

A war with Iran would present a golden opportunity for large-scale expulsion of Palestinians, precisely because (unlike the Iraq invasion of 2003) fighting would not be over too soon, and major protests

and disturbances are likely to occur among the masses throughout the region, including the Palestinian Arabs under Israeli rule. What better way to pacify such disturbances than to "expel many people".

Of course, a decision to ignite a war against Iran is not one that any Israeli leader would take lightly. There is a non-negligible risk that Israel would suffer many casualties. This is not a price that even the most adventurous prime minister would consider paying, unless the expected prize is extremely high. But in this case the prize is the highest possible one from a Zionist point of view: eliminating the demographic threat to the future of Israel as a Jewish ethnocracy. So Netanyahu will be sorely tempted to make a sacrifice of his own people for the 'greater national good'.

I assume that American policy-makers are aware of Israel's *special* interest in a military denouement of the conflict with Iran - an interest not quite shared by the US. This is why they are worried, and issue stern warnings to Netanyahu - discreetly and behind the scenes, of course, because, especially with the presidential elections approaching, Biden cannot afford to appear pusillanimous.

However, Netanyahu cannot flagrantly go ahead and start a war without US approval. Therefore the most likely scenario is a series of provocations instigated by Israel, mostly by devious and covert means, in order to escalate the conflict and drag the US by degrees into mission creep.

I do not wish to sound too alarmist, but the coming few months may well be 'interesting' in the Chinese sense.

## Postscript

The scenario I envisaged in 2012 has not materialised - not quite, not yet. A new *nakba* - a massive Israeli ethnic cleansing of Palestinians - began in Gaza rather than in the West Bank. Netanyahu and his fanatic messianic partners grasped the opportunity presented by the horrors of the October 7 Hamas onslaught.

But, when the war against Gaza stalled, Netanyahu upped the ante in April 1 by his deliberately provocative attack in Damascus on Iran's diplomatic premises - sovereign Iranian territory and in violation under international law. True to form, this included the assassination of several Iranian senior officers. Iran's retaliation, though massive, was largely ineffectual: the Iranians made sure of this by giving sufficient notice, allowing Israel and its allies to neutralise almost all the projectiles.

Now the ball is in Netanyahu's court. He has new additional personal motives to engage in a forever war. Will he manage to provoke a regional conflagration and upscale ethnic cleansing in the West Bank from its ongoing salami-style to massive dimensions? ●

## Notes

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# IRAN



Ali Khamenei leads prayers for Islamic Revolutionary Guard commanders killed in Damascus

# Just what Israel wants

Despite its criminal repression, the Iranian regime should not be equated with the genocidal Zionist state, argues **Yassamine Mather**. In the global pecking order, Israel is way towards the top

The obvious first point to make on the current perilous situation in the Middle East and the threat of an all-out war between Israel and Iran is to remind everyone that it was Israel that bombed the Iranian consulate in Syria and killed seven top commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards.

Of course, the Zionist state refuses to admit its culpability. However, the world, and indeed its western allies, know full well who was responsible. The Biden administration's subsequent claims that it had not sanctioned the attack are meaningless, given the US refusal to make a single statement condemning the attack during the 10 days of direct and indirect talks with the Islamic Republic, when it was trying to avert an Iranian military response.

## Trap fallen into

The second point is that Iran's rulers probably fell into a trap set by Benjamin Netanyahu. Since October 7, the Israeli government has been very keen to start a proper war with Iran. The attack on the Damascus consulate happened at a time when Netanyahu was facing sharp criticism from the US and others. Some officials in western capitals were getting concerned about possible charges of aiding and abetting genocide perpetrated by the Zionist state - in a week when the assassination of western aid workers was being called "systemic" killing by the likes of former MI6 director Sir Alex Younger.

Iran's retaliation against the bombing of its consulate in Damascus changed all this, overnight. Biden declared his "ironclad support" for the rightwing government in Jerusalem. Iran's drone and missile attack also saw regional realignments: Jordan and Saudi Arabia joined the US, UK and France, using their (albeit limited) air power to 'help' Israel in bringing down Iranian drones and missiles. By Sunday the news agenda had changed. Now there is rather less talk of the deliberate famine imposed by the Israeli military on the population of Gaza. As far as I can see, the title of Jeremy Bowen's April 16 article on the BBC's web pages sums it up correctly: "Iran's attack on Israel offers Netanyahu a lifeline."

There is no limit to the hypocrisy of western politicians, when it comes to Iran's drone and missile attack. This exchange between the Sky News presenter and David Cameron is an example of the kind of absurd comments we have heard so far:

Sky: What would Britain do if our consulate was flattened?

Cameron: Well, we'd take very strong action.

Sky: Iran would say that's what they did.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to Tehran's attack, Israel and its supporters are celebrating a major victory - there is no doubt that a large percentage of Iranian drones and missiles failed to reach their targets.

Iran claims this was a calibrated response: according to major general Hossein Salami, commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Iran's attack "could have been much larger, but we restricted it to only target facilities the regime had used to attack the consulate".

US defence officials say that out of more than 100 ballistic missiles that the Islamic Republic fired at Israel on Saturday night, "only nine" hit targets inside the country". CBS, quoting two American officials, reports that US military intelligence has indicated that four ballistic missiles struck the Nevatim airbase in the Negev region, while four hit another base in the same region. Israel has denied these claims. Nevatim is home to the highly advanced and expensive F-35 fighter jet and was one of the main targets of Iran's attack on April 13 - as US sources say, Israel targeted the Iranian consulate in Damascus from this base.

According to these officials, Iran's operation was designed so that Israel's air defence systems would engage in countering cruise missiles and drones, which meant that ballistic missiles could more easily hit their target. In fact the destruction of cruise missiles and drones with the cooperation of Israel, the United States and other allied countries outside of Israel's airspace helped to destroy ballistic missiles. Centcom, the headquarters of the US military's central command in the Middle East, has announced that it was involved in the destruction of 70 to 80 drones and at least 6 Iranian ballistic missiles.

There are some doubts about the use of hypersonic missiles by Iran. According to Press TV, quoting Iranian military sources, Israel and "its supporters failed to intercept any of the hypersonic missiles fired by Iran". However, according to Favaz Zahed, writing in the Iranian daily newspaper, *Etemaad*, the Revolutionary Guards have opted against using advanced weaponry such as hypersonic glide vehicles (HGVs): "Iran has prepared itself for round two, meaning that if Israel reacts, Iran will begin another level of military operation against it."

Videos shown by state media in Iran of many Israeli airbases on fire were fake, mainly used to satisfy the regime's most ardent supporters. However, as we get more details of the crucial role played by western allies, there is discomfort amongst Israeli politicians about the capabilities of the country's air defences.

## Iranian reaction

Some consider Iran's decision to launch missiles at Israel as a "show of national authority" and a source of pride, while others believe that the officials of the Islamic Republic have handed a major political victory to Netanyahu's government.

Below are some of the reactions of Iranian political figures and analysts to the attack - referred to as "Operation True Promise".

■ Hassan Khomeini, grandson of the founder of the Islamic Republic, himself a reformist, is among those who consider the attack a "strategic decision to show authority, security and national pride". He said:

The continuation of Israeli attacks and assassinations on Iranian positions and citizens for more than a decade, inside and outside the country, had created this incorrect belief and mentality among our enemies and even some Iranians that Iran is not capable of confrontation with Israel and will only be content with war or an indirect response. A mentality that has completely disappeared today.

■ Ali Motahari, a former member of parliament, speaking to Tasnim news agency, considered Iran's attack a

matter of national pride and honour, and at the same time, revenge of the people of Gaza against Israel: "Iran has improved the equation of confronting and confronting again the Zionist regime, and this regime will never return to the conditions before the storm."

■ Masha Allah Shams Alwaezin, a journalist and political commentator, told Tasnim news agency: "By carrying out this operation, Iran has entered the grey zone of deterrence."

■ Abbas Abdi, in an article in *Etemaad*, wrote: "... deterrence through conventional weapons with a country that does not recognise its existence or wants to destroy it is pointless ... Therefore, sooner or later we will reach a stage that we have avoided so far ..."

Criticising Iran's policy in the face of what he called the "Israel issue", he said that this cannot be resolved within the framework of Iran's current policy. According to Abbas Abdi, public opinion in Iran sees the lack of a military response as a sign of the government's failure, and the reason for that is "the futile expectations and slogans given by the supporters of the ruling circles - they raise expectations with their propaganda and unwise positions. And today they are stuck in the swamp of those slogans".

During Iran's attack on Israel its neighbour, Jordan, intercepted several drones and missiles that entered the country's airspace. The statement of the Jordanian government states that this action was taken to ensure the security of its citizens. Some angry users of social media responded by calling King Abdullah "a source of shame for the entire Islamic world". Another group, rejecting the explanation of 'ensuring the citizens' security', wrote that King Abdullah has prioritised "following the orders" of America and Israel over the security of his citizens by deciding to intercept and destroy Iranian missiles and drones that were passing through the sky of Jordan to Israel.

Contrary to the nonsense in leaflets written by sections of the Iranian left, the Islamic Republic does not want an all-out war with Israel. Apart from anything else, the regime is well aware of the limitations of its military capability and arsenal. If such an

all-out war were to take place, Iran would probably be defeated, even in the unlikely event that the US and its allies were not directly involved. For a regime obsessed with 'survival', such a scenario is the worst possible outcome.

## Deluded left

However, given Israel's determination for a military retaliation, we can assume Netanyahu is keen to widen the war, as it will not only pave the way to finishing what he started in terms of the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, but also to making sure there is no real regional support - even if it is just slogans and rhetoric - for the Palestinian cause.

In other words, equating Iran and Israel as equal warmongers, as sections of the deluded Iranian left in exile have done in the last few days, is absolute nonsense. These groups have tailed the pro-Zionist Persian media for such a long time that they have become social-imperialists with no principles, no tactics and no strategy.

We should oppose new wars in the region and, of course, this does not mean we reduce our criticism of the Islamic Republic over its reactionary policies in terms of intervention in the private lives of its citizens, etc; that we stop campaigning against repression in Iran; or that we no longer expose the rampant corruption amongst senior clerics and their allies. However, none of this justifies making irrational claims about Iran being an equivalent of Israel. For all its appalling acts of repression, the clerical regime in Tehran has not killed tens of thousands, as Israel is doing in Palestine; it has not embarked on ethnic cleansing in the land occupied by its military forces; it is not the main ally in the Middle East of the global hegemon ...

Those sections of the Iranian left who have any principles should have nothing to do with this bankrupt, right-leaning 'exiled' left. We should leave them where they belong, with the likes of Iran's royalists and on the pro-Israel trashy TV stations ●

## Notes

1. news.sky.com/video/david-cameron-urges-israel-not-to-escalate-as-he-condemns-irans-failed-attack-13115880.



## USA

# Congress does its imperial duty

Biden's military aid package looks like passing at long last. However, America's political system is one of almost permanent gridlock, says Daniel Lazare

After seemingly endless psychodrama, it looks like the US Congress is finally doing its imperial duty by voting for military aid for Israel as well as Ukraine.

Any number of things could still go wrong, but 'responsible' voices are beginning to speak up. Michael McCaul, a far-right Texas Republican who heads the House foreign affairs committee, cited Saturday's Iranian missile barrage as a reason to get serious in both military arenas: "What happened in Israel last night happens in Ukraine every night," he warned on one of the Sunday morning TV chat shows that are a Washington staple. Mike Turner, an Ohio Republican who heads the House intelligence committee, assured another programme that military aid will pass with "overwhelming support."

"Ukraine is beginning to lose the ability to defend itself and the United States must step up and provide Ukraine the weapons that they need," he said.

"Speaker says funds for Ukraine and Israel will finally get vote," *The New York Times* announced a couple of days later. If so, far-right isolationists may finally be losing their grip. Amid reports that Ukraine is buckling under the weight of a five-to-one Russian artillery advantage, aid is back on solid ground. And where Israeli military assistance was on the back burner it is now moving to the fore.

Does all this mean that Congress is finally regaining its functions after decades of paralysis? Hardly. But it does raise questions about the meaning of legislative breakdown. All that talk about stagnation, impotence, and a far-right Freedom Caucus riding roughshod over Republican moderates - was it merely for show? Were complaints about mounting gridlock just empty bombast? If Congress can function now, why has it been helpless for so long?

Or should dysfunction be understood not as a condition so much as an instrument that certain forces utilise for their own advantage? The late Alexander Cockburn, scion of the famous journalistic clan, used to enjoy shocking 'goo-goo' liberals by arguing that gridlock was positive because it prevented the ultra-right from doing its worst:

We like it. No bold initiatives, like privatising social security or shoving through [state-funded school] vouchers. No ultra-rightwingers making it onto the Supreme Court ... These days gridlock is the best we can hope for.<sup>1</sup>

That was more than 20 years ago. With the ultra-right now solidly in control of the high court, it can safely be said that Cockburn's judgment was more than a bit off. With its advantages never more than momentary, gridlock otherwise fuels reaction by undermining democracy and making a mockery of anything resembling progressive self-government. Conservatives use it to fuel frustration, discouragement and despair. The goal is to leave everyone so exhausted that they either wind up voting for Donald Trump, in the hope that he will at least do something, or stay home and lose themselves in TikTok.

This is the American crisis in a nutshell - one marked by paralysis, dysfunction and an accelerating drift to the right. It is both the result of



Joe Biden and Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv: arm, arm, arm Ukraine

a centuries-old constitution that is beyond reform and a syndrome that conservatives have helped induce. Mike Johnson, the latest Republican sucker to serve as speaker of the House, illustrates the process to the letter, as he struggles to shepherd Ukrainian and Israeli military aid through to completion.

Johnson, a 52-year-old lawyer from Shreveport, Louisiana, assumed the speakership after the Freedom Caucus - the 42-member ultra-right cabal headed by Georgia firebrand Marjorie Taylor Greene - all but rode his predecessor, Kevin McCarthy, out on a rail.

## Separates

McCarthy, who chose retirement rather than the humiliation of lingering on as an ordinary member, fell victim to a curious constitutional flaw. Just as the British constitution now separates the head of state from the head of government, which is to say the monarchy from the prime minister, it also separates the speakership from the chairmanship of parliament. Where the speaker once represented the House of Commons in general, the post has shrunk to little more than that of a neutral umpire, as real authority has flowed to the cabinet, chosen by the dominant party or coalition. But the functions remain combined in America, just as they were in the home country before the United States was born.

This is one of the more archaic provisions that America's 18th century constitution has carried forward into the modern era. The arithmetic can be pretty daunting as a consequence. Thanks to the party's razor-thin lead, a prospective speaker must win nearly unanimous support among his fellow Republicans in order to win a majority in the chamber as a whole. This is why

every last Republican member voted for Johnson in October - not because he is dazzlingly popular, but because no Democrat would touch a neo-Confederate Christian fundamentalist with a 10-foot pole. Johnson thus squeaked through by a vote of 220 to 209.

With the Republican caucus continuing to shrink due to ongoing resignations, the party's lead is now down to just five. That means that three Republican 'no' votes would be enough to topple Johnson from his throne.

"I believe that scripture, the *Bible*, is very clear: that God is the one who raises up those in authority," Johnson told his fellow Republicans on taking office. "He raised up each of you. All of us."

If so, Allah must be a fan of backroom deal-making, since the only way Johnson has been able to survive since then is by entering into side agreements with the Democrats. With Republicans split down the middle, he was only able to pass a budget a month after taking office because Dems agreed to vote for it as well. The same went for a bill allowing US intelligence agencies to conduct warrantless surveillance of certain electronic communications. Five Republicans balked, but enough Democrats came out in support last week to put it over the edge.

One of the most rightwing speakers in history has thus entered into a *de facto* centre-right coalition that dares not speak its name for fear that Greene and her fellow militants will declare holy war. If military aid passes, it will be because the same coalition continues to exercise control. Since the association is always in flux, Democratic votes will predominate in the case of Ukraine, while Republican votes will predominate in the case of Israel. But, either way, it looks like

the centre will hold long enough for both aid packages to pass.

## Reality

Hallelujah! Not only has the House been saved, but the empire has been too. But, rest assured, it will not last long. The reason is a little thing called reality. In Ukraine, this is the fact that a country of 33 million cannot hold out forever against a determined foe with more than four times as many people plus an economy that is more than 10 times as large.

Even if the White House's \$60 billion aid package makes it through, it will be no more than a stop-gap. To be sure, Joe Biden may be able to push through more such packages if he wins in November. But if he loses the writing is on the wall that aid will stop. That means that an economically straitened Kyiv will have no choice but to give up the Donbas and Crimea, while submitting to demilitarisation, political oversight and other aspects of 'Finlandisation'. Fear and loathing will be palpable from the Baltics to Warsaw, Berlin and Paris - and especially to the Nato headquarters in Brussels.

Reality also applies to Israel. With the Gaza war turning into a long, hard slog, the Jewish state has every reason to extend the conflict to Iran. One is that it is easier to attack a country that is weaker and farther away than deal with a highly motivated enemy ensconced in an underground fortress just next door.

But another is that it will draw the US into the fray, since Iran remains public enemy number one in Washington as far as the Middle East is concerned. It is not merely that memories of the humiliating 1979-81 hostage crisis still linger. Rather, it is because control of the Persian Gulf - source of more than 50% of the world's gas and oil -

has been a top US priority since the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan in December 1979. Since Iran is the only force standing in the way of 100% US control, eliminating the Islamic republic remains a top priority. By luring America into a war with the Islamic Republic, Israel is therefore making an offer the US cannot refuse. Its aim is to strengthen an all-important alliance, while tamping down US criticism of its tactics in Gaza.

America is entering more and more deeply into a conflict with no end in sight - a recipe for disaster if ever there was one. Conceivably, democracy might offer a way out of the maze. If the House was freer and more open, it might launch itself into a fully-fledged debate before the problem gets even more out of hand. It could thrash out issues having to do with the Persian Gulf and Nato, it could try to figure out whether certain alliances hold more risk than reward, and it could begin the process of paring back responsibilities. This would be the rational thing to do, so far as imperialism allows. But the House is not a free assembly. With more than 125 committees and subcommittees at the last count, it is a collection of warring fiefdoms, in which policy is thrashed out not in the open, but in innumerable back rooms. The classic description is by Woodrow Wilson, who made his name as a political scientist before running for president in 1912:

Power is nowhere concentrated; it is rather deliberately and of set policy scattered amongst many small chiefs. It is divided up, as it were, into 47 seigniories, in each of which a standing committee is the court-baron and its chairman lord-proprietor. These petty barons - some of them not a little powerful, but none of them within the reach of the full powers of rule - may at will exercise almost despotic sway within their own shires, and may sometimes threaten to convulse even the realm itself.<sup>2</sup>

Gridlock is what happens when an ever-expanding number of petty baronies squeeze together so tightly that no-one can move. Instead of negotiating, they enter into trench warfare. Internationally, gridlock is what happens when side deals with Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan *et al* proliferate to the degree that no-one can keep track. Is the US a beneficiary of such alliances or a victim? Does it have a strategy in Ukraine or is it merely painting itself into a corner? What is the end-game in the Middle East, if any? Where a free assembly might try to make sense of it, Congress cannot even begin, because it is lost in confusion. Little more than an appendage of the executive branch, all it can do is stumble blindly over a cliff.

Conservatives have used gridlock to march Congress toward the right. They have mobilised it as a tool of de-democratisation. The resulting pettiness and confusion are what allow imperialism to march forward despite its dangers and contradictions. But, now that the ice is beginning to break, conditions may grow even worse. The only thing more dangerous than a deep freeze may be a thaw ●

## Notes

1. [www.counterpunch.org/2000/11/09/election-2000-the-best-of-all-possible-worlds](http://www.counterpunch.org/2000/11/09/election-2000-the-best-of-all-possible-worlds).  
2. W Wilson *Congressional government* Boston 1885, p92.



OUR HISTORY

# Two election tactics

The Bolsheviks are rightly famous for their armed street demonstrations and storming of the Winter Palace. But what they are less known for is their use of elections to the duma, the tsar's toothless parliament. Jack Conrad puts the record straight

Russia had its unique features - that was to be expected. However, it also had features that were general. More, we can say that within Russia the contradictions of capitalism found their highest, sharpest, expression. Fortunately, based as they were on solid Marxist theory, the Bolsheviks were able to develop their strategy and tactics to match the promising, but always hugely challenging, conditions. It is here that we find the international significance of the Bolshevik experience - not least their use of parliamentary elections and parliament itself.

So what were the electoral politics of the Bolsheviks? To answer that we must first examine the forces and possibilities of the Russian Revolution.

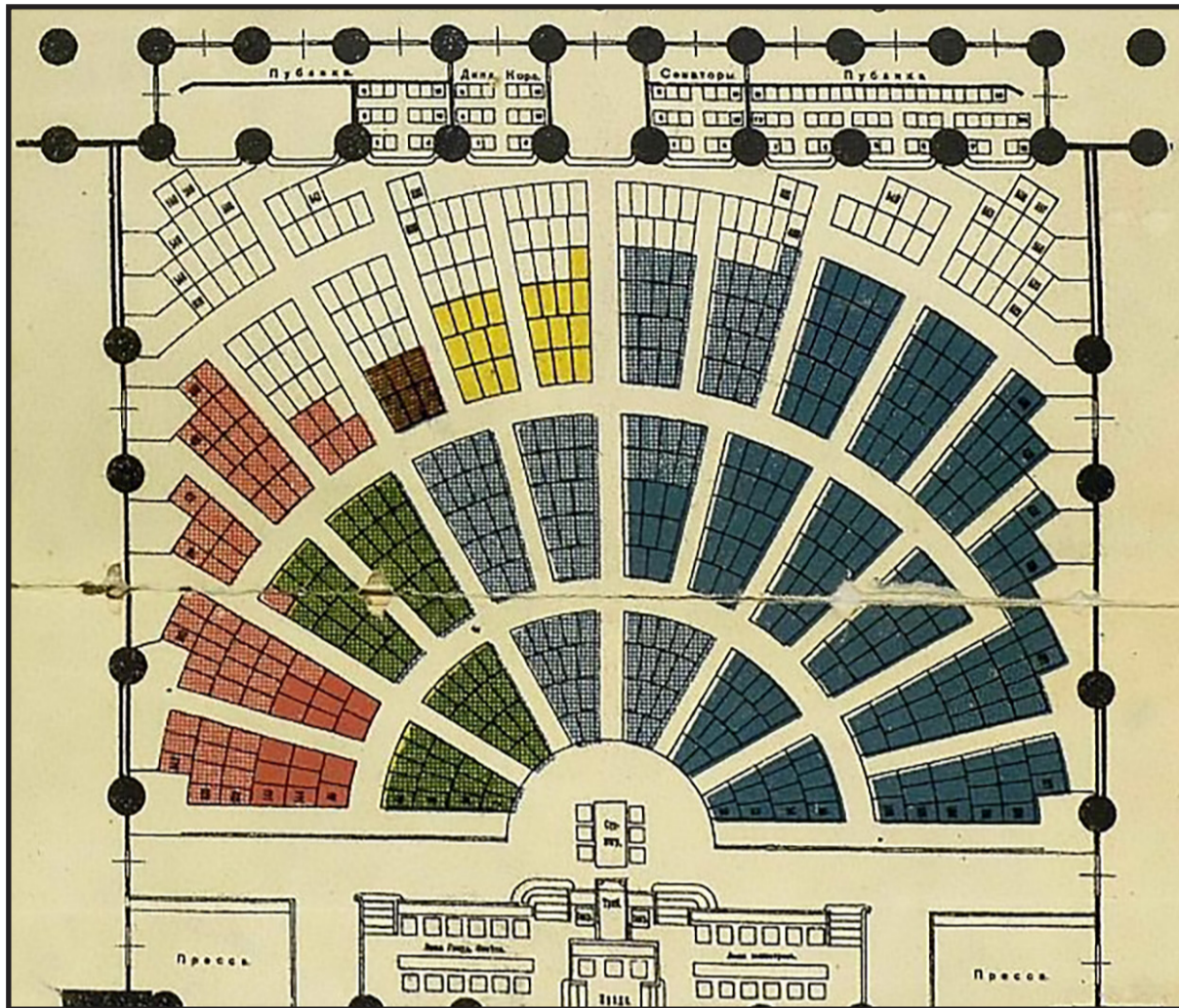
What separated the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks was far more than the dispute over soft or hard membership criteria, which precipitated the 1903 split between these once united partisans of *Iskra*. The cleavage at the 2nd Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party - where Bolsheviks (majorityists) and Mensheviks (minorityists) came into existence - stemmed from what were implicit, latent, but profoundly different strategic conceptions.

Both of the RSDLP's big factions agreed that what was required, and what was in the offing, was in essence, the same as England 1649, America 1776 and France 1789; ie, a bourgeois revolution. Do not forget, Russia was ruled by an autocratic tsar and a clique of nobles, priests and hangers-on. Capitalist development was still comparatively feeble and the working class consequently small.

Taking this as their starting point, with a seemingly faultless appeal to what was claimed to be Marxist orthodoxy, the Mensheviks argued that the working class had to support the bourgeoisie in carrying out its historic mission. The working class had to follow, encourage and if necessary push the bourgeoisie to make revolution against the tsarist autocracy. The working class should meanwhile build its trade unions and improve its economic conditions, but, above all, do nothing 'adventurous'. That would scare off the bourgeoisie, would lessen the 'sweep' of the bourgeois revolution.

Once safely ensconced in power, the bourgeoisie would faithfully introduce a parliamentary system, the full set of democratic rights and, all in all, open the road to unrestricted capitalist development. In due course, this would help form a politically conscious working class social majority. Till then, thoughts of any kind of working class state power were decidedly off the agenda. In the words of the Mensheviks' April-May 1905 conference resolution, unless "the revolution spread to the advanced countries of western Europe ... social democracy should aim not to seize power or to share it in a provisional government, but should remain a party of extreme revolutionary opposition".<sup>2</sup>

The Bolsheviks considered such a strategy, stagist, lifeless, artificial, conservative, mechanical and ahistorical. In short, they disagreed. This was not revolutionary Marxism. The Russian bourgeoisie was a



Fourth duma: Bolsheviks occupied all six seats in the workers' curia

spineless creature, compared with their 17th and 18th century English, American and French counterparts.

These epigones, not least in the form of the Constitutional Democrats, were incapable of making a revolution of any sorts. That was not the case, however, with the working class and peasant majority. The *narod* had already moved into action according to their own interests. As they did, far from the Cadets rushing to put themselves at their head, they trailed behind and were soon to be found desperately looking for a rotten, counterrevolutionary deal with the tsarist authorities in the form of a constitutional monarchy.<sup>3</sup> Perceptively, Lenin instantly denounced the newly formed Cadets as "monarchist" and therefore anti-democratic.<sup>4</sup>

What was immediately possible in Russia was something infinitely more valuable to the proletariat of Russia - and the world at large - than a weak, pale and probably transient parliamentary democracy. The working class could do much better than lift the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie into power and then, for who knows how long, bide their time as the Menshevik's "party of extreme revolutionary opposition".

Objective circumstances in Russia made it possible for the working class to seize the banner of democracy and the initiative. With single-minded leadership, daring and imagination, the working class could win hegemony over the peasant masses and take the lead in overthrowing tsarism - replacing it with what the Bolsheviks called the 'revolutionary democratic (majority) dictatorship (decisive rule) of the proletariat and peasantry'. Such was the Bolshevik strategy, first sketched out by Vladimir Lenin in early 1905 and

later that year given a fully rounded treatment in his masterful pamphlet *Two tactics of social democracy in the democratic revolution*.<sup>5</sup>

## Europe

If realised, the Bolshevik's anti-tsarist democratic revolution would be a work in progress. Left in isolation in Russia, it would be impossible to sustain, but the aim was always for Russia to provide the spark that would ignite the whole of Europe. This was no longer the epoch of the rising bourgeoisie. The advanced capitalist countries were objectively ripe for socialism. And, with a socialist Europe, Russia, under proletarian hegemony, could proceed *uninterruptedly* - that is, without the need for a second revolution - to the tasks of socialism.

How did things turn out? Well, according to the Mensheviks themselves, things turned out much closer to the perspectives of the Bolsheviks than their own - and not only in the great year of 1917, but in 1905, the great dress rehearsal too. Long tottering on the precipice, tsarism nearly went down as a result of the disastrous 1904-05 war with Japan. Taking advantage of tsarism's weakness, revolt erupted in Kingdom Poland, Finland and Georgia, street demonstrations and strikes gripped St Petersburg, Moscow and other big cities, peasants seized land and tools, and army and naval units mutinied.

Here was a profound revolutionary situation which mercilessly tested the theories, programmes and expectations of all working class parties, groups and factions. To their credit, in the words of leading Menshevik Yuri Larin, in 1905 the Mensheviks "acted like Bolsheviks".<sup>6</sup> Confronted with the reality of a cowering and servile bourgeoisie

and the heroism and determination of the working class, the Mensheviks momentarily put aside their strategy and let themselves be swept along by the floodtide.

Revolutions must be resolved positively. If not, they are resolved negatively. Either revolution or counterrevolution will win the day. That is why the Bolsheviks were determined to take what possibilities there were for success in 1905 to their limit.

Of course, revolutions are not one-way affairs. Initiative and tactical manoeuvre are not the sole prerogative of the popular forces. Those above - even though split, confused and panicked by revolutionary developments they can never really understand - still have resources, finance and the experience necessary to offer well chosen sops. Hence, when Cossacks and the police failed to terrorise the masses into submission, Nicholas II issued his October manifesto, which granted some minimal civil rights and elections to a consultative duma or parliament (only those over 25 were to be given the vote and, of course, there was no thought of extending the franchise to include women).

How did the Bolsheviks respond? With the great bulk of advanced workers fully behind them, with utter conviction, with a refusal to be diverted from the real prize, the Bolsheviks called for an election boycott and, alongside that, preparations for an armed uprising.

The revolution reached its height in the last months of 1905, with mass political strikes, peasant revolts, soldiers and sailors sending delegates to the soviets, and the formation of armed units. However, with a peace deal signed with Japan

and the liberal opposition vacillating, the tsarist authorities were ready for a ruthless clampdown. Leon Trotsky, chair of the St Petersburg soviet, was arrested on December 3, along with other members of its executive committee.

The centre of gravity briefly shifted to Moscow, where the Bolsheviks had a strong influence. They made the call for a political general strike, and for efforts to be made to transform it into armed insurrection. That is indeed what happened. With the active help of the city's million-strong population, less than a thousand guerrillas were able to duck and dive between a string of symbolic street barricades and keep 10,000 troops at bay for nine splendid days.

Note, many of the tsar's troops arrived directly from Manchuria and were therefore free of infection from revolutionary ideas. But, while there were other local attempts, no nationwide insurrection followed. Crucially, St Petersburg did not move. December's action had to be called off by the Moscow soviet. The tsarist authorities took swift revenge: not only were there thousands of arrests, trials and sentences of internal exile, hundreds were unofficially executed and buried in unmarked graves.

The revolution was not broken, though the tide had substantially ebbed. A few months later, in March 1906, duma elections were held. The Bolsheviks and others on the left called for an active boycott. That did not mean the Bolsheviks were saying workers should adopt an anarchist-style abstention from political struggle. The boycott call, reluctantly accepted by Lenin, was to keep the possibility of a nationwide insurrection alive ... and, as it turned out, the first duma only lasted till July 1906. Nicholas II had no liking for its liberal bourgeois-peasant majority and, as he could, dissolved it and announced new, even more restrictive, electoral laws.

There were good reasons to believe that not all was lost. Membership of both the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions continued to grow in leaps and bounds, and had already assumed mass proportions. Though the Socialist Revolutionary Party officially boycotted the elections, 34 SRs were elected. So too were 18 Mensheviks. Interestingly, Lenin reached out to influence and help them.

Basically his approach was to win the social democrat deputies to champion the radical demands of the peasantry, not least land redistribution, thereby they would expose the liberal bourgeois Cadets as false friends of the people. A particular target of his polemics was Peter Struve, now a Cadet, but once a sort of Marxist (he wrote the RSDLP's founding manifesto in 1898). Of course, the theoreticians of Menshevism - Pavel Axelrod, Fyodor Dan and Alexander Potresov - had other ideas. They instinctively cleaved to the liberal bourgeoisie. The Cadets, after all, were the very people they looked to as the historically predetermined leadership of the revolution.

Looking back, in his famous pamphlet, *Leftwing communism* (1920), we find the following assessment:



The boycott of the Witte *duma* was ... a mistake, although a small and easily remediable one ... What applies to individuals applies - with necessary modifications - to politics and parties. Not he is wise who makes no mistakes. There are no such men nor can there be. He is wise who makes not very serious mistakes and who knows how to correct them easily and quickly.<sup>7</sup>

Yes, the boycott was a mistake. Nevertheless it was, as Lenin said, a small one - small because it was quickly and imaginatively rectified.

Within the year the boycott gave way to full, effective and very impressive intervention in tsarist elections. Bolshevik participation in what was a travesty even of what the bourgeoisie calls 'democracy' did not, however, mean an end to the struggle between themselves and the Mensheviks. In fact, divisions continued, even as the two factions came together in the RSDLP's Unity Congress of April-May 1906: the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks constituted respectively the left and right wings.

Given the underlying strategic differences, it is no surprise that, when it came to *duma* elections and *duma* tactics, there were two distinct approaches. Not a case of the 'streets' versus the 'ballot box' - a stupidity we routinely encounter in the pages of *Socialist Worker*.<sup>8</sup> No, the difference between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks was about opportunist parliamentarism versus revolutionary parliamentarism.

Let us begin by outlining the main parties and party groupings, from right to left. On the extreme right there was the bloc of parties - the League of the Russian People, the monarchists, the Council of the United Nobility. These were counterrevolutionary, tsarist parties: parties that wanted to maintain the status quo; parties of the landlords and clergy, which organised and paid for anti-Jewish pogroms by lumpen gangs of Black Hundreds (a generic term for their extra-legal armed forces). To the left of these parties of the Black Hundreds stood the Octobrists, a deeply reactionary bourgeois party. But the main party of the bourgeoisie, as already mentioned, were the Cadets.

The Cadets quickly settled for the idea of a constitutional monarchy, but to realise that thoroughly moderate aim these liberals were prepared to threaten Nicholas II with revolution. What they were not prepared to do, though, was to make revolution themselves. Revolution, made by workers and peasants, the *narod*, was seen as a danger that the tsar's stubborn insistence on upholding the *ancien régime* by arrogantly proclaiming Russia a 'constitutional autocracy' only brought nearer. The Cadets were themselves horrified by the prospect of revolution. Definitely something to be avoided. Only an energetic programme of liberal reform could do that, they slavishly pleaded.

Attempts by the Cadets to gain sway over the peasantry therefore had to be fought and their hypocritical, fake democracy uncompromisingly exposed. Lenin wrote:

To apply the term 'democratic' to a monarchist party, to a party which accepts an upper chamber, proposed repressive laws against public meetings and the press and deleted from the reply to the address from the throne the demand for direct and equal suffrage by secret ballot, to a party which opposed the formation of land committees elected by the whole people - means deceiving

the people. This is a very strong expression, but it is just.<sup>9</sup>

It almost goes without saying that those who did "apply the term 'democratic'" to the Cadets were none other than the Mensheviks. That is why Menshevik leaders made endless proposals for joint action with the Cadets and an equal number of excuses for their refusals and acts of cowardice.

Anyway, to the left of the Cadets stood the Trudovik grouping, which claimed to be for socialism and was supported by wide sections of the peasant masses. The Trudoviks included an assorted collection of non-party people, but in effect served as an outpost for the Socialist Revolutionary Party and the Popular Socialist Party: the latter being closer in spirit to the Cadets, closer in spirit to the bourgeoisie than the Socialist Revolutionaries, the more genuine revolutionary organisation.

It was in relationship to these groupings, parties and the classes they variously represented that the revolutionary and opportunist wings of the RSDLP argued, negotiated and positioned themselves. There were two main prongs to the Menshevik approach. First, the necessity of keeping out the Black Hundreds; they were the biggest evil. Second, as just mentioned, making the liberal bourgeoisie - ie, the Cadets - fight.

The Bolsheviks had a very different approach. Their view of politics was not determined by who was more evil and who was less evil. No, they took as their starting point the needs of the working class and who was and who was not revolutionary. Neither the landlords nor the bourgeoisie were revolutionary classes. But within strict historic limits the peasants were. Hence, while the Bolsheviks wanted to beat both the Black Hundreds and the Cadets, they wanted to get to, appeal to, win over, the peasants - and not by engaging with the Trudoviks. Their 'three pillars' programmatically were: a democratic republic, confiscation of the landed estates and an eight-hour working day.

While the Mensheviks had gone along with general strikes, soviets and insurrection in 1905, as the revolutionary tide retreated ever further during the course of 1906, they returned to type. They clutched at their old conception of the bourgeois-led character of the Russian bourgeois revolution: surely a case of keeping hold of something you know, for fear of finding something worse. The announcement by Nicholas II, on July 21 1906, that he was going to dissolve the first, Witte, *duma* even saw the Mensheviks effectively accepting tsarism's constitutional framework.

The Mensheviks issued the slogan, "A *duma* with real powers", and called for a general strike and demonstrations to save what was always a sop. For the Bolsheviks, defence of any sort of tsarist *duma* was a complete diversion. They mocked the Mensheviks' *duma* cretinism, and went to the factories and working class districts agitating *against* a general strike and demonstrations in defence of the indefensible.

Workers were urged not to take precipitate action. With the revolution on the defensive, but still not defeated, with the December action still fresh in minds, the Bolsheviks argued that what was needed was a constituent assembly born of revolution, not a tsarist "duma with full powers". Instead of placing hopes on an instant general strike and banking on the Cadets, the Bolsheviks looked to "enlighten and educate" the masses by participating in the tsar's new elections.

Indeed their campaign proved pretty successful. Among the 65 social democrats elected were a solid bloc of 18 Bolshevik deputies. Most were rank-and-file workers with little in the way of higher learning. Lenin took to giving close advice and leadership. He wrote many of their formal speeches. Inevitably, however, the comrades made political "mistakes" - even "departed from the political line of the party" - but they alone were not to blame and with the help of the whole party things could be put onto a "different basis".<sup>10</sup> The idea of democratic centralism began to be used. Lenin certainly had no wish for the parliamentary fraction to in effect become 'the party' (as with the Parliamentary Labour Party in Britain and some other countries in western Europe). That would be an abomination.

## Disagreements

Of course, not all Bolsheviks agreed with this shift in tactics. Alexander Bogdanov, Lenin's lieutenant in 1905, became leader of the *otzovist* ['recallist'] trend, which pictured the "Bolshevik centre" surrendering "every Bolshevik position, one after another".<sup>11</sup> What such criticism amounted to, though, was the liquidation of legal party work, focused as it was, on the demand to recall RSDLP deputies from what was now a bourgeois-Black Hundreds *duma*. Understandably many party militants recoiled in disgust. Another Bolshevik variety of boycottism was the 'ultimatists', who wanted to break off relations with *duma* deputies unless they agreed to abide by an ultimatum stipulating that they obey all the decisions of the central committee.

For a short while, Lenin found himself in a minority. He even threatened to "leave the [Bolshevik] faction immediately" if the recallist line prevailed.<sup>12</sup> There was a whole series of *open* polemical exchanges in the Bolshevik press. True, liberals and petty bourgeois socialists mocked the Bolsheviks for 'washing their dirty linen in public'. Yet without such frankness, without such transparency, the broad mass of the working class could never be politically trained, and without that the idea of a popular revolution was a complete non-starter.

Lenin's demolition job on Bogdanov's idealist philosophy, his insistence on combining illegal with legal work and the promise of emulating German social democracy, which had learnt how to survive the anti-socialist laws and exploit elections to the Reichstag to brilliant effect, won the day. An enlarged conference of the editorial board of *Proletary*, the Bolshevik's paper - held in Paris over June 21-30 1909 - saw a resolution condemning both *otzovism* and ultimatism overwhelmingly agreed. *Otzovism* and ultimatism, it stated,

expresses the ideology of political indifference on the one hand and anarchistic vagaries on the other. For all its revolutionary phraseology, the theory of *otzovism* and ultimatism in practice represents, to a considerable extent, the reverse side of constitutional illusions ... All the attempts made so far by *otzovism* and ultimatism to lay down principles inevitably led to denial of the fundamentals of revolutionary Marxism. The tactics proposed by them inevitably lead to a complete break with the tactics of the left wing of international social democracy as applied to contemporary Russian conditions, and result in anarchist deviations ... Bolshevism, as a definite trend within the RSDLP has nothing in common with

*otzovism* or with ultimatism ... the Bolshevik wing of the party must resolutely combat these deviations from the path of revolutionary Marxism.<sup>13</sup>

Bogdanov and his co-thinkers were branded left liquidators and formally expelled from the Bolshevik faction (not the party). But actually he had already walked. Soon his *Vperyod* group were preaching the standard 'non-sectarian' banalities, promoting the centrality of didactic education and proletarian culture, joining worthless diplomatic unity schemes - before spiralling off into self-confessed political irrelevance. Bogdanov abandoned revolutionary activity in 1912 and returned to Russia in 1914, following the tsar's amnesty marking the tricentenary of the Romanov dynasty.

## Blocs

Let us turn to the January-March 1907 election campaign for the second *duma*. This is important, because it basically characterised the Bolshevik's approach right up to November 1917, when, under conditions of soviet power, they presided over elections to the Constituent Assembly.<sup>14</sup>

The first thing that strikes one is the fundamentally different attitude towards alliances. The Mensheviks proposed an electoral bloc with the Cadets - if the party did not do that, the masses would never forgive them. Nicholas II had weighted the whole electoral system heavily in favour of the propertied classes. So, when it came to forming a *duma* majority, it was going to be either the Cadets or a bloc of Black Hundreds. Naturally, the Mensheviks had no hesitation about stating their preference between these two evils.

Readers will not be surprised to learn that the Bolsheviks disagreed. They insisted that working class independence was the main question. Our "main task is to develop the class consciousness and independent class organisation of the proletariat", wrote Lenin. Only that class can lead "a victorious bourgeois-democratic revolution. Therefore, class independence throughout the election and *duma* campaigns is our most important general task".<sup>15</sup>

The Bolsheviks did not apply this approach only to the Cadets, but the Trudoviks, Popular Socialists and the Socialist Revolutionary Party too. Lenin insisted:

The argument about the proletarian-peasant character of our revolution does not entitle us to conclude that we must enter into agreements with this or that democratic peasant party at this or that stage of the elections to the second *duma*. It is not even a sufficient argument for limiting the class independence of the proletariat during the elections, let alone for renouncing this independence.<sup>16</sup>

Hence, in the cities, where the working class population was concentrated, Lenin said that the RSDLP

must never, except in case of extreme necessity, refrain from putting up absolutely independent social democratic candidates. And there is no such urgent necessity. A few Cadets or Trudoviks more or less (especially of the Popular Socialist type!) are of no serious political importance, for the *duma* itself can, at best, play only a subsidiary, secondary role.<sup>17</sup>

Bolshevik stress on working class political independence and presenting independent candidates to the working class clearly stemmed

from core principle. That is why in 1912 they refused to countenance even a bloc of opportunist and revolutionary working class parties. Here is how one of the successful Bolshevik candidates wrote about it:

The Bolsheviks thought it necessary to put up candidates in the workers' curia and would not tolerate any agreements with other parties or groups, including the Menshevik-liquidators. They also considered it necessary to put up candidates in the so-called 'second curia of city electors' ... and in the elections in the villages, because of the great agitational attitude of the campaign.<sup>18</sup>

Putting forward independent party candidates, refusing to enter blocs, did not mean the Bolsheviks were oblivious to the advantages of 'partial agreements'. To appreciate what was meant by this it is necessary to say something about the tsar's convoluted electoral laws.

## Curia

The tsar's *duma* was not elected directly. Nicholas II thought it would be far safer to divide the population into six curias or 'estates': landowners, city habitats, peasants, workers, Cossacks, and non-Slavic people. Each curia had its own weighting: eg, landlords - one elector per 2,000; peasants - one elector per 4,000; workers - one elector per 30,000.<sup>19</sup> The electors eventually determined the deputies allotted to each curia.

In the distribution of seats by these intermediate elected 'electors', the Bolsheviks considered "partial agreements" perfectly permissible.<sup>20</sup> Lenin used the following hypothetical example to illustrate how they would work. If in the countryside there were 100 electors and "49 are Black Hundreds, 40 are Cadets and 11 are social democrats", then a "partial agreement between the social democrats and the Cadets is necessary in order to secure the election in full of a joint list of *duma* candidates, on the basis, of course, of a proportional distribution of *duma* seats according to the number of electors."<sup>21</sup>

Hence, in this case, if there were five *duma* seats up for grabs, the Bolsheviks saw every reason to completely exclude the Black Hundreds - that is, as long as the Cadets were prepared to give them, the social democrats, one of the *duma* seats. This would be facilitated by making it clear to the masses what arrangements were on offer and being negotiated.

Who were the Cadet electors going to make a deal with? With the revolutionary social democrats or the Black Hundred pogromists? In this way the RSDLP could force the 40 Cadets to do a deal with the 11 social democrats and leave the Black Hundreds out in the cold. Naturally, if the balance was different, if it was more favourable, the same treatment would be meted out to the Cadets - if, say, there was a possibility of doing a deal with electors inclined to support the SRs; and, in turn, if the arithmetic was favourable, every effort would be made to split away genuine revolutionary elements from them.

Of course, not least in the cities, *duma* seats were entirely secondary. Here the

importance of the elections is not at all determined by the number of deputies to be sent into the *duma*, but by the opportunities for the social democrats to address the widest and most concentrated sections of the population, which are the most social democratic in virtue of their whole position.<sup>22</sup>



# 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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In the cities there should be

no agreements whatsoever at the lower stage, when agitation is carried on among the masses; at the higher stages all efforts must be directed towards defeating the Cadets during the distribution of seats by means of a partial agreement between the social democrats and Trudoviks, and towards defeating the Popular Socialists by means of a partial agreement between the social democrats and the Socialist Revolutionaries.<sup>23</sup>

As was bound to be the case, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were confronted with the 'lesser of two evils theory' - a theory that has certainly been used against us, and is effectively meant to outlaw any independent communist activity in the electoral field: eg, 'Vote Labour, keep the Tories put'. This rotten theory was, unsurprisingly, the main argument the Cadets used to recommend themselves. As Lenin noted,

the whole of the Cadets' election campaign is directed to frightening the masses with the Black Hundred danger and the danger from the extreme-left parties, to adapting themselves to the philistinism, cowardice and flabbiness of the petty bourgeois and to persuading them that the Cadets are the safest, the most modest, the most moderate and the most well behaved of people.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, the Cadets went to the electorate as the lesser evil, and said: 'Vote for tinkering reforms, vote for safety'. They threatened the middle classes with what they thought were the greater evils, the danger, on the one hand, of letting in the Black Hundred pogromists and, on the other, Lenin and those terrible people who caused all the bloodshed and disruption in Moscow in the dark days of December 1905.

Those who believed the Cadets to be progressive were in their turn forced to adapt to, and even adopt, their method. The Mensheviks did not want the working class to do anything that might upset the Cadets. Nothing must be done that might push them towards the camp of the biggest evil, the Black Hundreds. To encourage the Cadets along the road that led to the bourgeois revolution, they wanted to support them with offers of joint lists, blocs and alliances.

It was either that, said the Mensheviks, or the Black Hundreds. Here is how Lenin summarised the Menshevik approach:

Let the social democrats criticise the Cadets before the masses as much as they like, but let them add: yet they are better than the Black Hundreds, and therefore we have agreed upon a joint list.

And here is how Lenin countered it:

The arguments against are as follows: a joint list would be in crying contradiction to the whole independent class policy of the Social Democratic Party. By recommending a joint list of Cadets and social democrats to the masses, we would be bound to cause hopeless confusion of class and political divisions. We would undermine the principles and the general revolutionary significance of our campaign for the sake of gaining a seat in the дума for a liberal! We would be subordinating class policy to parliamentarism instead of subordinating parliamentarism to class policy. We would deprive ourselves of the opportunity to

gain an estimate of our forces. We would lose what is lasting and durable in all elections - the development of the class consciousness and solidarity of the socialist proletariat. We would gain what is transient, relative and untrue - superiority of the Cadet over the Octoberist.<sup>25</sup>

## Contempt

Lenin was not frightened by Menshevik warnings that independent social democratic electoral work would let in the Black Hundreds. As we can see, he treated such arguments with the contempt they deserve:

The ... flaw in this stock argument is that it means that the social democrats tacitly surrender hegemony in the democratic struggle to the Cadets. In the event of a split vote that secures the victory of a Black Hundred, why should we be blamed for not having voted for the Cadet, and not the Cadets for not having voted for us?

'We are in a minority,' answer the Mensheviks, in a spirit of Christian humility. 'The Cadets are more numerous. You cannot expect the Cadets to declare themselves revolutionaries.'

Yes! But that is no reason why social democrats should declare themselves Cadets. The social democrats have not had, and could not have had, a majority over the bourgeois democrats anywhere in the world where the outcome of the bourgeois revolution was indecisive. But everywhere, in all countries, the first independent entry of the social democrats in an election campaign has been met by the howling and barking of the liberals, accusing the socialists of wanting to let the Black Hundreds in.

We are therefore quite undisturbed by the usual Menshevik cries that the Bolsheviks are letting the Black Hundreds in. All liberals have shouted this to all socialists. By refusing to fight the Cadets you are leaving under the ideological influence of the Cadets masses of proletarians and semi-proletarians who are capable of following the lead of the social democrats. Now or later, unless you cease to be socialists, you will have to fight independently. In spite of the Black Hundred danger. And it is easier and more necessary to take the right step now than it will be later on. In the elections to the third дума ... you will be still more entangled in unnatural relations with the betrayers of the revolution. But the real Black Hundred danger, we repeat, lies not in the Black Hundreds obtaining seats in the дума, but in pogroms and military courts: and you are making it more difficult for the people to fight this real danger by putting Cadet blinkers on their eyes.<sup>26</sup>

In a nutshell, the differences between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks amounted to the fact that, where the Bolsheviks wanted "complete independence in the election campaign", the Mensheviks, by contrast, wanted a solid Cadet дума "with a large number of social democrats elected as semi-Cadets!". Where the Mensheviks were prepared to sacrifice their political independence for the electoral defeat of the greater evil - the Black Hundreds - the Bolsheviks fought and worked for revolution.

In pursuit of this it was better to have a дума consisting of "200

Black Hundreds, 280 Cadets and 20 social democrats" independent from the Cadets, than a дума consisting of "400 Cadets and 100 social democrats" elected as semi-Cadets. And Lenin defiantly declared: "We prefer the first type, and we think it is childish to imagine that the elimination of the Black Hundreds from the дума means the elimination of the Black Hundred danger."<sup>27</sup>

To back up their position the Bolshevik publishing house produced Russian editions of works by their German comrades, Karl Kautsky and Wilhelm Liebknecht. For instance, in *The driving forces of the Russian Revolution and its prospects*, the highly influential Kautsky was full of praise for the 1905 revolution and the barricade tactics of the Bolsheviks, and dismissive of the revolutionary potential of the Russian bourgeois.<sup>28</sup> Wonderful anti-Menshevik ammunition, and used to good effect. Liebknecht's pamphlet, *No compromises, no electoral agreements*, was if anything even more useful.

We can get a taste of what it had to say from the preface Lenin wrote, which we might say turned the 'lesser of two evils theory' onto its feet. Here is a short excerpt:

The class consciousness of the masses is not corrupted by violence and draconian laws: it is corrupted by the false friends of the workers, the liberal bourgeois, who divert the masses from the real struggle with empty phrases about a struggle. Our Mensheviks and Plekhanov fail to understand that the fight against the Cadets is a fight to free the minds of the working masses from false Cadet ideas and prejudices about combining popular freedom with the old regime.

Liebknecht laid so much emphasis on the point that false friends are more dangerous than open enemies that he said: "The introduction of a new anti-socialist law would be a lesser evil than the obscuring of class antagonisms and party boundary lines by electoral agreements."

Translate this sentence of Liebknecht's into terms of Russian politics at the end of 1906: 'A Black Hundred дума would be a lesser evil than the obscuring of class antagonisms and party boundary lines by electoral agreements with the Cadets' ... Only bad social democrats can make light of the harm done to the working masses by the liberal betrayers of the cause of the people's liberty who ingratiate themselves with them by means of electoral agreements.<sup>29</sup>

The Bolshevik approach won the day at the RSDLP's May 13-June 1 1907 London congress. Besides pushing the idea of a 'broad workers' party', the Mensheviks, who lost their short-lived central committee majority, had urged the 338 delegates to go for a 'lesser evil' policy, whereby social democrat deputies in the дума would support a Cadet - even a 'left' Octobrist candidate - for speaker.

Relations with the Bolsheviks further soured, as the increasingly fragmented Mensheviks careered off to the right. Whereas the Bolsheviks had dealt decisively with their left liquidators, those who effectively wanted to put an end to legal дума activities, the Mensheviks were characterised by right liquidationism. They wanted to put an end to illegal activities such as 'expropriations' and the whole underground apparatus.

Their model was something like the British Labour Party and the promise that this would be acceptable to Nicholas II (ie, total capitulation before tsarism).

Things came to a head with the January 5-17 1912 Prague conference, when the Menshevik liquidators were deemed to have put themselves outside the party (incidentally, the conference was chaired by a pro-party Menshevik). Breaking with the Menshevik liquidators and seeking a rapprochement with Georgi Plekhanov's pro-party Mensheviks was a bold, daring move and, though it largely failed, it did set the stage for the Bolsheviks' September-October 1912 дума election campaign.

The fourth дума saw them win all six of the deputies allocated to the workers' curia. True, there were seven other social democrats (six Mensheviks were elected as part of a bloc with liberals and petty bourgeois democrats, and one other was elected from Warsaw with help from the Bund). Either way, it was a drop in the ocean of a 422-seat дума completely dominated by liberals and rightists. But the exact make-up of the дума was an entirely third-rate issue.

What really mattered was that the Bolsheviks were the indisputable majority, when it came to the mass of the working class. An entirely first-rate issue ●

## Notes

1. The best account by far of the Bolsheviks' approach to parliamentary elections is August H Nimtz's two-volume *Lenin's electoral strategy* New York NY 2014.
2. Quoted in N Harding (ed) *Marxism in Russia: key document 1879-1906* Cambridge 1983, p314.
3. I am not aware of any worthwhile study of the Cadets as such, but, in terms of a biography, take a look at Stephen Williams's account of one of their most prominent leaders, Vasily Maklakov. See SF Williams *The reformer: how one reformer fought to prevent the Russian Revolution* New York NY 2017.
4. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 8 Moscow 1977, pp488-89.
5. See VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, pp15-140.
6. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 11 Moscow 1977, p363.
7. VI Lenin, *CW* Vol 31, 1977, pp35-36.
8. For a recent manifestation of this anarcho-economism we have Charlie Kimber, *Socialist Worker* editor, writing against giving any support for George Galloway: "We need a left that fights for Palestine - and also takes up other issues. And the most important direction for those who have marched over Gaza is still in the streets, building the movement, not the ballot box" (*Socialist Worker* April 10 2024).
9. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 31, Moscow 1977, p311.
10. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 15 Moscow 1977, p352.
11. Quoted in RV Daniels (ed) *A documentary history of communism* Vol 1, London 1985, p45.
12. N Krupskaya *Memories of Lenin* Vol 2, London nd, p24.
13. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 15 Moscow 1977, pp444-46.
14. Elections to the Constituent Assembly were constantly put off by a fearful Provisional Government after the February Revolution. The election was not held until after the October Revolution and, although the Bolsheviks participated - coming second behind the (now split) Socialist Revolutionary Party - the assembly was forcibly dissolved in January 1918 on the orders of the Bolshevik-Left SR coalition government, which derived its moral authority from its commanding majority in the workers', peasants' and soldiers' soviets.
15. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 11 Moscow 1977, p279.
16. *Ibid* p280.
17. *Ibid* p286.
18. A Badayev *The Bolsheviks in the tsarist дума* London 1932, p9.
19. [duma.gov.ru/en/duma/about/history/information](https://duma.gov.ru/en/duma/about/history/information).
20. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 11 Moscow 1977, p289.
21. *Ibid* p291.
22. *Ibid* p296.
23. *Ibid* p283.
24. *Ibid* p415.
25. *Ibid* p285.
26. *Ibid* p314-15.
27. *Ibid* p315-16.
28. N Harding (ed) *Marxism in Russia: key documents 1879-1906* Cambridge 1983, pp352, 372.
29. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 11 Moscow 1977, p403.



# Turning the tide

Ukraine's summer 2023 offensive was a complete failure and Russia now appears to be making tactical gains. But Kyiv is not going to be a pushover, writes **Eddie Ford**

There has been a whole stream of stories ringing the alarm bell for Ukraine. Crucially, in a months-long logjam, the Biden administration has not been able to get its \$60 billion 'aid package' for Ukraine - or war package - through the Republican-controlled House of Representatives (we shall see if that is about to change anytime soon).

Militarily this 'aid package' really matters. Ukraine not only needs surface-to-air missiles. It needs shells, shells, shells. Millions of them. It is extremely difficult to see Europe, Japan or any other country doing this. There are, of course, some armchair generals who say that artillery does not count for much in the age of drones, cyber-warfare, satellites, and so on. However, even though Iranian drones are often looked down upon in a slightly snooty way, they still cost \$250,000 each. Now contrast that with the humble artillery shell which costs a mere \$5,000.

### Antiquated

In other words, after observing what has been going on in Ukraine and looking at the general trend of modern warfare, artillery is far from antiquated. By contrast, you can make a good case that aircraft carriers are nowadays sitting ducks (and still hugely costly, coming in at around \$4 billion each). In fact, after two years of war in Ukraine, you could argue that the ultra-sophisticated drones that the US has been producing are now white elephants in what is now the era of *mass* drone warfare. We are not talking about one expensive drone that hovers over the skies in Afghanistan - Ukraine and Russia get through thousands every week. Quite staggeringly, Kyiv has been losing 40,000 drones a month. Some of these drones are not even the size of the Iranian ones - they are not capable of carrying anything more than a hand grenade and are mostly just for observation purposes.

Either way, drones are easy to shoot down, as we saw with the Iranian armada launched against Israel. We are told that Israel and its allies managed to intercept/destroy "99%" of them, but so what? They are cheap!<sup>1</sup> But the real point is that artillery warfare now is *informed* by drone technology. So increasingly what you have are artillery officers who are given pretty accurate details about the location of the enemy - where to strike can now be done with some precision. But massed artillery also still serves, just like in World War 1, to take territory and to keep territory.

That was the pattern quickly established in Ukraine after the initial phase, where we saw the use of tanks, yet things quickly settled down to some sort of rerun of the 1914-18 western front. And it



Artillery still matters

was Russia which went for trench warfare, as described in the pages of this publication, with its three layers of defence that involved anti-tank ditches, rows of dragon's teeth, razor wire, and all the rest of it. Ukraine is now doing the same on its side - not only on the front line, but all the way up to the international frontier between the two countries.

Regarding Ukraine, the sunshine is out and the country has had some dry weather. But what spring actually means in Ukraine is that you are going to have a lot more wet days: and the general expectation is not of a Russian spring offensive, but rather a summer offensive. Meaning that there will be a race between the ground drying out to enable offensive warfare and Ukraine digging its trenches to put in those lines of defence. Critically, without Ukrainian mass artillery Russia can attack with tanks and maybe make a breakthrough.

### Defeat?

Recently, there have been a lot of sensationalist headlines - 'clickbait' - about Ukraine being on the verge of collapse if it does not get its US aid package. You should treat such stories with a large grain of salt. Yes, it cannot

be denied that Ukraine has problems, when it comes to conscription. Last week the Rada passed legislation lowering the draft age from 27 to 25, in a situation where the average age of a *frontline* Ukrainian soldier - quite incredibly - is 43, essentially meaning that you will have a load of people in their 50s trying to fight a war. How much puff have these guys got? More to the point, how come Volodymyr Zelensky has not mobilised people from 18 upwards to fight the Russian invader that wants to annihilate the Ukrainian nation? It remains a bit of a mystery, though it is hard not to speculate that maybe there is an anti-war mood amongst that generation - which would be an excellent development.

Even though fewer people are now enthusiasts for the war than two years ago, when it began, Ukraine is not going to be a pushover. People will resist the Russian invader and that is not going to change. Even if you had a situation where they had no choice but to use partisan warfare - which does not seem likely, as it is very hard to envisage Russia conquering the whole of Ukraine. You cannot entirely dismiss the possibility, of course, but given the experience of the US in Vietnam and the Soviet Union

in Afghanistan, the idea does seem fanciful. These superpowers had vastly more in the way of population, economic resources and military hardware. However, both were forced into humiliating scuttles.

Now, whether fanciful or not, it is worthwhile mentioning a headline that appeared over the weekend on the BBC website: "Ukraine could face defeat in 2024" - a story that has been widely circulated in many media outlets.<sup>2</sup> Actually, the BBC article was based on comments by the former commander of the UK's Joint Forces, general Sir Richard Barrons. Obviously speaking on behalf of the military establishment, the general told the BBC that there is "a serious risk" of Ukraine losing the war this year, because the country "may come to feel it can't win" - and "when it gets to that point, why will people want to fight and die any longer, just to defend the indefensible?" However, the article emphasised that Ukraine "is not yet at that point".

We go on to read that last year everyone knew when the Ukrainian offensive was going to happen, summer and not spring, and the direction it would take - south with their new shiny Leopard tanks, plus a few British and American ones added

on, where they would smash through the Russian lines of defence and go all the way to the Azov Sea. But it was always a fairy story, no matter how often repeated in the western media. The Russians planned accordingly and the Ukrainian offensive was a complete failure. With their first contact with the enemy, they lost large numbers of tanks and armoured cars - reduced to using infantry at night, crawling on their bellies, in order to demine Russian defences.

Now, as the article points out, the boot is on the other foot, as Russia readies its troops and keeps Kyiv guessing where it is going to attack next - could be anywhere. What you can say is that it is a very long front line indeed and the Ukrainians need to be able to defend it all. It almost goes without saying that its defences are not yet in place, even if Zelensky has given a target for the end of spring. So it is a game of 'wait and see' for everyone.

### Five to one

But in the opinion of general Barrons, whatever direction they go in, the shape of the Russian offensive that is going to come is "pretty clear". That is, at the moment we are seeing Russia "batter away at the front line", employing a five-to-one advantage in artillery, ammunition, and newish weapons - including the FAB glide bomb (an adapted Soviet-era 'dumb bomb', fitted with fins, GPS guidance and 1500kg of high explosive, that is wreaking havoc on Ukrainian defences). But at some point this summer, argues the general, expect to see a major Russian offensive, "with the intent of doing more than smash forward with small gains to perhaps try and break through the Ukrainian lines". If that happens, he says, that could see Russian forces managing to break into "areas of Ukraine where the Ukrainian armed forces cannot stop them".

That does not necessarily mean that Ukraine is on the verge of going down, or Russia marching into Kyiv, with the capital falling this year, or anything on that scale. But it could mean that we see Moscow making substantial gains that start turning the tide of the war to its favour. If that were to happen, it would be a calamitous blow for imperialist plans to get regime change in Moscow, the dismantling of Russia as any sort of viable independent state and - most cherished prize of all - the encirclement and eventual defeat of the global hegemon's only real rival, China ●

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### Notes

1. abc.net.au/news/2024-04-16/how-israel-air-defence-stopped-iran-drone-missile-attacks/103707770.
2. bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-68778338.