

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

# weekly **worker**



**Spoil Sir Keir's election party:  
vote Diane Abbott in Hackney  
and Faiza Shaheen in Chingford**

- Letters and debate
- Galloway's motley crew
- USFI's failure: polemic
- Trump's felony conviction

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Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10



**WHAT SOLUTION  
SHOULD WE BE  
MARCHING FOR?**

## LETTERS



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

## Manchester vote

We have been asked to read and comment on the manifesto of the Manchester-based Communist Future group (see [communistfuture.com/manifesto](http://communistfuture.com/manifesto)).

Well, we have done just that and, to be brutally honest - and what is the point of being anything else? - it is vague, parochial and politically pointless. Empty phrases are piled upon empty phrases. Capitalism is counterposed to communism in a manner reminiscent of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. In other words, we have soggy abstractions and pious wishes. Of course, this is just the flipside of the usual broad-frontist approach that sees disorientated leftwingers advocate unity around the lowest-common-denominator politics of tailism and economism.

Substantive ideas, concrete demands and necessary strategic goals are almost entirely absent. What about a Communist Party government? The nature of the Labour Party and how to overcome the labour and trade union bureaucracy? The free movement of people and opposition to immigration controls? Israel's Gaza war and Nato's proxy war in Ukraine? What about Irish unity, self-determination for Scotland and Wales and the demand for a federal republic? Nothing, nothing, nothing. What about European unity brought about by working class revolution as a vital step towards the global transition from capitalism to communism? Nothing. And nothing on the Soviet Union, nothing on China and nothing on the ectopic social formations that should be expected in this historic period.

A Communist Party is mentioned, but just in passing. Yet this is the *main* strategic question we face. Is a Communist Party to be built around electoral work in Manchester? Any such suggestion smacks of localism and is therefore utterly alien to the tradition of orthodox Marxism.

Surely other communist groups have to be engaged with programmatically. Above all, those who are committed to building a Communist Party need to be engaged with in terms of *serious* discussions and debate as a matter of urgency. Yet the grouping, Communist Future, has chosen to associate itself with ... the ironically named Talking About Socialism - which is characterised by a refusal to discuss, a refusal to engage.

We are told that there can be no discussions, no debate, while we insist on describing centrists as centrists, opportunists as opportunists and social-imperialists as social-imperialists. A cover for unity with centrists, opportunists and social-imperialists.

However, together we can turn things around. Use the *Weekly Worker*, Online Communist Forum and Communist University to engage with the CPGB with a view to rapprochement and bringing about unity in the struggle for a genuine, mass Communist Party. That is the only serious approach.

Meanwhile, the comrades can certainly submit an appeal for funds and support to the *Weekly Worker's* letters pages. The comrades can also rest assured that, unless there is a better left candidate - unlikely - we will urge electors in Manchester Central to vote for your candidate.

Our approach can be summed

up as 'Vote left where you can (and that includes the few left Labourites who are being allowed to stand), vote Labour where you must (ie, mainstream Labour)'.

**Jack Conrad**  
London

## Labour vote

Jack Conrad was absolutely correct in his letter last week on voting Labour - it remains a bourgeois workers' party (May 30). Trotskyists hold that voting Labour is part of the essential tactic of the workers' united front and the transitional method.

The latest document of Ian Donovan's Consistent Democrats is: 'A vote for Starmer's Labour is a vote for Zionist genocide and Nazism in Ukraine!' It does not even bother to claim that Labour is no longer a bourgeois workers' party; Peter Taaffe and Hannah Sell were forced to postulate this, when they made their 'open turn' against Ted Grant and Allan Woods in 1991 - only to have to summersault yet again, when Corbyn reigned. Ian's article is completely contradicted by those he wrote when a member of Socialist Fight.

On June 2 my old comrades of David North's World Socialist Web Site/Socialist Equality Party went into a big rant against voting Labour by Chris Marsden; 'Britain's pseudo-left endorse a vote for Starmer's Labour Party'. They hold that the trade unions are no longer workers' organisations and consequently it is obvious that bourgeois workers' parties no longer exist anywhere. A "pseudo-left" is anyone who is not a member of the WSWS/SEP.

But Trotsky made his position on the British Labour Party very clear in his writings: "For every revolutionary organisation in Britain its attitude to the masses and to the class is almost coincident with its attitude towards the Labour Party, which bases itself on the trade unions."

Although the policy of the existing left wing of Labour was as dire back then as it is now, he goes on: "The policy of the opposition in the Labour Party is unspeakably bad. But this only means that it is necessary to counterpose to it inside the Labour Party another, a correct, Marxist policy. That isn't so easy? With this we are entirely in accord: the bureaucracy will not surrender. But the revolutionists, functioning outside and inside, can and must succeed in winning over tens and hundreds of thousands of workers."

It is a completely tactical question when and to what extent the revolutionary group operates in Labour. The conditions are now very unfavourable, but it remains a bourgeois workers' party (Lenin's characterisation), so, whilst entryism is now almost impossible, we must vote Labour if there are no serious revolutionary or centrist alternatives with a mass base in the class.

We insist that class consciousness - the class for itself subjectively and not just objectively in itself - does not develop in the minds of individual workers divorced from their social relations: it is primarily lodged in its own organisations. That is, the trade unions and reformist, Stalinist, centrist and revolutionary parties and groups vying for leadership of the class. The Marxist method is dialectical materialism and the application of this method to the class struggle is the transitional method. This can only operate effectively within the practice of the united front. That is, we must learn how to defend strategic principles, whilst utilising all the flexible tactics necessary to build the revolutionary party and advance the struggles of

the class towards the goal of the socialist revolution.

The argument often put forward that the situation is ripe nationally for an independent electoral challenge to Labour from the left bears little relationship to reality. Lenin emphasised the need for "a sober assessment of the actual level of political consciousness of the working class as a whole, and not just its communist vanguard".

He argued: "It is not that this [ultra-leftist] line doesn't find a resonance among some groups of workers. Periods of retreat and demoralisation frequently produce ultra-left moods in a minority of the class. The real question is whether this line represents a correct approach to the politically conscious sections of the working class as a whole. And the answer is that it does not."

**Gerry Downing**  
Socialist Fight

## Spart vote

Vincent David of the Spartacist League central committee wants us to join him and the other comrades in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition ('Muddleheaded Labourism' May 30). He's afraid that if any of us vote Labour then we will cross a class line (into ...?). The working class isn't keen on Labour - true, but that's hardly new - they just want the Tories out.

He quotes Lenin, perhaps we need Tusc to keep the Cadets - sorry, Reform - out. A vote for Labour is a vote "for an open alliance with the capitalists". When was it ever not? So now, this year, we have an earth-shattering election, in which we must get Starmer out. Even bourgeois elections have some use: so many folk have little or no interest in politics and take what little they do have from the mainstream media. But attention does rise a little when elections are coming, I know from experience that it is much easier to talk about politics then.

Another use is to see how we're getting on. Unfortunately there is no mass Communist Party of the working class, unlike when Lenin was writing on the subject. This leaves us mainly as observers when the results come through.

It will be of interest to see how Tusc and Galloway's outfit get on - apart from Galloway himself, will anyone save their deposit? What effect will there be in certain constituencies (eg, those with a big Muslim vote)? I think we expect a Starmer-led Labour victory, but what will be the impact of the Lib Dems and the Greens? What about Scotland? There is so much to examine and analyse. I suppose that is why the Spartacists need more than a month after the election and so can't spare an hour or two for Communist University.

We need, apparently, an alternative to Labour for the working class. But Labour was formed by working class organisations, and it normally gets around 10 million votes - mostly working class, I guess. It is, even now, at least partially funded by the trades unions. But, comrade David is not too keen on union bureaucrats, so perhaps we need an alternative to each trade union too - I'm sure Tusc could rustle up something.

Yes, we need another party, but one where strategy, tactics and politics are fought out, open and clear. We need a party with a programme - with amendments, if needed, openly debated and voted on. We don't need a party with just a lot of nice people that we get on with.

In this election CPGB comrades might vote for a Tusc candidate, even a Spartacist, maybe a Galloway

candidate or one of the other leftist odds and ends, but, in the absence of anything at all useful, we will vote Labour. Comrade David seems to think that this means we support Starmer. No, but unfortunately in these times we just don't have enough rope.

**Jim Nelson**  
email

## Spart debate

I enjoyed reading the article by Vincent David. As a reader of *Workers Hammer* - the Spartacist League's quarterly newspaper - I was therefore disappointed to read that the comrades will not be part of the debate at this year's Communist University.

I agree with Vincent's article, where he argues that to call for a Labour vote is to cross class lines. However, whilst I understand the Spartacist League's involvement in Tusc as a means to expose the economism of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, I see Tusc as a dead end.

I would like to see more debate between the CPGB and organisations of the left, not only in its Sunday teatime Online Communist Forum, and its Communist University, but also in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*. Perhaps the CPGB should actively engage with groups such as Socialist Alternative (a split from SPEW); Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (a split from the Socialist Workers Party); and Workers Power and the Revolutionary Communist Group (also splits from the SWP).

Whilst we are not a debating society - we are revolutionaries who want to replace capitalism with a communist democracy - debate is the best way of building a mass Communist Party. Only via vigorous debate can communists through splits and fusions form the basis of the mass Communist Party so desperately needed by the working class in Britain, Europe and further afield.

So here's to more debate from organisations of the left in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## RCP vote

The artists formally known as Socialist Appeal are running a general election candidate in Stratford and Bow. Revolutionary Communist Party member Fiona Lali went viral following an appearance on GB News, in which she faced off against Suella Braverman and called her a liar during an effective defence of pro-Palestine student encampments and marches.

The discussion has been viewed several hundred thousand times across different platforms, and Lali's face is on stickers plastered across London promoting the RCP. The comrades have made what appears to be a snap decision to stand Lali in her home constituency, despite the presence of an already existing left candidate, Halima Khan of the Workers Party of Britain - herself well known on social media for her role as the whistleblower featured in Al Jazeera's 'The Labour files'.

The WPB online has responded with outrage - George Galloway retweeted a condemnation of the RCP as "establishment stooges" and the retweet of that retweet suggested the RCPs media coverage indicated a "psyop", endorsing a full-on conspiracy theory - also backed by the former WPB collaborators, the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist) - that the RCP's sudden media coverage somehow implied a state-sponsored endorsement of Trotskyism.

This is a bonkers overreaction

and unhelpful, as the RCP comrade in my workplace made clear in an anecdote from canvassing this weekend in Stratford - the WPB he bumped into was perfectly friendly, as if they were on the same side. If such a comrade later sees material online suggesting those he's canvassed alongside are secret service agents, that cannot help his political education. Equally, my workplace comrade's revelation that "we are placing a lot of emphasis on flexibility at the moment" inevitably leads to the question, 'flexibility or opportunism?' It isn't clear to me that it's a positive move for the leading communist group (in terms of recruitment) in the UK to compete for the left vote in a left constituency.

That all said, there is a genuine debate to be had, which is clear from the *Weekly Worker's* position - ranging from Mike Macnair's friendlier view on the WPB to Carla Roberts' more critical line. One factor for consideration is that the RCP hasn't bothered to register with the electoral commission under its own name, so voters in Stratford and Bow who pick Fiona 'YouTube' Lali will be voting for an 'independent' - as opposed to an actual party like the WPB. In that sense I agree with Mike that that we should support the WPB despite its problems ahead of opportunist independents.

As it hasn't yet featured in the *Weekly Worker*, it's also worth sharing what Galloway stated in his recent interview with Novara Media on left collaboration: "Corbyn should lead an alliance of socialist organisations. There's a name for that - there was once a Socialist Alliance before Respect. It's not a bad thing. Different parties can affiliate to it, while retaining their own iconography, their own vocabulary, their own programme. There'd be an agreement for a limited programme for that alliance. I hope he'll do that, [but Corbyn] doesn't seem ready to do that."

Developments since do indeed suggest Corbyn isn't prepared to do that - and whether Galloway would be is also debatable! But that is the model - an electoral left alliance within which groups can maintain their own programme and freedom to organise. Not too hard, is it? Certainly better than competing over votes in the same place.

**Sean Carter**  
South London

## No BDS

Moshé Machover enjoys pouring on the sarcasm. But, despite it all, he still makes a number of elementary mistakes concerning the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement (Letters, May 30).

"That Hamas is 'in the leadership' of the BDS movement is a Zionist *hasbarah* porky, which Lazare keeps repeating," he says. "As readers must have noticed, *hasbarah* uses Hamas as a bugbear to besmirch any Palestinian anti-colonial initiative. In reality Hamas has no role whatsoever in leading the BDS movement. It is just one of scores of Palestinian groups of diverse political colours that have formally endorsed BDS, including trade unions, women's organisations, etc."

I have no idea what "porky" means, although it certainly does not sound good. But if Zionists use Hamas to besmirch anti-colonialism, isn't the solution obvious - ie, to jettison Hamas, so as to avoid any connection with an ultra-reactionary outfit that murdered hundreds of Israelis on October 7 and has brought down nothing but ruin on Palestinians ever since? Or is there some reason that BDS insists on keeping Hamas

in the leadership of what is in effect a popular front? If so, isn't it the first duty of Marxists to call upon the working class to free itself of such criminals, so it can make common cause with the Israeli proletariat?

Machover also compares BDS to movements against military spending. As he puts it, "And, as for disemploying workers, I suppose we must not oppose military budgets: we don't wish to persuade imperialism to withdraw investments and disemploy the many millions of workers who make their living in and around the military-industrial complex, do we?"

But Marxists do not seek to disemploy arms workers on the basis of race or nationality. We do not call on weapons manufacturers to fire workers who happen to be white, male, American or whatever, on the grounds that such people are inveterate warmongers and therefore deserve to be thrown on the street. Lining up with class enemies in this fashion would be obviously disastrous. Yet BDS calls on imperialists to disemploy workers because, Jewish or Muslim, they are all Israeli. So how is it any different?

If an international labour boycott causes workers to be laid off, then Marxists should fight for full employment with equal wages and full trade union rights for all Israeli and Palestinian workers, regardless of religion or nationality. Will BDS join in this fight? It hardly seems likely.

For all his sarcasm, Machover refuses to answer the crucial question at hand. How can he propose to organise the Israeli working class against Zionism, while at the same time proposing to destroy it? It's either one or the other, but it can't be both.

**Daniel Lazare**  
New York

## Lennon

Paul Demarty was perhaps confused by the military outfits worn on the cover of the Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's lonely heart's club band* ('Banging the drums of war', May 30). John Lennon never did military service - like the other Beatles, he wasn't old enough by the 1960 cut-off.

Demarty's thesis about the 1960s counterculture emerging from the iconoclastic ethos and rock 'n' roll spirit of national service seems dubious in the extreme, but a better exemplar might be Alan Bennett, who went from working as a linguist for British signals intelligence to the *Oxford Revue* and thence to *Beyond the Fringe*.

**Jack William Grahl**  
email

## Transitional

Mike Macnair provides a highly novel interpretation of the role and purpose of the "minimum demands", which attempts to resolve a contradiction within the *Weekly Worker* group's programme - but actually opens up further contradictions and questions ('Minimal symmetrical errors', May 23).

Macnair now openly states that the WWG's "minimum programme" can only be achieved in full via the proletarian socialist revolution: ie, the overthrow of the capitalist state and the establishment of working class state, political and economic power. I think this is the first time I have seen this stated so openly and clearly on behalf of the WWG.

Certainly, I could never see how some elements of the WWG's "minimum programme" - such as the abolition of the standing army (and police and other state forces) and its replacement by a people's or workers' militia, and the general self-arming and self-organisation of the working class in their workplaces and communities - could possibly be achieved this side of a socialist revolution. Macnair has now provided some clarity.

He (including the whole WWG?) now sees the initial establishment of working class rule as the first essential stage towards the development of full communism: ie, the "maximum programme". By the way, I like Jack Conrad's characterisation of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as the "decisive rule of the working class majority" ('Applying Bolshevism globally', April 25 - my emphasis), capturing both the *democratic essence* of this rule and the fact it has to be rule *over* the overthrown and defeated classes

The *Weekly Worker* in the past has carried exhaustive and really interesting articles and letters debating whether there are distinct stages after the socialist revolution, whether there is a transition period immediately after the revolution towards socialism and then from socialism to communism, or whether the process after the establishment of working class power is more continuous, involving a whole range of both quantitative and qualitative changes.

To my mind the three key factors determining progress to full socialism (or communism) are:

- (1) the actual pace at which the working class power can reorganise, reshape and develop the productive forces to meet the full needs of the working population;
- (2) the pace to which the overthrown classes disintegrate and dissolve as classes and either are eliminated or are absorbed into the working population; and
- (3) the pace at which reactionary ideas, ideologies, values and consciousness are replaced by widespread collective and social consciousness, which will enable both the dissolving of the remaining elements of the coercive state apparatus and enable free access to all essential goods and services, combined with the voluntary commitment of the working people to work to produce those goods and services.

I don't think it is particularly useful or helpful to try and identify distinct or separate stages within this future set of processes.

But we do come back to the urgent question of the day, which is: what is the strategy for achieving socialist revolution within the relatively near future?

I think we need to do two basic things. One is to make the fundamental case for the abolition of capitalism and its replacement by socialism (defined as majority working class state power or working class rule). Two, we have to develop a programme of *immediate* demands, which respond to the *real needs* of working people in the here and now, but which are *not limited* by what capitalism says or actually are deliverable or affordable. I am not especially bothered if we call these minimum or even at a real push "transitional" demands (despite the strong Trotskyist connotation), but I do prefer "immediate demands".

Some of these would almost certainly be deliverable within existing capitalism, as is the case with many of the "minimum" demands in the WWG programme (hence my pointing to a further contradiction revealed by Macnair's novel interpretation of the "minimum programme"). Some will only be achievable through and after a socialist revolution and we should make this clear in our daily educational, agitational and propaganda work. Ideally, many of our immediate demands would point the way to the ultimate permanent solution being through socialism and in many ways could (and should) prefigure some elements and features of future socialist society.

Such demands may include ready access for everyone to decent, affordable housing, cheap, nutritious food, high-quality education and excellent healthcare services (with a

strong emphasis on the prevention of ill health in the first place), very cheap or free comprehensive and integrated public transport, and strong social protection for the young, the retired and those unable to work for a wage, including the sick, disabled and those who work in the home or for their communities.

The basic problem with the Trotskyist 'transitional programme', as I understand it, is that it denies (or just ignores) the fundamental need to inject and develop socialist consciousness into the working class, by somehow conning or enticing working people through a series of immediate, medium and longer-term demands, over a sort of 'transitional bridge' from existing capitalism and, as they pass over the bridge, somehow end up at the need for proletarian socialist revolution. I find this highly contemptuous of (indeed deeply insulting to) the basis intelligence of most working class people and very much reflects the reactionary, petty bourgeois or middle class basis of Trotskyism.

To be fair, both Conrad and Macnair have strongly emphasised the fundamental factor of working class consciousness and the self-organisation and self-determination of the working class as distinguishing the genuinely communist approach from the Trotskyist. It is a pity they can't make a complete break with Trotskyism and feel the need on occasion to genuflect towards Trotskyism and indeed Trotsky himself.

We should know and be prepared for the fact that modern-day capitalism can in fact be extraordinarily elastic and flexible in accommodating even some of the most radical-sounding demands, albeit only for relatively limited periods. We saw the 'war socialism' and effective suspension of the law of value during World War II, for example, and, more recently, during the initial so-called Covid crisis, a further partial suspension, as businesses, jobs and incomes were in effect guaranteed despite many of them being effectively shut down.

But, provided our political programme is based on both making the basic and fundamental case for replacing capitalism by socialism *and* our immediate demands are based on the *real* needs of the working people (as opposed to being some form of 'transitional' hoodwinkery), our strategy for working class socialist revolution will be able to respond effectively to any such capitalist responses - which, even if dramatic and radical, can only be partial and time-limited, before the fundamental laws and contradictions of capitalism force their way through.

As my letter in *Weekly Worker* March 7 tried to point out, the Communist Party in Britain, since its original establishment in 1920, has through successive programmes, including successive editions of *The British road to socialism* and *Britain's road to socialism*, tried to set out this basic communist (and indeed Bolshevik) approach to socialist revolution.

I don't claim any of the past or present programmes are perfect or that one can agree with every single formulation or wording in any one edition. But they are by far the best and most credible programmes which have been developed for socialist revolution in Britain, and every class-conscious worker should read and study them. They should seriously consider supporting in whatever way they can the Communist Party in Britain, if they seriously want a qualitatively better future for themselves, their families and indeed for the working classes of the world.

**Andrew Northall**  
Kettering

# ACTION

## Secret power: Wikileaks and its enemies

**Friday June 7, 6.30pm:** Book event, Bookmarks, 1 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1. Panel discussion with Stefania Maurizi, author of *Secret power: Wikileaks and its enemies*, Stella Assange (lawyer) and Ewen McAskill (retired journalist). Registration free. Organised by Bookmarks the socialist bookshop: [x.com/Stella\\_Assange/status/1797644818166022472](http://x.com/Stella_Assange/status/1797644818166022472).

## Derby Silk Mill festival

**Saturday June 8, 10.15am to 4.30pm:** March, rally and free festival. Assemble Market Place, Derby DE1 and march to Cathedral Green. Celebrate Derby's historic general strike (1833-34). Speakers include Kevin Horne (Orgreave Campaign), Matt Wrack (FBU) and Fran Heathcote (PCS). Organised by Derby Silk Mill Rally: [www.facebook.com/DerbySilkMillRally](http://www.facebook.com/DerbySilkMillRally).

## End the genocide - stop arming Israel

**Saturday June 8, 12.30pm:** National demonstration. Assemble Russell Square, London WC1. The government and the Labour leadership have provided support for Israel's genocide. They have blood on their hands. Demand a ceasefire now. Stop arming Israel. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [palestinecampaign.org/events](http://palestinecampaign.org/events).

## War, peace and Palestine - trade union issues

**Sunday June 9, 10.30am to 4.30pm:** Trade union conference, ITF House, 49-60 Borough Road, London SE1. Facing up to the warmongers and sharing experiences of building pro-Palestine initiatives in unions and workplaces. Tickets £10 (£5). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events).

## General election: what would Marx do?

**Thursday June 13, 7pm:** Online briefing introduced by Jack Conrad: 'Should we *still* support Labour like "the rope supports the hanged man"?' Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: [www.whymarx.com/sessions](http://www.whymarx.com/sessions).

## Free Palestine - stop arming Israel

**Saturday June 15, 10.30am:** National demonstration. Assemble Glasgow Green, Glasgow G1. Stop the spread of war: welfare, not warfare. Organised by Stop the War Scotland and Scottish CND: [www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=852638623574269](http://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=852638623574269).

## Stop the Counter Terror Expo

**Wednesday June 19, 9am:** Anti-arms fair protest, Excel Exhibition Centre, 1 Western Gateway, Royal Victoria Dock, London E16. These events promote the arms trade. Equipment on display is designed to kill, injure and enforce repression. Organised by London Campaign Against Arms Trade: [londoncaat.org.uk/events/protest-against-the-counter-terror-expo](http://londoncaat.org.uk/events/protest-against-the-counter-terror-expo).

## Restore the people's NHS

**Saturday June 22, 10am to 5pm:** Launch conference, London Irish Centre, 50-52 Camden Square, London NW1. Hear from activists, healthworkers and experts about fighting for a full restoration of the founding principles of the NHS. Registration £10 (£5). Organised by Keep Our NHS Public/Health Campaigns Together: [www.facebook.com/events/789812619952647](http://www.facebook.com/events/789812619952647).

## Tories out - fight for a workers' manifesto

**Saturday June 22, 11am to 4.30pm:** Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. An opportunity for union reps, members and activists to share experiences from struggles and to prepare for the battles that will follow after July 4. Registration £8. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: [www.facebook.com/events/2164260670591261](http://www.facebook.com/events/2164260670591261).

## Jarrow rebel town festival

**Saturday June 22, 11am:** Parade. Assemble pedestrian tunnel, Tyne Street, Jarrow NE32. Led by Felling Silver Band. Speakers include Arthur Scargill, Kate Osbourne MP and David Douglass. Followed by stalls and music at The Crown and Anchor, Chapel Road, Jarrow NE32. Organised by Jarrow Rebel Town Festival and Seven Lads of Jarrow: [ourjarrow.wordpress.com](http://ourjarrow.wordpress.com).

## Restore nature now

**Saturday June 22, 12 noon:** Demonstration. Assemble Park Lane, London W1. March to Parliament Square for rally and entertainment. One in six species in Britain are at risk of extinction. The nature and climate emergencies demand urgent political action. Organised by Restore Nature Now: [www.restorenaturenow.com](http://www.restorenaturenow.com).

## Stop the deportations, stop Rwanda

**Saturday June 29, 12 noon:** Demonstration. Assemble outside Unite House, 99 New Road, Hayes UB3. March to Colnbrook Detention Centre. Stop the snatch squads, close the detention camps. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: [www.facebook.com/events/806604534399911](http://www.facebook.com/events/806604534399911).

## Marxism 2024

**Thursday July 4 to Sunday July 7:** SWP annual school, university locations in Bloomsbury, London WC1. Over 100 sessions, including debates, live music, a culture tent and film screenings. Tickets: day £22.38 (£16.96), full event £44.04 (£27.80). Organised by Socialist Workers Party: [socialistworker.co.uk/marxismfestival](http://socialistworker.co.uk/marxismfestival).

## Durham Miners Gala

**Saturday July 13, 8am to 5pm:** Rally and labour movement festival, The Racecourse, Green Lane, Old Elvet, Durham DH1. Organised by Durham Miners Association: [www.facebook.com/events/343419915171132](http://www.facebook.com/events/343419915171132).

## 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.

**ELECTION**

# Muddying the message

In the end, Sir Keir bottled it and allowed Diane Abbott to stand, writes **Eddie Ford**. But will he have to pay a political price? Almost certainly, Sunak will exploit his dithering

**W**ill he, can she? In the end, of course - after endless rumours that she would be blocked - Sir Keir bottled it, with Labour's national executive committee finally announcing that Diane Abbott will be standing in the seat she has held for 37 years ahead of the deadline for nominations on June 7.

Previous to that, there had been the running story of Abbott versus Starmer, with the MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington at one point telling hundreds of supporters on the steps of Hackney town hall that she will use "any means necessary" to stand in the July 4 general election - obviously threatening to stand as an independent like her long-term friend and ally, Jeremy Corbyn, had been forced to do in neighbouring Islington North. Meanwhile, Starmer had been maintaining the fiction that whether she stood as an official Labour candidate or not had nothing to do with him (!), as it was entirely a decision for the 'independent' NEC - certainly not the local Labour Party in Hackney North, as it should be. But you were a fool if you believed any of that, as Starmer dominates the national executive and his courtiers will always do the king's bidding.

Reinforcing the impression that Starmer was playing a game with Abbott by spreading deliberate confusion, when she had the whip restored on May 28, he said she was "free to stand" as a Labour candidate despite spending days saying it was purely a matter for the NEC - but friends of Abbott said she had been fearing a "fait accompli" by elements around the leadership that would prevent her. In a further twist to the tale, before the NEC announcement she had angrily denied reports of being offered a seat in the House of Lords if she agreed to stand down - going on to tweet a link to an article in *The Guardian* by Starmer biographer Tom Baldwin headlined "Starmer on Abbott: 'I've actually got more respect for Diane than she probably realises'", with the words: "More lies from Starmer." She deleted the post shortly afterwards!

In fact, Yvette Cooper, the shadow home secretary, felt compelled to deny the stories that a string of Labour MPs had been offered peerages, so they would quit and make way for Starmer allies. It is worth mentioning that on the same day that Abbott was given the green light, Apsana Begum, despite speculation that she could be blocked, also found herself on the list of party candidates nodded through by the NEC. According to local party sources in her constituency of Poplar and Limehouse in east London, there had been 'active' conversations about parachuting in another candidate, but this was rejected because Labour headquarters had been "concerned" about the fallout if they deselected another minority ethnic woman - something that happened to Faiza Shaheen - which sounds plausible enough.

Hackney being a leftwing and highly multicultural constituency, with many voters of Turkish, African or Afro-Caribbean heritage, Abbott seems to get a warm reception everywhere she goes - the first black woman ever elected to parliament and the longest-serving black MP, getting re-elected in every general election since 1987. Of course, you can say the same about Jeremy Corbyn - a genuinely popular figure



**Diane Abbott: about politics, not race or gender**

in Islington North, known for being former Labour leader, champion of numerous international causes and for being an extraordinarily hard working MP.

## Racism?

Why were the Starmerites and those around them seemingly so intent on blocking Diane Abbott? Whatever some might say, it was not because she was black or a woman. However, having said that, you could argue that her sex and ethnicity were not irrelevant, when it came to choosing her in the first place. She replaced the sitting Labour MP, Ernie Roberts, another popular figure on the left - former assistant general secretary of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers and chair of the Unemployed Workers Charter, who died in 1994.

Anyway, by a narrow vote the CLP decided to retire Ernie with honours and instead select Diane - who had served as a press officer for the Greater London Council under Ken Livingstone in 1985-86, and was then head of press and public relations at Lambeth Council, before getting elected to Westminster City Council in 1982. She was active in the Labour Party Black Sections movement alongside Bernie Grant, Paul Boateng and Keith Vaz - figures that readers of this paper might well remember - but she lost out to Livingstone in 1985, when it came to the selection battle for Brent East. Given the nature of the constituency in Hackney North and Stoke Newington, and the understandable desire of the CLP to have a woman and a black MP, they did not find

it difficult to choose her - and, of course, she won with 48.7% of the vote.

As we all remember, Abbott was denied the whip over her stupid letter last April to *The Observer*, where she said that Jews, Romany gypsies and Irish travellers do not suffer lifelong racism - only black people do. She was subsequently issued with a formal warning for conduct "grossly detrimental" to the Labour Party and directed to complete some appalling online anti-Semitism awareness course run by none other than the Jewish Labour Movement - Zionists to a man and woman.

When you hear statements from the likes of Momentum and others on the left ascribing racism as the reason she was targeted, then it shows that these comrades have completely lost their political bearings - failing to understand that ideological (or institutional) anti-racism, has become a weapon deployed against the *left*, or those perceived to be on the left, especially when it is dressed up as the fight against 'anti-Semitism'.

We saw this very recently with Faiza Shaheen, who has quit the Labour Party following her deselection as its candidate for Chingford and Woodford Green, blaming a "hierarchy of racism" and claiming Keir Starmer's party had "a problem with black and brown people", when the real reason - as she essentially admits - was that she liked a series of tweets from over ten years ago that contained a list of companies to boycott in order to show solidarity with the Palestinians, and one from a US academic who talked about the "Israel lobby" - how

terrible! Now she is standing as an independent - good!

Either way, Keir Starmer and his faction were very reluctant to let Diane Abbott continue as an MP. Why? Because she has the wrong sort of *politics* - someone associated with the left in the popular imagination - Jeremy Corbyn's shadow home secretary, fellow member of the Socialist Campaign Group, and other such sins. It goes without saying that, if she had not been endorsed by the NEC, the left would have protested vociferously and the CPGB would certainly have supported her as an independent. Not because we have any illusions in her politics, which is hardly that of principled socialism, but simply - as it looks like Labour will win a solid majority - to spoil Sir Keir's party somewhat on July 4 by having a couple or three unwanted leftwingers elected.

Keir Starmer bottled it not because of pressure from the usual suspects on the left like Momentum and John McDonnell, but from the likes of Angela Rayner, who you

normally think of as belonging to the so-called centre - even some on the right raised their voices against the control-freakery. Hence the usual stuff about a bird needing two wings if it is to be successful - the realistic wing and the dreamers (though it was actually the 'hard left' Tony Benn who seems to have first come up with that metaphor).

## Vindictive

Starmer was also in danger of incurring the opprobrium of well-known black figures, including Lenny Henry, David Harewood, Afua Hirsch, Linton Kwesi Johnson, and Gary Younge. The Abbott affair prompted them to sign a damning open letter calling Labour's treatment of Abbott "disproportionate, undemocratic and vindictive", urging the party to "rectify and reverse" the "disrespectful" treatment of the MP from Hackney North.<sup>1</sup> The letter further points out that, given Labour's "recent embrace of others who have championed causes far more objectionable to its core values", the leadership's attitude towards Abbott "smacks of a disgraceful double standard" - the Labour leader does not particularly want to alienate that constituency.

On the other hand, Starmer might have to pay a political price for allowing Abbott to stand, though exactly how much and in what way is hard to calculate - but arguably it could be more costly than if he and the NEC had blocked her. You got Rishi Sunak instantly saying that it was Angela Rayner who really runs the Labour Party after her remark last week that she "doesn't see any reason" why Abbott could not run, now the party whip had been restored, and how the row over Abbott shows that Keir Starmer "constantly changes his mind".

After all, if you look at Starmer, what is his big selling point - indeed, his only selling point? It is not Tony Blair's third way or some bold vision of a new 'socialist' Britain like Clement Attlee, or the white heat of the technological revolution of a Harold Wilson. No, it can be summed up by one dull word - *change*. He has changed the Labour Party by moving it firmly to the right, and now he will change Britain.

But, with Diane Abbott standing for Labour again, he runs the risk of muddying the waters. You talked about 'purging' anti-Semitism, Sir Keir, but it is still there - nothing has changed, as you did not have the courage to shove her out! Expect to hear that message from Sunak and the Tories again and again. ●

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## Notes

1. [theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/may/30/leading-black-figures-criticise-labour-diane-abbott](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/may/30/leading-black-figures-criticise-labour-diane-abbott).

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LEFT

# Galloway's motley crew

## Economic nationalism and anti-war internationalism are combined together with social conservatism. Paul Demarty has a look at the Workers Party and its quirky slate of candidates

The sudden lurch into a general election campaign has occasioned a flurry of slightly hurried campaign launches, and on June 1 it was the turn of George Galloway and his Workers Party of Britain.

Speaking in Ashton-under-Lyne, the Greater Manchester constituency of Labour deputy leader Angela Rayner, Galloway used his launch event - unsurprisingly - to lay into Sir Kier Starmer, denounce his vacillations on the question of Israel's war in Gaza, and characterise him as a mere twin of the Conservatives: "I don't know if, asked to choose between this cheek or that cheek of an arse, that I have any preference," he quipped. Instead, "I want to boot that arse hard on 4 July in the general election." He was bullish, as any leader should be under the circumstances, asserting that he would be "extremely disappointed" to get anything less than a double-figure parliamentary fraction by the end of it.<sup>1</sup>

We suspect he is not *truly* that optimistic. He will do well to keep his own seat, of course; his victory in the recent Rochdale by-election was impressive, but it was, after all, a by-election, and one in which Labour found itself without a candidate after a series of calamitous screw-ups. In the general election, we would normally expect two-party polarisation to reassert itself under Britain's grotesquely undemocratic electoral system, and votes for Nigel Farage's Reform outfit to drift back to the Tories (although, now that the Cheshire Cat himself has decided to throw his hat into the ring, maybe less so), and Galloway's votes to go back to Labour. That is hardly an iron law: one obvious exception is the political fate of Scotland in the last decade, with the Scottish Nationalist Party achieving dominance over the Westminster delegation from Galloway's homeland. Is the Gaza war a 'black swan event' on the order of the 2014 independence referendum? Time will tell, but it seems unlikely.

### Raised eyebrows

The WPB has given itself something of a chance by at least getting together hundreds of candidates - something it was able to do in part because it was already furiously soliciting people for the job the moment Galloway got his breakthrough in Rochdale (the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition seems to be having a tougher time). It is difficult, at this point, to get much of a read on who these people are. A few have name recognition: Galloway himself, of course; Chris Williamson, formerly a Labour MP and standing in his old Derby seat; and Craig Murray, former British ambassador to Uzbekistan and anti-war veteran, will be standing in Blackburn. For a time, Monty Panesar, the former England cricketer, was to stand in Ealing Southall, but he dropped out after a week under intense media pressure.

Most of the other names on the list are not well-known, certainly beyond their localities (and perhaps within them too). In my own patch - Plymouth Sutton and Devonport - there is a Dr Guy Hayward, who seems to be a cardiology consultant with basically no political record. (His personal website mentions deforestation as a particular bugbear of his, and he is after all standing in a constituency which has not recently been kind to its trees ...)



Sworn into parliament: will it happen twice in 2024?

Some eyebrows were raised in Crewe and Nantwich, where the candidate is Phil Lane, the owner of a local pet supply business by the whimsical name of the Dog's Dinner. He is very concerned that an out-of-town mall is "suck[ing] customers away" and that a promised car park has yet to open.<sup>2</sup> It is not exactly the sort of stuff one would expect from a candidate for a workers' party, but rather typical of the outlook of the sort of well-meaning petty bourgeois he appears to be.

Assuming that Mr Lane is representative of at least part of this general election slate, it would suggest that George is back up to some of his old tricks. Long-time readers may remember the glory days of Respect - a strange alliance between Galloway, the Socialist Workers Party and some Islamist fragments, which ended up running a lot of council candidates in major cities who were essentially well-connected local businessmen from, mostly, south-Asian Muslim backgrounds. The *Weekly Worker's* Peter Manson had a lot of fun in those days interviewing such people on the ostensibly 'socialist' politics their party stood for. A certain Harun Miah, who stood for Respect in a council election in Shadwell in 2007, always stands out in the memory. What, comrade Manson asked, was his opinion on trade unions? "I do favour trade unionism. We need all the trade we can get!"<sup>3</sup>

There are already problems with the WPB from our point of view. For the *Weekly Worker*, both I and Carla Roberts have already discussed, in varying levels of detail, the lengthy and rather strange hodgepodge the party had already adopted as its electoral platform.<sup>4</sup> As with people like Sahra Wagenknecht in Germany, the WPB has positioned itself as 'socialistic' or left-social democratic, when it comes to domestic economic policy, and anti-war in international politics, but combined these straightforward leftwing positions with conservative criticisms of progressive social orthodoxies. Galloway has made a point of distancing himself from gay and transgender rights, particularly as they pertain to education.

In doing so, he signals his solidarity with conservative Islamic sentiment in many of his target seats, but then also oddly managed to Hoover up campaigners against 'grooming gangs', which overlaps with anti-Muslim sentiment in towns like Rochdale, where there have been major scandals on this front.

It has also been argued that taking reactionary positions on social issues could be a *deliberate* effort to scare off the existing left groups from signing up *en masse*, as often happens when an exciting new initiative pops up. After his bruising encounter with the SWP in Respect, he may want to make sure that he remains firmly in the driver's seat this time around.

### Politics

That is one reason why it is hard to recommend a vote across the board for the WPB. It will matter a great deal what a *particular* candidate is standing on in some constituency - which of the party's contradictory emphases they pick up.

The possibility of a whole crew of localist petty-bourgeois candidates of the Phil Lane/Harun Miah type is a particular case of this general problem; socialists should not usually involve themselves in the fate of pet food shops, however quaint. Our orientation is to the working class, which is defined by its reliance on the overall wage fund and therefore includes the unemployed, stay-at-home parents, and a whole bunch of proletarianised white-collar jobs - teachers, for instance - which are typically staffed by the university-educated progressives who will be rightly turned off by 'Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve' grousing.

Galloway instead seems to want to revive the politics of 'official communism', as it was before the old party became dominated by the Eurocommunists: a programme of quasi-autarkic national development, coupled with formal non-alignment in global politics - a sort of northern European Peronism. (This is, indeed, more or less the historic outlook of Galloway himself, who was long a fellow traveller and caused some controversy in the early 80s, when he proposed the affiliation of the 'official' CPGB to Labour.) This is intrinsically a cross-class politics, with 'good' productive national capital to be aligned with workers in pursuit of good, stable jobs. Economically speaking, the petty bourgeoisie proper are superfluous here, but as *political* representatives they can be useful: their intrinsic localism and dependence on the state makes them plausible ideologists for this kind of programme.

What is true for the WPB, of course, is even more true of the spate of 'pro-Palestine independents' who have announced candidacies (leaving aside cases where the 'independent' tag is simply dishonest, as in the

case of Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough's Maxine Bowler - in reality an SWP member). It is, of course, admirable on an individual level that people are prepared to run these campaigns and attempt to help Galloway and others boot that arse. It shows some moral fibre. But what are *their* programmes? Are they also petty bourgeois localists of some type? The WPB at least has a programme - a flawed and odd one, but you can read it and get a sense of your alignment with it. It is at least conceived as a party - so if you are aligned, you can join it, pay dues and maybe stand as a candidate.

Equally, however, none of these should be considered show-stoppers. No doubt some of these independents are supportable, and the same is true of some WPB candidates. The truth is we do not have a great set of options in front of us, and will not until the left starts to take common organisation *as communists* seriously. Until then, electoral tactics serve only to help us get what purchase we can on the major issues of high politics of the day.

Galloway's particular reactionary policies are to be fought against politically, not used as excuses for empty abstentionism. We have the policy of *critical* support available to us for a reason. It is particularly galling to see the SWP reaching for the smelling salts when Galloway offers another diatribe about trans issues, since it was not that long ago that the SWP was using its numbers to ensure Respect did not (for example) support abortion rights, all in the name of keeping George on side. The SWP leadership, as with sect leaderships generally, cannot cope with the idea of unity in spite of disagreements, of fighting issues out. Either you construct an illusion of perfect agreement, or you do the opposite, and treat particular contentious issues as indicative of *total* disagreement. To relinquish that framework would entail trusting the members to hold two ideas in their heads at once - a trust that has long been absent from the upper ranks of the SWP.

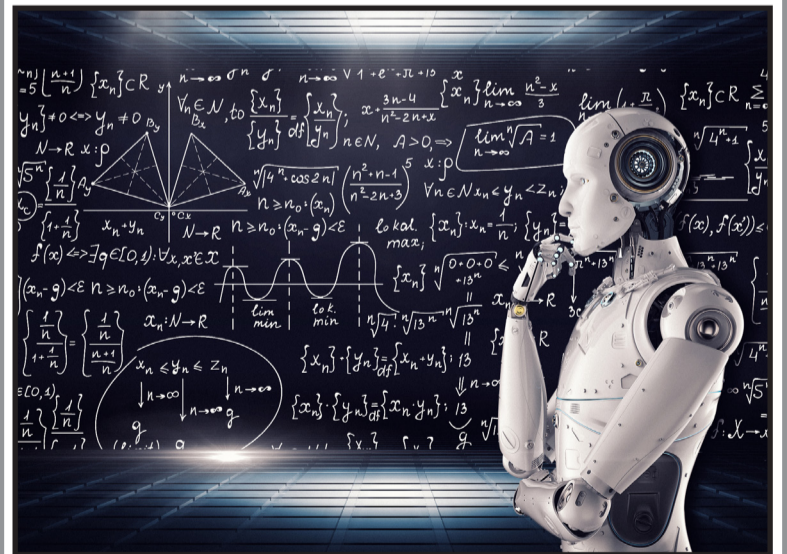
We should be on the lookout for supportable candidates in the WPB slate - people with some meaningful relationship to the working class movement, above all. However, we cannot abandon our critique of its nationalism, its sectionalism and its class collaborationism: ills, alas, to be found well beyond its own ranks ●

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### Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cxwwkrykv0zo.
2. crewe.nub.news/news/general-election-2024/general-election-2024-meet-the-crewe-and-nantwich-workers-party-candidate-230589.
3. 'Respect - the party for everybody' *Weekly Worker* August 1 2007 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/684/respect-the-party-for-everybody).
4. P Demarty, 'Selective memory syndrome' *Weekly Worker* April 18 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1487/selective-memory-syndrome); C Roberts, 'Third-period Bennisism' *Weekly Worker* May 9 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1490/third-period-bennisism).

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## POLEMIC

# Rising above the smog

Dual power and the mass strike is a failed strategy that directly leads to today's endlessly fragmented 'far left'. Instead we need a mass Communist Party and a strategy of republican democracy. **Mike Macnair** replies to Steve Bloom

This is in response to comrade Steve Bloom's article, 'Continuing a conversation' (*Weekly Worker* May 30). There is considerable obscurity in this discussion, so that significant disentangling is involved before we can get to clarity about the issues.

To start with, it would be nice to be able to just concede comrade Bloom's arguments about who is guilty of 'sloppy method', but to do so would miss important substantive points of difference. Comrade Bloom's original *Cosmonaut* article posed the issue of a mass-strike or 'dual power' approach to the question of power as an alternative to what he regards as the Marxist Unity Group's "schema" of fighting for the democratic republic as the form of workers' power. He footnoted the Luxemburg reference as follows:

I thought to include this reference to Luxemburg because in his comments to the recent MUG national congress Mike Macnair criticised Luxemburg's approach, explaining that by itself a mass strike cannot solve the question of political power. That's certainly true, but it strikes me as also quite beside the point. I have since listened again to the talk Macnair gave to the congress, which is available here, however, and do not find the reference. So I assume his comments about Luxemburg were in response to something raised in the question and discussion period. Without access to the video of that discussion I decided it was best to formulate the content of my article as a positive reference to Luxemburg rather than as a negative reference to something said by Macnair - which I am unable to check or document. But I do think it's important to highlight, for readers of *Cosmonaut*, the fact that this seems to be an area of disagreement, at least between Macnair and me.

In my original response to comrade Bloom ('Deal with the arguments' *Weekly Worker* February 22) I made the point that Googling "Mike Macnair Luxemburg" would produce as the *first* hit in response my 2012 article on the modern far left's use of Luxemburg, so that it is hard to see how comrade Bloom was "unable to check or document" my views on the issue. In addition, his polemic against MUG's use of a 'democratic republic' perspective is in itself a polemic against my arguments in the book *Revolutionary strategy*, which MUG routinely use as one of their points of reference.

The effect is that comrade Bloom argues that MUG are guilty of 'schematism' for failing to give sufficient weight to the mass-strike and dual power perspective as a road to workers' power; but he does not engage with the arguments explicitly against that perspective found in *Revolutionary strategy*, which MUG use as a reference point, or in my Luxemburg article, which would be found on a first attempt to "check or document" my oral comment on Luxemburg at the MUG convention. Actual disagreement can provoke debate, but to be useful it needs to engage with the arguments.

My argument has two sides to it. The first, in *Revolutionary strategy*,



Casper David Friedrich 'Wanderer above the sea of fog' (1818)

is that either an all-out general strike or a spontaneous mass strike wave dislocates the economy. In consequence, it immediately poses the question of what decision-making mechanisms alternative to capitalism will be used to overcome this dislocation. The spontaneous appearance of local workers' councils quite plainly does not do the job: witness umpteen examples, but very strikingly the Austrian *Räte* (workers' councils) calls on the leadership of the Social Democratic Party in 1918-19 to take planning decisions that would allow the local factories, etc, to keep running. (Of course, the SPÖ leadership, fearful of civil war and Italian intervention, told them to hand power back to the capitalists.) The Russian case is equally an example: it was the emergency-management 'planning' of *Sovnarkom*, the government set up in October 1917, which allowed bare survival of the Russian economy after the collapse of 1917. The usual consequence is that demoralisation leads to the return of power to capital.

The flipside of this point, which is not in *Revolutionary strategy*, is about the lessons of the Soviet experience itself. This is that planning without republicanism (that is, that republicanism demands that managers cannot be permanently in post), and without political democracy, produces incentives to managers and officials to lie to keep their jobs, leading in turn to 'garbage in, garbage out' in the plan, 'planning irrationalities' and mass demoralisation on a much deeper level.

The second point, which is in my 2012 Luxemburg article that comrade Bloom was "unable to check or document", is that the mass-strike strategy naturally entails a tendency to the production of small bureaucratic-centralist sects. In this

respect Luxemburg and Jogiches' Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, not Bolshevism, is the model of today's endlessly splintered bureaucratic-centralist 'far left' groups. The reason is that the tasks given to the party by this conception are tasks of tactical leadership, which are inconsistent with permitting effective autonomy to local groups or sectoral fractions.

Comrade Bloom in 'Continuing a conversation' argues:

... the mass strike/dual power phenomenon has, in fact, generated the potential for socialist revolution multiple times during the history of the 20th and even the 21st century, but without effectively leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat, because a revolutionary leadership for the mass strike was lacking. Thus the absence of widespread success cannot reasonably be attributed to a flaw in the theory that this is one possible road to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

But the problem posed is: what would be "a revolutionary leadership for the mass strike"? The answer, in fact, is that such a leadership would have to offer a political project for the society as a whole - not a mass-strikerist project.

Witness positively Bolshevism, which had pursued an electoral path in 1912 and pursued an electoral path - again - in 1917 in the soviets (and in local elections), down to the moment at which, judging that they had a majority together with their allies, they kicked out the remaining Provisional Government in October. Witness negatively every single other case of a broad mass-strike movement with the presence of a far-left group or groups aiming to apply

a dual-power strategy.

## USFI's failure

I went on to argue that comrade Bloom's 'anti-schematism' was the common coin of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International's response to the Cuban revolution, in the 1960s - but that this 'anti-schematist' response produced practical political tailism - albeit the people tailed by the FI majority and by the US Socialist Workers Party - the Argentinian Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores and their co-thinkers were different. I argued that the problem with comrade Bloom's argument is that, as a matter of scientific method, "the disproof by empirical evidence of 'classical Trotskyism' stops with the Cuban revolution and goes no further".

Comrade Bloom responded in his letter (April 18) that he

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 "schematism" of the FI's historical self-conception. But a wrong turn by the FI majority in the name of combating schematism hardly justifies a subsequent rejection of any and all efforts to combat it.

I replied (Letters, April 25), making casually the point that in the 1980s-90s I was not aware of comrade Bloom's opposition, because of the anti-democratic organisational practice of the leadership of the British section of the FI. I also (and more substantively) said:

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

Comrade Bloom responded to these points in his May 30 article ('Continuing a conversation') by turning back on me the criticism of 'sloppy method' in my original article:

I am 'guilty' (if that is the right word) of not being aware of Mike's collected works and, therefore, failing to check them for a relevant quote about Rosa Luxemburg before I submitted my original article to *Cosmonaut*.

I do not in the least expect comrade Bloom to be "aware of Mike's collected works". But he in the first place said that he was "unable to check or document" my views on Luxemburg orally expressed, which would be found in writing in the *first* hit of a Google search; and he polemicalises against MUG's 'schematist' failure to take the mass-strike perspective seriously, while not following up the arguments the *MUG themselves* cite against the mass-strike perspective.

In contrast, comrade Bloom argues that "Mike, for his part, is likewise 'guilty' of not being aware of my role in opposition to the 'broad mass party' line, while I was part of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International leadership starting in the 1980s. Mike, too, could easily have discovered this."

However, this simply fails to address my April 25 point that the "polemic in my [February 22]

article was not mainly about the 1980s-2000s, but that comrade Bloom's argument for 'anti-schematism' was the common view of his and my own youth in the 1960s-70s USFI and its response - which he cited - to the Cuban revolution".

Comrade Bloom comes to a point of substance when he argues that "Mike needs to remember that the trajectory of the US Socialist Workers Party during the 1960s and 70s, in which I got my training as a young activist, was not the same as what he lived through 'in the 1960s-70s USFI.'" But I said, explicitly, that the *common* response of both the 'International Secretariat' majority and the SWP to the Cuban revolution, which grounded the 1963 'reunification' of the USFI, was 'anti-schematist' and *as such and logically* led to political tailism. During the 1970s, the SWP and its co-thinkers tailed Fatah on the Palestine question and the ANC on South Africa, characterising the FI majority's support for left critics of these nationalist leaderships as ultra-left. In the Portuguese revolution of 1974-76, while the FI majority tailed the Communist Party of Portugal and the Maoists in their support for leftist officers in the Armed Forces Movement, the SWP and the Morenistas tailed the Portuguese Socialist Party's call for a government based on the Constituent Assembly. Tailism thus affected both sides of the USFI - although, apart from both sides tailing the Cubans, they chose different political actors to be tailed.

## Schematism

I argue that the concept of 'schematism' as a negative judgment on political projects is useless and anti-scientific, because the 'anti-schematist' analysis *forces* untestability, since a 'non-schematic' analysis, being essentially agnostic, can make no claims that might be testable. Comrade Bloom says: "I admit that I am perplexed by this assertion."

The question is: what is the difference between a schema (bad thing) and a hypothesis, or (better) a building plan, an engineering design, or a medical treatment plan (all good things)? In his original critique of MUG on the topic, comrade Bloom wrote:

What is 'schematism'? It's a process of thought which elevates our theoretical models (schemas) of what we expect a social process to look like and thereby blinds us to a proper assessment and understanding of whatever real processes might actually unfold in life, since revolutions in the real world generally fail to match our theoretical expectations. The clearest historical illustration is 'third-camp' currents, which, after 1959, considered the Cuban revolution and said: 'These events do not fit the model that our theory tells us a socialist revolution should adhere to. We therefore conclude that this is not a socialist revolution ...'

Just like scientists in any field we compare our theories to the actual experiences we have with whatever realities we are theorising about and trying to influence, understanding full well as materialists that experience trumps theory whenever there is a conflict. We therefore always need to be adjusting our theories based on our experience.

What comrade Bloom actually proposes, therefore - "We ... *always* need to be adjusting our theories based on our experience" (my emphasis) is in fact empiricism *without* theory,

because a theory that is *always* being adjusted to "experience" is not even a hypothesis. In my February 22 article, I wrote:

In scientific reason, prior theories are disproved by adverse evidence to the extent that a superior theory that explains the data with equal or greater economy of explanatory structures is produced. But 'anti-schematism' actually refuses to attempt to construct an alternative theory. It operates to deny the possibility of future experimental testing of theories.

And on the specific case of Cuba, I wrote:

From this point of view it is in my opinion clear that the 'sectarian' opponents of the USFI in 1963 (Healy, Lambert, Robertson, Wohlforth, etc), and the 'official communists' and Maoists, were both right (as against the USFI) in understanding that what was involved in Cuba was an extension of the 'socialist bloc', creating a regime of the same type, albeit a bit 'softer' than the USSR (as was also true of Yugoslavia); not a 'third way'. The fact that the 'sectarian Trotskyists' did not positively solve the theoretical problem this posed for 'orthodox Trotskyism' does not affect this. Hence, comrade Bloom's USFI argument falls to the ground: the various roads to the extension of the 'socialist bloc' led not to the dictatorship of the proletariat (working class rule), but to a blind alley necessarily ending in capitalist restoration.

In his last article, comrade Bloom asks:

Was the international Trotskyist movement, when confronted with the Chinese and Cuban revolutions, stuck in a schema of the Russian model (soviet power) as the one and only true road to the dictatorship of the proletariat, yes or no?

The answer to this question is clear from the passage just quoted from my previous article: No.

Pre-1948 Trotskyism was not "a schema of the Russian model (soviet power) as the one and only true road to the dictatorship of the proletariat". Trotsky personally and explicitly polemicalised against the fetishism of the soviet model both in *In defence of October*, and in his writings on the Spanish revolution. The FI was an organisation founded on the decisions of the first four congresses of Comintern, plus rejection of 'socialism in one country' and 'national roads to socialism' and of the people's front project, and the assertion of 'permanent revolution', meaning that the democratic revolution against colonialism, fascism, etc would inherently pose the question of the socialist revolution; and 'political revolution' - ie, the overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucratic dictatorship in the USSR, while preserving the nationalisations, the state monopoly of foreign trade, and the plan.

The post-war extension of the 'socialist bloc' produced an extremely widespread belief on the left that Trotskyism was simply wrong, and 'official communism' with the people's front, socialism in one country and national roads to socialism was right. Trotskyism was marginalised; and a good many former Trotskyists went over to 'official communism'. Cuba was another such case. This was a scientifically defensible approach: it treated Trotskyism as a hypothesis or plan of action that

had been disproved. The trouble with this view today is that (unless you believe China is a 'socialist country') 'official communism' as a hypothesis or plan of action has now also been disproved by the fall of the 'socialist camp'.

An alternative scientifically defensible response was to offer some explanation of the expansion of the 'socialist camp' that did not amount to its being a road to the global dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism. A wide variety of such explanations were offered, *some* of which were 'third camp' ones (as comrade Bloom puts it), while others (eg, James Robertson and Shane Mage of what became the Spartacists) were not. This was also a scientifically defensible response: it offered theoretical explanations for the unpredicted phenomena. Most of these theories were also disproved by the fall of the 'socialist camp'.

What was *not* a scientifically defensible response was the common position of the USFI - to 'recognise' Cuba as a 'socialist revolution', but not to give a theoretical explanation of what, in this case, had to be rejected in Trotskyism as a hypothesis or plan of action. This was to substitute a commitment to agnosticism, which *logically entailed* tailism.

Comrade Bloom asks:

Was a majority of the Bolshevik Party, at the start of the April 1917 congress, stuck (for the moment, at least) in the schema that the Russian Revolution must, inevitably, pass through the stage of a 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' (by which the Bolsheviks meant a bourgeois-democratic dictatorship), yes or no?

The answer is plainly 'no', irrespective of comrades' views of Lars T Lih's work on April 1917, arguing that it was not a fundamental reorientation (which comrade Bloom rejects), because, as Lenin put it in 1919,

Our victory was made easier by the fact that in October 1917 we marched with the peasants, with all the peasants. In that sense, our revolution at that time was a bourgeois revolution. The first step taken by our proletarian government was to embody in a law promulgated on October 26 (old style) 1917, on the next day after the revolution, the old demands of all the peasants, which peasant soviets and village assemblies had put forward under Kerensky. That is where our strength lay; that is why we were able to win the overwhelming majority so easily. As far as the countryside was concerned, our revolution continued to be a bourgeois revolution, and only later, after a lapse of six months, were we compelled within the framework of the state organisation to start the class struggle in the countryside, to establish Committees of Poor Peasants, of semi-proletarians, in every village, and to carry on a methodical fight against the rural bourgeoisie.<sup>2</sup>

In 1921, of course, the government had to back off from the "methodical fight against the rural bourgeoisie" in face of peasant resistance. But it is clear that the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' was a workable strategic line for a country that was between 70% and 80% peasant and only about 5% proletarian;<sup>3</sup> and the adjustments made in April, as Lenin's 1919 comment shows, did not amount to the abandonment of this strategic line. If the Bolsheviks had started

with principled agnosticism about the shape of the revolution, like the USFI's common response to Cuba, they would not have got far enough before 1917 for their adjustments in 1917 to matter.

This relates to a point in comrade Bloom's original *Cosmonaut* articles that I did not address in my reply. In his September 2023 article, 'A practical roadmap for the workers' movement in taking political power', he said:

In Russia, for example, the expropriation of the expropriators began before the October revolution - especially in the countryside - and the mass political mobilisation of the workers and peasants that was the basis of that revolution depended on this process of economic expropriation as an essential stimulus.<sup>4</sup>

But the peasant land seizures in summer-autumn 1917 were in substance a *jacquerie* against the landlord class, like 1789-91 in France, *establishing* private (peasant) property - as Lenin put it, a bourgeois revolution. They were not a measure of socialisation or the 'expropriation of the expropriators', which referred to the expropriation of *capital* after capital itself had previously expropriated the peasants and artisans.

## Democracy

Comrade Bloom offers three reasons for characterising the liberal-constitutionalist regimes of the 'west' as "bourgeois democracy" rather than, as I do, as liberal regimes, mixed constitutions or plutocratic oligarchies. The first is the working class's interest in the difference between liberal and authoritarian regimes. The second is that the word, 'democracy', is taken by broad masses to mean the liberal-constitutionalist regimes of the 'west', and using it in any other way would involve more or less elaborate explanations. The third is that *not* using the term, 'bourgeois democracy', cuts us off from the usage of the left: "Without it no-one can properly comprehend the previous history of the Marxist movement. It is a concept/term that underlies a great many of the discussions and debates that have taken place over the last century and a half."

To take these points in reverse order. The "century and a half" is flatly mistaken. The 'bourgeois democracy' usage appears around 1900 - most clearly in Karl Kautsky's *The social revolution and the day after the social revolution*.<sup>5</sup> This usage *cuts us off* from the prior usage of 'democracy' by Marx, Engels and others. It also cuts us off from the classical conceptions of 'democracy', as in Aristotle - or, for that matter, Abraham Lincoln's "government of the people, by the people, for the people", which the USA certainly is not. Yes, we should recognise the changed usage of the left. But we should do so with caution, not treat it as dispositive.

Second, the mass confusion round the meaning of 'democracy' and the need to explain our usage is no different - as comrade Bloom himself says - from the case of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' (working class rule over the bourgeoisie and middle classes in the transition to socialism). And it is also no different from the cases of 'communism' and 'socialism', both of which are currently taken by broad masses to mean the bureaucratic regimes of the 'Soviet bloc' before 1991. We cannot escape the need to fight for our own interpretation of the meaning of words.

Third. Comrade Bloom's

first reason for using 'bourgeois democracy' is that:

'Bourgeois democracy' is, indeed, 'democratic', if we are making a comparison to other forms of bourgeois rule - fascism or military dictatorship. The difference between a capitalist class that rules by 'democratic' means and one that relies on brute force is not trivial. It is worth fighting for in the streets, because things like the right to free speech, to assemble in mass demonstrations, to run candidates in elections, to create labour unions and other mass organisations - genuine democratic rights that characterise 'bourgeois democracy' (and only 'bourgeois democracy' as a form of bourgeois class rule) - are important for us, as we struggle to make the socialist revolution.

The trouble is that this approach - which is absolutely standard among Trotskyists - confuses the interests of the working class with those of the capitalist class and flattens what are very varying *degrees* to which capitalist regimes permit these rights. Yes, the working class certainly needs free speech, freedom of assembly, the right to stand in elections and freedom of association (and a whole load of other 'pro-democratic' rights too). But the extent to which 'bourgeois democracies' allow these rights is variable.

Trade unions were legalised in Britain in 1875, in the USA in 1935. Before then criminal prosecution was commonplace; in the USA, the violence of the 'Pinkerton men' was another repressive measure. McCarthyism in the 1950s, and today the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt, deny freedom of speech. The coming general election in the UK, called at short notice, denies many leftists the right to stand in elections under party names, because the electoral commission, created by the Blair government, sets up elaborate bureaucratic hoops to register (and simply bans some parties from standing under their own name, like the CPGB and the Socialist Party in England and Wales, while refusing to give reasons unless these parties are willing to spend £70,000-£100,000 in judicial review costs). And this is much less restrictive than the ballot access laws in the USA. And so on.

Conversely, dictatorial regimes may allow small loopholes, through which the workers' movement may crawl to defend its interests. The tsarist regime is a classic example, but there were also many cases in the military regimes of the 'cold war' period.

It is merely confusing to give the name, 'bourgeois democracy', to the concessions of legality and rights of one sort or another that the working class has extorted from the capitalist class. We have to fight clearly and unambiguously for *our* interest in political democracy ●

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## Notes

1. Referenced at various points in O Bauer *The Austrian revolution* London 1925.
2. 'Report on bourgeois democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat' *First Congress of the Comintern*.
3. D Moon, 'Estimating the peasant population of late imperial Russia from the 1897 census: a research note' *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol 48 (1996), pp141-53 (the variation depends on the definition of 'peasant'). According to encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/labour\_russian\_empire, the proletariat had nine million of a total population in 1914 of 164 million, which would be around 5%.
4. *cosmonautmag.com/2023/09/a-practical-roadmap-for-the-workers-movement-in-taking-political-power*
5. It is not, in fact, Kautsky's consistent usage. See B Lewis (trans) *Karl Kautsky on democracy and republicanism* Chicago 2020.

## USA

# Another step towards the abyss

Donald Trump is now a convicted felon, but still looks set to win in November. Daniel Lazare warns that some kind of civil war beckons

America's long-running constitutional crisis rose another notch last week, when a Manhattan jury found Donald Trump guilty of 34 felony counts in the Stormy Daniels hush-money trial.

"The rule of law being applied to Trump is good," announced *Jacobin*, the online magazine that our Jim Creegan once described as the closest thing to a "flagship publication" that the Democratic Socialists of America have to offer.<sup>1</sup>

The DSA, of course, is the pseudo-socialist outfit that is desperate to become part of the Democratic establishment, even though 99% of elected Democrats will not touch it with a 10-foot pole. A *Jacobin* seal of approval was therefore expected, since the magazine is still backing Biden in November despite attacking him on a near-daily basis in the meantime.

But it makes zero sense regardless. One reason has to do with the rule of law itself - a hoary old liberal cliché that takes the relationship between law and political democracy and gets it exactly backwards. Since law is something that "We, the people" use to implement and expand their authority, rule of law is no more coherent than rule by any other instrument or tool - shovels or perhaps darned needles. But popular sovereignty does not mean government of, by and for the law. Rather, it means government of, by and for the *people*, who then create a legal structure for their own purposes.

But another reason is that the US law is a mess even by bourgeois-liberal standards. Supposedly, the American people are sovereign. That is what the preamble - the famous paragraph that opens with the words, "We, the people" - says. But the rest of America's sacred constitution says the opposite. It nips popular sovereignty in the bud by locking the people into a governing structure that is effectively frozen in time. Back in 1790, thanks to the complicated amending clause set forth in article V, four out of 13 states, representing as little as 9.8% of the population, could block any constitutional reform sought by the remainder. More than two centuries later, the percentage is down to just 4.4, which means that veto power now rests with just one person in 22 or 23.

A complicated governing structure dating from the days of silk knee britches and powdered wigs is thus set in stone. With its chronic gridlock and multiple minority choke points, the system fairly cries out for reform. Yet, the more it deteriorates, the more unlikely reform becomes. Americans are prisoners of a system that is beyond their control.

This is why faith in government, criminal justice included, is plunging. According to a 2019 survey, the number of Americans who say they are very confident in judges, juries, and state and local courts has fallen to between 36% and 38% - a record low. Some 66% think that the courts are too political while 70% agree that they favour the rich.<sup>2</sup>

That is a damning judgment by two-thirds of the country or more. So, while social democrats are thrilled by the Trump verdict, ordinary voters are less impressed. Indeed, one poll found that the needle had barely budged. "Just over half the country thought Trump was guilty before the verdict," CBS News reported, "and now just over half think the jury



Taking the oath: will it happen again in January 2025?

reached the right verdict and that the trial was fair."<sup>3</sup>

Instead of striking a blow for justice, the verdict merely compounded the deadlock that is now tearing the country apart.

But there is a third reason why *Jacobin's* faith in the rule of law is unwarranted. It is because the hush-money case is so weak. Alvin Bragg, the Manhattan district attorney who brought it, ran for election on a 'Get Trump' platform in 2021. Juan Merchan, the judge who presided over it, is a Biden supporter whose daughter, Loren Merchan, heads a Democratic political consulting firm whose clients include such top Dems as Adam Schiff - the congressman who served as chief prosecutor in Trump's first impeachment trial and is now using the hush-money case to raise money for his bid to become the next senator from California.

"It is a sombre moment, and unprecedented for a former president to be indicted, but his alleged offences are also unprecedented," moaned the neocon foreign-policy hawk from Los Angeles - a man who gives new meaning to the word 'oleaginous'.

## Securing defeat

As for the charges themselves, they are nothing if not a stretch. The trouble began in 2016, when Trump used personal funds to buy the silence of various individuals claiming to have embarrassing tales to tell in the closing weeks of the presidential campaign. One was a doorman who said Trump had fathered a child out of wedlock. Another was a former *Playboy* model, who claimed to have engaged him in an extra-marital affair. A third was porn star Stormy Daniels, who claimed to have slept with Trump during a celebrity golf tournament in Nevada in 2006.

Trump paid Daniels \$130,000 to keep quiet about an encounter he continues to deny. The prosecution says he then listed the payment in his business records as a legal expense. Even if true, the falsification is a misdemeanour for which the statute of limitations has long since expired. But Bragg was able to get around that obstacle by charging Trump with

committing one crime in furtherance of another that was more serious. As Judge Merchan explained to the jury, this was using the money "to unlawfully influence the 2016 presidential election".

There would have been no problem if Trump had merely used his powers of persuasion to convince Daniels to stay mum. But, because he used money, there was. Ironically, Jack Smith, the prosecutor leading the anti-Trump charge in the federal courts, brought a remarkably similar case against John Edwards - a Democratic senator from North Carolina who in 2004 launched a short-lived presidential bid. Smith charged Edwards in 2011 with using more than \$900,000 in campaign contributions to buy the silence of a woman with whom he had had an extramarital relationship and had fathered a child. But the case fizzled out, when a jury found Edwards not guilty of federal campaign-finance violations.<sup>4</sup>

Now Trump has been convicted of essentially the same offence, even though he used his own money rather than campaign funds contributed by others. So, given Bragg's obvious bias, Merchan's conflicts of interest and the 'all or nothing' feeling among Dems that no trick is too underhand if it helps Biden win another term, it is hard to imagine a more political prosecution.

As Trump declared at a press conference the day after conviction, "The only way they think they can win this election is by doing exactly what they're doing right now: win it in the courts because they can't win it at the ballot box."

Quite right. Still, what is remarkable about the legal strategy is how badly it is backfiring. Instead of cutting his lead, it is boosting support among voters turned off by the Democrats' all-too-obvious misuse of the legal system. Voters figure that anyone who earns the enmity of media moguls, Hollywood liberals and neocon warmongers must be doing something right. So they are rallying around a bourgeois rebel whose anti-immigrant tirades are growing more and more fascist and unhinged by the day.

But that is liberalism's function in a period of capitalist decline. Instead of fighting the ultra-right, it smoothes the way for its takeover. After endless congressional hearings, a special prosecutor, two impeachments, four criminal indictments, civil judgments for business fraud and sexual abuse, and now a criminal conviction, the only result is that Trumpism is more powerful than ever.

## Lawfare

America is hardly the only country in which 'lawfare' is leading to disaster. Pakistan's Islamist opposition got there first by forcing Imran Khan, the cricket star turned prime minister, out of office in April 2022 and then obtaining a legal judgment banning him from ever running again.

Following an assassination attempt a few months later, Khan was again arrested and sentenced to 20 years on charges ranging from corruption to entering into a marriage in violation of Islamic law.<sup>5</sup> Were the charges trumped up or not? The dysfunctional state of the Pakistani legal system makes it unclear. But there is not the slightest doubt as to the aim. It is to sideline Khan once and for all despite polls showing that he is still the favourite.

Then there is Ukraine, where then-president Viktor Yanukovich put Yulia Tymoshenko, his long-time political nemesis, on trial in 2011 for misuse of public funds. Although Tymoshenko received a seven-year sentence, it is again unclear whether the charges were warranted or not. But Ukraine is such a swamp of corruption, it is hard to believe that anyone's hands are clean.

Yet the only thing Yanukovich accomplished was to spark a rightwing rebellion three years later that sent him packing, even as it exonerated Tymoshenko and tipped the country in the direction of civil war.

Now the United States is doing the same. While hardly in the same class as Ukraine, the US is subject to many of the same forces. It is awash with corruption, riven by political extremism, geographically polarised, and gripped by a growing social crisis with which it is unable

to cope. But that is not all. Like Trump, Volodymyr Zelensky is also an ex-TV star who scored so big with *Servant of the people* - a hit series about a high-school teacher who is suddenly vaulted into the presidency - that he decided to form a party with the same name and get himself elected president in real life.

*Servant of the people* boosted Zelensky just as *The apprentice* boosted Trump. When government is dysfunctional, fantasy takes over and the lines between politics and entertainment grow blurred. In Ukraine, voters ultimately wound up with a Russian invasion as a consequence. In the United States, they are likely to wind up with rightwing authoritarianism, mass round-ups (Trump is vowing to expel 11 million illegal aliens), growing restrictions on abortion, plus other horrors to boot.

Not surprisingly, outraged Republicans contributed \$53 million to the Trump campaign within 24 hours of the verdict being announced. Computers crashed as online records were shattered. National Republican leaders condemned the verdict so vociferously that *The New York Times* said it was now "clear that Republicans across the country would not run away from [Trump's] newfound status as a felon", but "would, instead, run on it" - "the base has never been more motivated," a Texas Republican announced. Trump is "more than just an individual," Speaker of the House Mike Johnson added. "He's a symbol of fighting back against this government corruption, the deep state, the bureaucracy and all the rest."<sup>6</sup>

So civil war is brewing in the US as well. With sentencing set for July 11, it seems unlikely that Merchan will force Trump to do "hard time". The charge is so petty that prison seems unlikely. But, after being called "crooked ... totally conflicted ... a devil", it is plain that the judge's patience with Trump is at an end. So jail is not completely out of the question.

Questions are swirling in response. With the Republican National Convention set to begin in Milwaukee just four days later, will Trump give his acceptance speech from inside a cell? Since he is entitled to Secret Service protection as an ex-president, will armed agents follow him inside, where they may potentially clash with armed prison guards? What happens if he is elected? Will he take the oath of office behind bars? Will he meet with his cabinet in between meeting with his parole officer?

No-one knows. Instead of a bang or a whimper, the US system is ending with the hilarity of a TV sitcom ●

## Notes

1. jacobin.com/2024/05/trump-law-criminal-conviction-presidents. For Jim Creegan's comments, see 'Walking the tightrope' *Weekly Worker* March 22 2018: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1195/walking-the-tightrope.
2. willowresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Public\_Confidence\_in\_US\_Courts.pdf.
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# MIDDLE EAST



## Breaking the grip of Zionism

There is a way out of the hell into which the Palestinian masses have been consigned by Israeli settler-colonialism. Jack Conrad presents the communist solution

**H**amas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, has not been destroyed by Israel, that despite an eight-month military onslaught on the Gaza Strip. Though well over 36,000 Palestinians have been killed - doubtless including many Hamas leaders, cadre and rank and file militants - its standing is probably higher than ever. Recruits are flocking to join and not only in Gaza but on the West Bank too ... and, revealingly, fighting keeps erupting in parts of Gaza supposedly cleared of Hamas fighters.

Does that mean Israel is losing its war as claimed by various opposition MPs in the Knesset? Or that Israel "cannot win"? That would be true if the war aims of Benjamin Netanyahu, his war cabinet and his Likud-led coalition were really about destroying Hamas militarily and bringing home all its war captives. However, in truth, that was never the intention.

Netanyahu is many things. But he is no fool. His war aims were never about destroying Hamas, not even militarily. Its social roots are far too deep for that. Certainly the war captives are little more than a nuisance for Netanyahu when it comes to Israel's domestic politics. He knows it and so do their tens of thousands of relatives, friends and supporters who took to the streets of Tel Aviv on June 1 ... and many times before that.

If you really want the war captives back from the tunnels, tents and bomb shelters of Gaza, then negotiations with Hamas would be an absolute priority. And destroying Hamas and negotiating with Hamas are, to put it mildly, mutually incompatible.

No, the *real* war aim of Netanyahu, his war cabinet and his Likud-led coalition is to uproot the entire Palestinian population in Gaza in what is yet another ghastly step towards realising the Zionist dream of a Greater Israel. That means, when the opportunity arises, expelling as many Palestinians as possible, a second Nakba, the obvious route being a forced exodus into Egypt's Sinai. Israel now, of course, controls

the Philadelphi Corridor.

As for those who refuse to countenance the prospect of life in the Sinai desert as an impoverished refugee, well the Netanyahu government, not least its Bezael Smotrich (National Religious Party) and Itamar Ben-Gvir (Otzma Yehudit) components, are more than prepared to preside over a genocide by omission: denying food, water, medicines and basic sanitation facilities.

Seen in that context it is clear that while Israel has not achieved its *real* war aims, it has taken them forward and to some considerable degree at that. Indeed what holds Israel back from pressing home its overwhelming military advantage is less Hamas resistance fighters, more geostrategic considerations, not least public opinion in the Arab world, in the United States and globally.

A second Nakba certainly risks the destabilisation of regimes such as in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. Indeed a second Nakba could easily see Genocide Joe losing in November as Arab-Americans and progressive Americans in general refuse to come out and vote for him. Hence, the recently announced Biden plan for peace in Gaza, has, surely, more to do with the possible outcome of this year's presidential race than with delivering a workable end to the Israel-Gaza war.

And despite Netanyahu's occasional bluster, the entire spectrum of Zionist opinion in Israel is acutely aware that US support is vital: it could easily, at a stroke, stop the delivery of artillery shells, bombs, missiles and the stream of replacement parts needed for tanks and fighter aircraft - if they are to be kept fit for purpose. Of course, the US will not do that. Biden fervently supports Israel, not out of sentiment, but because of US state interests in having a reliable attack dog in the Middle East ... but he doesn't want it 'going too far' and creating total chaos, including unleashing an unplanned war with Iran, which would, surely, have all sorts of unintended consequences.

**David Ben-Gurion  
proclaiming Israeli  
independence in 1948  
under the watchful portrait  
of Zionism's founding  
father, Theodor Hertzl**

**In 1920 Ben-Gurion assisted  
in the formation of  
Histadrut, the Zionist Labor  
Federation in Palestine.  
With its votes, money and  
organisation, Labor Zionism  
became the dominant  
political force till the late  
1970s**

Trump is another matter. He wants Israel to 'finish the job' in Gaza. He wants more annexations on the West Bank. He wants Iran much reduced, preferably shattered into national fragments ... and denuclearised. Of course, Israeli hawks, including Netanyahu himself, noisily clamour for a 'pre-emptive' strike. But while Netanyahu undoubtedly prays on his knees every night for a Trump victory, today he has to deal with the reality of the Biden administration ... and its restraints.

It appears to be true that the part desperate, part audacious, October 7 attack caught Israel completely unawares. An intelligence failure of monumental proportions ... not surprisingly leading to speculation that Netanyahu and his cronies were in some way complicit in allowing the whole thing to happen. It was, after all, a year in the preparation. Yet warnings were consistently ignored. Hamas military commanders were themselves certainly surprised by the ability of their fighters to go way beyond what had been originally planned as a suicide operation. Expectations were of something like an 80% casualty rate. Military targets, IDF outposts, police stations, thereby gave way to a random, totally pointless, killing of innocent civilians ... and baseless stories of beheading babies and mass rapes.

October 7 did, though, provide the political cover needed to excuse an onslaught on Gaza (and upping settler and IDF violence in the West Bank). True, Israeli public opinion has been deeply divided between what we might call the peace party and the war party. Nonetheless, the war party commands a Knesset majority and Netanyahu himself has every reason to keep the war going on all the way up to Tuesday November 5 and way beyond that. He wants to keep his coalition together, he wants to stay out of jail, he wants a Greater Israel.

Zionists, and not only the far-right nationalist and religious, envisage a Greater Israel incorporating both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Some even hanker after a greater Greater Israel - based on various

biblical passages: Genesis, Numbers, Ezekiel. At its largest extent their Eretz Israel stretches from the Nile to the Euphrates.<sup>3</sup> Of course, any such an Israel would come with a poisoned chalice. An oppressed Arab *majority*. The Zionist conquistadors would have to permanently deny them elementary democratic rights. That or the newly acquired Arab population would have to be driven out in their many millions.

Present-day Israel results from and is predicated on expansion. The *aliyah* (in Hebrew 'ascent' - or migration to Israel) constitutes a fundamental part of the Zionist project and is enshrined in Israel's 'law of return' (enacted by the Knesset in July 1950). Any Jew, no matter where they live, no matter how dubious their Jewish antecedents, has the legal right to assisted settlement in Israel, as well as automatic citizenship.

A heterogeneous mixture of the genuinely desperate, the cruelly duped, secular dreamers, religious fanatics and cheap adventurers have come to the promised land over the years. Between 1948 and 1992 Israel took in 2,242,500 Jewish migrants. The bulk from eastern Europe - displaced by World War II - the centres of Jewry in the Arab world and the Soviet Union. Nowadays, however, the flow of migrants has reduced to a mere trickle: mainly they come from the former Soviet Union, North America and Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, some 85% of Ethiopia's Jewish population, the Falasha or Habashim, have gone to Israel under the law of return. Today there are 160,000 Israelis of Ethiopian origin. Though many bitterly complain of discrimination and that amongst Jews they occupy the lowest economic position, there can be no doubt that since 1985 the Israeli state has gone to extraordinary lengths to facilitate their migration and subsequent assimilation. In 1984-85 alone 10,000 Ethiopian Jews, victims of famine, were airlifted to Israel via Sudan in Operation Moses.

Israel needs people. Or, put more accurately, Israel needs *Jewish*

# MIDDLE EAST

people. Even a little Israel goes hand in hand with Jewish immigration and conflict with the indigenous Palestinian population. All keenly felt and bitterly resented throughout the Arab world.

There are today some 5.9 million UN-registered Palestinian refugees - in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.<sup>5</sup> There is also a Palestinian diaspora living in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, the US, Britain, Germany, Chile, Argentina and many more countries besides. Meanwhile, Israel's remaining 2.08 million Palestinian Arabs are treated as second-class citizens in what is rightly regarded as an apartheid state. Officially, after all, Israel was founded as and continues to be a Jewish state for Jewish people.

## American arms

Following the 1967 Six Day War Israel's main arms supplier has been the US. Before that it was France. Not that there was an instant love affair between the two countries. George Marshall, president Harry S Truman's secretary of state, was more than cool about recognising Israel in May 1948. Nor was John Foster Dulles, Dwight Eisenhower's secretary of state, pro-Israel. It was the rise of Arab nationalism and the turn towards the Soviet Union instigated by Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser, that led to a US shift. From 1958 the US-Israel alliance slowly expanded in scope and took its present form after the Yom Kippur War of 1973.<sup>6</sup> Noam Chomsky dates US support for the Greater Israel position to 1970 when Henry Kissinger succeeded in "taking over Middle East affairs."<sup>7</sup>

US economic and military aid to Israel has been considerable. In the 1946-2024 period it amounted to well over \$310 billion (in constant 2022 dollars). Today Washington's largess mainly goes to support Israel's already potent military machine: Israel is on a short list of "major non-Nato allies" and has privileged access to the most advanced US military platforms and technologies. There is an agreement to supply it with a military package worth some \$3.8 billion annually till 2028.<sup>8</sup> In return for imperial sponsorship, Israel acts as a US "strategic asset" in the Middle East (a region which not insignificantly possesses something like 50% of the world's readily accessible oil reserves).<sup>9</sup>

There were those on the left who foolishly welcomed the election of Barack Obama in 2008 - the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, George Galloway, Stop the War Coalition - because they hoped he would chart a fundamentally different, peaceful, more even-handed course in the Middle East. As we predicted at the time, they were bound to be "sadly disappointed".<sup>10</sup> Whatever the skin colour of the president, America is in relative decline and that means that national antagonisms become ever more acute. Indeed, Obama and his secretary of state, Hilary Clinton, undertook the "pivot to Asia" in 2016: the main aim clearly being to block the rise of China, a policy seamlessly continued by the Trump and then the Biden administrations.<sup>11</sup>

As for Israel there has, of course, been no change: unwavering US support is combined with a prolonged economic and diplomatic campaign to reduce, to hem in, Iran and stop it acquiring nuclear weapons. This makes Israel the regional superpower in the Middle East. Even without the 'special relationship', Israel has repeatedly fought, invaded and defeated its Arab neighbours: 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973. Its armed forces are vastly superior, compared with any Arab country or any conceivable

combination of them. Armchair generals rank Israel as militarily amongst the most powerful states on the face of the planet. Underlining the point, Israel reportedly possesses between 90 and 400 nuclear warheads ... and certainly has the means of delivering them from land, sea and air.

## Fragmented

Territorially, economically and politically Palestine is cleaved between Hamas in Gaza and Fatah on the West Bank. Two statelets for one people. Uncompromisingly, the 1988 Hamas charter demands an end to the Zionist state of Israel and its replacement by a single Islamic state of Palestine. True, though Hamas doggedly refuses to recognise Israel, it has offered a "long-term truce" in return for Israel withdrawing from all territories it has occupied since 1967: in effect an Israel-Palestine two state 'solution'.

Though Israel encouraged the formation and growth of Hamas from the mid-1980s onwards in order to weaken Fatah, after its landslide victory in the January 2006 elections and the Fatah June coup in the West Bank, Israel imposed its asphyxiating blockade on Gaza.

That said, since 2018 Netanyahu's government allowed Hamas to receive "infusions" of Qatari cash and granted tens of thousands of work permits to Gazan residents. The idea was to keep the Palestinians divided and thereby render any Israel-Palestine two state 'solution' practically inoperable. Hence the Palestinian Authority on the West Bank was treated as a "burden" while Hamas was treated as an "asset".<sup>12</sup> That is until October 7 2023 and what has been called Israel's Pearl Harbour.

Leaders of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation - dominated by Fatah - preside over a series of disconnected Arab reservations on the West Bank called the Palestinian Authority. Its president, Mahmoud Abbas, pleads for an Israel-Palestine two state 'solution' and roundly condemns Israel's invasion of Gaza. He is, however, to all intents and purposes a creature of Israel, a collaborator, a quisling.

The PLO's present line dates back to 1988, when the demand for a return to the *status quo ante* 1948 was formally abandoned. Fatah had been steadily moving in this direction since the mid-70s; however, the final turning point was the US-brokered Oslo accord, signed in August 1993 by PLO chair Yasser Arafat and Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. The PLO effectively conceded Israeli hegemony over the whole of mandate Palestine in return for local self-government in Gaza and the West Bank. Abject surrender. The vital questions of Jewish settlements on the West Bank and the right of Palestinians to return to their lands were put aside. A diplomatic coup for the US and Israel.

As for Israeli politics they are notoriously fragmented. At least a dozen blocs - many with multiple components - are represented in the Knesset. But virtually the entire Israeli-Jewish political spectrum unitedly oppose any kind of *democratic* settlement with the Palestinians. The nationalist and religious hard right, including Likud, has absolutely no truck with Palestinian statehood. Centrists and liberals pay lip service. Only the left, which relies on Israeli-Arab votes, seems serious about a Israel-Palestine two-state 'solution': and that means Palestinians getting the West Bank and Gaza, and nothing more.

Note, working class politics in Israel, that is Israeli-Jewish working class politics, hardly exists, at

least at this moment in time, as an effective collectivity. Historically there has been a remorseless shift from the Labor Party to voting for parties of the right in an attempt to reinforce national privileges. The Jewish-Israeli working class being a labour aristocracy that has seen its social power substantially eroded by years of neo-liberalism.<sup>13</sup> In 1983 membership of the trade union federation, Histadrut, stood at 1.6 million, today it is around 570,000. Histadrut, once the spearhead of Zionist colonisation, has also been shorn of its role in health, banking and as a very substantial employer in its own right of masses of workers.

Histadrut needs to be put into the context of colonisation. Marxists have distinguished between various types of colonies: plantation colonies, exploitation colonies, colonies properly so-called, etc. Broadly the colonisation of the India, Congo, South Africa type saw the exploiters enslave people, including by importing captives from abroad, gaining a fat profit from the traditional native work force, including peasant farmers, through all manner of barely concealed forms of robbery, cheating and double dealing. That went hand-in-hand with staffing an army officer corps, running a bureaucracy and managing railroads, docks, etc. The colonisers therefore constituted a relatively narrow caste who often maintained close ties with the imperial homeland (to which they often returned having made their fortunes).

Nonetheless, it must be understood that in terms of political economy Israel is what Karl Kautsky called a "work colony"<sup>14</sup> or what Moshe Machover prefers to call an "exclusion colony".<sup>15</sup> Instead of constituting themselves as a narrow, often highly privileged, caste, the colonisers make up the full spectrum of classes: bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, small farmers, workers, unemployed reserve labour. Instead of relying on the labour of the indigenous population, they are either replaced, marginalised or driven to the point of extinction. Examples: USA, Canada, Australia.

Israel is most certainly an exclusion colony. Despite present-day claims, Zionism was never a national liberation movement. It was always, as it first presented itself, crucially in Theodor Herzl's foundational *Der Judenstaat* (1896), a colonial-settler project that would rely on its own labour. Hence, whatever the socialistic pretensions of Labor Zionism, from the beginning Israel owed far more to the blood and soil ideology of late 19th century European reaction than anything remotely progressive.

What marked out Israel, however, was not that to begin with the settler-colonists were a minority of the population in Ottoman and then mandate Palestine. No, the Zionist project relied on propertyless migrants coming from all manner of different countries, while exercising "no coercive power over the indigenous population".<sup>16</sup> At first the Zionists were substantially dependent on external sources of capital, had to purchase land from wealthy native owners and most certainly relied on the good will of an imperial sponsor (to begin with Britain, which agreed the Balfour declaration in November 1917 in the expectation of carving out for itself a "Jewish Ulster" in the midst of a hostile Middle East).

Histadrut played a determining role. It organised Jewish workers and forced the Jewish capitalist class to grant all manner of concessions, not least barring indigenous, cheaper, Arab labour from whole sectors of the economy (relaxed somewhat

after statehood). Histadrut also provided Labor Zionism with the money, the votes and the organisation needed to make it the dominant force politically from the mid-1930s till the late 1970s. So it was far removed from being a trade union federation of the type normally seen in the so-called west.

## Brit left

Historically, what passed for the mainstream left in Britain held a sympathetic attitude towards Zionism. Poale Zion - now the Jewish Labour Movement - affiliated to the Labour Party in 1920. Successive Labour conferences voted in favour of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Echoing Soviet foreign policy the 'official communist' MP, Willie Gallacher, welcomed the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948. After 2,000 years of supposed *uninterrupted* persecution the Jewish people had liberated themselves at last. Tony Benn was proud to be counted amongst the Labour Friends of Israel. He routinely cited the kibbutz as a brave socialist experiment.

Little or nothing of that now remains. Israel nowadays counts amongst those countries dominated by the hard right. True, there is still a pro-Zionist left. But it is, thankfully, widely despised: the Alliance for Workers' Liberty comes to mind, so does the CPB's resident Zionist, Mary Davis.

That does not mean that the left has lighted upon a correct programmatic orientation. Instead we are presented with, on the one hand, a socialistic version of the current PLO's Israel-Palestine two state 'solution' - the Socialist Party in England and Wales being perhaps the most prominent advocate. It calls for a 'socialist' Israel alongside a 'socialist' West Bank, Gaza Strip Palestine. Israel, it should be noted is treated as a 'normal' country: the idea of it remaining a "settler state" is dismissed out of hand.<sup>17</sup> That despite the ongoing ethnic cleansing in Gaza and the 720,000 Jewish settlers planted on the West Bank (including east Jerusalem).

Anyway, why on earth two such states would remain separate, especially given substantial population cross over, is something of a mystery. More to the point, the means of achieving such an outcome relies almost entirely on trade union politics - primarily wages and conditions. But such economism, because it is inevitably sectional, merely reproduces the division of the working class. On the one side privileged labour aristocrats, and a marginalised underclass on the other. There is no socialist circuit breaker.

Then there is the left version of the old PLO single Palestine 'solution': the Socialist Workers Party being the quintessential example. Ignoring the history, power, connections and wishes of the Israeli-Jewish population, there is the call for the abolition, the dismantling, of Israel and in its place "one secular, democratic [capitalist - JC] state built on the principle of equal rights for all citizens, including Israeli Jews."<sup>18</sup>

However, the Israeli-Jewish working class is entirely incapable of playing any positive role here. Israeli-Jews, most of whom consider themselves secular, will paradoxically be allowed individual religious freedom, but not collective national rights under the SWP's 'solution'. As a matter of doctrine Israeli-Jews are often defined as a non-nation, but even when it is admitted that they do constitute a nation, they are classified as an oppressive, a counterrevolutionary nation, which should thereby be denied the right to self-determination, presumably in perpetuity.<sup>19</sup>

There are some 7.2 million Israeli-Jews (settlements included). About 10-11 million Palestinians worldwide; but only 6-7 million of them live in Israel, the occupied territories, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. It is fair to say, then, that any projected single Palestinian state would include roughly equivalent numbers of Israeli-Jews and Palestinian-Arabs. Assuming, that is, no forcible movement of peoples. No attempt to drive the Israeli-Jews into the sea. No closure of refugee camps and dumping of Palestinians over the other side of the Jordan river. No round-up and expulsion of Palestinian workers in Saudi Arabia, etc. Therefore what is being proposed is unity where one half of the population gets no say in the matter. Impractical and in strategic terms really dumb.

After all the Israeli-Jewish working class has everything to lose and nothing to gain from such a single capitalist state 'solution' that is more or less guaranteed to be neither secular nor democratic. They are, therefore, likely to resist any such outcome. The whole of the 20th century since 1933, but especially the 1943-45 holocaust, tells us that. Without military conquest - a highly unlikely and in and of itself an unwelcome outcome - the immediate demand for a single-state solution is entirely illusory. Translated into the 'Palestine shall be free from the river to the sea' slogan, it goes down well on street demonstrations, but offers zilch in terms of bringing about a rapprochement between the two peoples in Israel-Palestine and advancing common working class interests.

The call for a single Palestinian state "may seem completely utopian", owns up the SWP's Alex Callinicos. He also correctly states: "For over 30 years the Palestinian movement, supported by much of the left and progressive opinion worldwide, has had an official policy" for two states. He rightly claims, however, that there is "very clear evidence that the two-state solution cannot work". Crucially, there exists, he says, the "massive imbalance of power between the two sides. Israel is one of the greatest military powers in the world, backed and subsidised by the US".<sup>20</sup> Right again.

Hence it is pertinent to ask exactly who is going to establish the SWP's single Palestinian state. In other words, we come to the vital matter of agency. After all, once again according to comrade Callinicos himself, the Palestinians are incapable of achieving any kind of viable state alongside Israel by their efforts alone. Perhaps what the SWP therefore envisages is a combination of Lebanon's Hezbollah, Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood governments in Egypt, Syria and Jordan acting together against Israel.

An anti-working class agency if ever there was one. Such a pan-Islamic alliance, leave aside the Shia and Sunni divisions, would, though, hardly produce a *secular* Palestinian state. Nor would it produce a *democratic* Palestinian state. True, if such an unlikely combination were to come together - and, just as unlikely, achieve military victory over Israel - it might conceivably lead to a mass exodus of Jews (to who knows where - there is no single mother country). But if that did not happen, the Jewish-Israeli population would have to be subject to extraordinarily harsh measures to crush the inevitable resistance. The poles of national oppression would thereby be reversed. Not something any genuine Marxist would countenance.

No *democratic* solution can be won without the consent of Israeli Jews - that is, a clearly expressed majority of them. Yet the fact is,

# 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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despite the warnings, pained outrage and courage of Israeli-Jewish socialists, anti-Zionists and pacifists, the Israeli-Jewish population at large consistently, often overwhelmingly, supports the wars of their elected politicians, generals and capitalist masters, irrespective of the hatred of Israel that this inevitably engenders. Why? Israel is a colonial-settler state and all such states face a fundamental problem. What to do with the people whose land has been robbed? During the wars of 1947-49 and 1967 well over a million Palestinians fled or were forcibly driven out. Palestinians in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank are therefore unfinished business.

Both the Palestinian enemy within and the Palestinian enemy without engender a permanent state of insecurity. Israeli-Jews know they are resented, know they are hated. When it comes to worst-paid labour the Palestinians willingly undercut them. Then there are the Hamas rockets, suicide bombers and the October 7 spectacular. Understandably, the Israeli-Jewish population feels under constant threat and therefore - frightened, vengeful, maddened - willingly supports, urges on Israeli aggression, oppression and even genocide. The hope is to crush or finally remove the Palestinians. An oppressor's peace.

Does it follow that Israelis cannot make peace with Palestinians? That any Israeli settlement with the Palestinians is bound to be a sham? There can certainly be no *democratic* settlement with Israel as a *Zionist* state - any more than there can be with an *Islamic* Palestine.

Zionism is, arguably, a nationalism *sui generis*. While it now boasts a homeland, Zionism claims purchase over the loyalty of all Jews world-wide, that despite most Jews do not live in Israel and do not speak Hebrew (around 40% of the world's Jewish population lives in the US, roughly the same as in Israel). No less to the point, the Zionist state is committed to expansion and denying elementary rights to a good portion of the population it rules over (ie, the Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories).

Nevertheless, the Israeli-Jewish people, the Hebrew nation, is a real, living entity and cannot be dismissed or discounted, just because Israel

began and continues as a settler colonial state. Israel emerged out of the last phase of the British empire, in the midst of a terroristic civil war and unforgivable crimes that no-one should forget. That said, there is no reason for refusing to recognise the definite, historically constituted Hebrew nation which took state form with the May 14 1948 declaration of Israeli independence.

And since then millions of Jews have migrated to Israel, learnt Hebrew, intermarried, had children, assimilated and made and remade the Israeli-Jewish nation. Today some 75% are Sabras - Israel born - and mostly second or third generation. Hence, the Israeli-Jewish nation not only inhabits a common territory and shares a common language. It is historically constituted.

Of course, most, if not all, the world's states came into existence by way of ghastly oppression. But, while fully taking into account history, any consistently democratic programme must be squarely based on contemporary realities - crucially human facts on the ground. Abolition of *Zionist* Israel, legal equality for all, secularism, halting expansionism and withdrawing from the occupied territories are basic (minimal) programmatic demands. None of that, however, should be taken as synonymous with an eviscerating reconstruction of the pre-1948 situation. One might just as well call for the abolition of the US, Canada, Australia, etc, and a return of lands to the enfeebled remnants of the aboriginal populations.

The only realistic, progressive and humane programme must be based on a mutual recognition by both Palestinians and Israeli-Jews of each other's national rights. Needless to say, it would be an excellent thing if both nations *chose* to happily live side by side, or, even better, to slowly merge together into a single nation. No rational human being would want to oppose either such outcome. The question is, though, how to arrive at such a happy outcome? Given where we are situated today, our discussion must necessarily include process as well as agency.

## Arab nation

No democratic solution for the Israel/Palestine conflict can be achieved in

isolation. Objective circumstances simply do not permit it. That is as certain as anything can be certain in this uncertain world.

By themselves the Palestinians - debilitatingly split between Hamas and Fatah - palpably lack the ability to achieve anything beyond abject surrender or hopeless resistance. Certainly not a single Palestinian state where Israeli-Jews have "full" religious rights but no national rights. There is, however, a way to cut through the Gordian knot. Widen the strategic front. There are nearly 300 million Arabs in a contiguous territory that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean, across north Africa, down the Nile to north Sudan, and all the way to the Persian Gulf and up to the Caspian Sea.

Though studied here and there with national minorities - Kurds, Assyrians, Turks, Armenians, Berbers, etc - there is a definite Arab or Arabised community. Despite being separated into 25 different states and divided by religion and religious sect - Sunni, Shiite, Alaouite, Ismaili, Druze, Orthodox Christian, Catholic Christian, Maronite, Nestorian, etc - they share a living bond of pan-Arab consciousness, born not only of a common language, but of a closely related history.

Arabs are binational. There are Moroccans, Yemenis, Egyptians, Jordanians, etc. But there is also a wider Arab identity which has its origins going back to the Muslim conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries. The most well known candidate for Arab unifier was Nasser. This uncrowned Bonaparte led the Free Officers' revolution in 1952, which overthrew the pro-British monarchy of Farouk I. Nasser then oversaw a radical agrarian reform programme, nationalised the Suez canal, allied Egypt with the Soviet Union and put his country on the course of state-capitalist development. This went hand in hand with crushing both the Muslim Brotherhood and the working class movement.

Nasser called it 'Arab socialism'. Especially with his success in the 1956 crisis - an Israeli invasion followed by a pre-planned joint French and British intervention and then an unexpected American veto - Nasser's popularity soared throughout the Arab world. Pro-Nasser Arab socialist parties, groups and conspiracies were sponsored or established themselves. His name became almost synonymous with pan-Arabism.

Nasser demanded that natural resources be used for the benefit of all Arabs. Hugely popular with those below. Everyone knew he meant oil. Of course, the house of Saud instantly became an implacable enemy. Yet because of mass pressure the Ba'athist authorities in Syria sought a merger. Despite the repression suffered by their co-thinkers in Egypt, the 'official communists' and the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood likewise favoured unity.

The United Arab Republic was formed on February 1 1958. Nasser was appointed president and Cairo became the capital. Yet the UAR proved fleeting. Syrian capitalists did not gain access to the Egyptian market and Egyptian administrative personnel were painted by Syrian officers, bureaucrats and top politicians as acting like colonial officials. The union ignominiously collapsed in 1961. Opposition came from the Damascus street. However, from then onwards the UAR became a hollow pretence. It united no other country apart from Egypt.

The 1967 Six Day war with Israel proved to be the final straw for Nasserism. Israel's blitzkrieg destroyed the airforces of Egypt, Syria and Jordan on the ground and by the end of the short-lived

hostilities Israel occupied the Sinai, the West Bank and the Golan Heights. Nasser was humiliated and died soon afterwards a broken man.

Evidently, Arab reunification remains a burning, but unfulfilled task. The fact that Nasser's short-lived UAR saw the light of day is testimony to mass support for Arab unity. What was a potent sentiment in the 1950s and well into the 1970s needs to be revived in the 21st century and given a new democratic and class content.

Communists need to take the lead in the fight for pan-Arab unity. A task inseparable from the struggle for socialist revolution and the formation of a mass Communist Party - first in each Arab country and then throughout the Arab world. A Communist Party of Arabia.

What of reconciliation between Israeli-Jews and the Palestinians? This can only happen in the context of sweeping away the House of Saud, the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan and the petty Gulf sheikdoms, ending the military dictatorship in Egypt and the creation of an Arab republic led by and under the domination of the working class.

Only from such a salient, even if it is in the process of realisation, can the Israeli-Jewish working class be prised away from the clutches of Zionism and formed into a positivity. Even if it is, to start with, confined to the Mashriq, an Arab socialist republic could offer Israel federal status with the confident expectation that such an invitation would receive an overwhelmingly positive response from below. Instead of being an oppressed class subject to capitalist exploitation - that today has to content itself with the much diminished crumbs that come with being a labour aristocracy - the Israeli-Jewish working class would have everything to gain from a de-Zionised socialist Israel federated to a socialist Arabia. They would be part of the ruling class. Now that would something to be ●

## Notes

1. Eg. Ofer Cassif of the 'official communist' Hadash party and Ram Ben-Barak of the 'centrist' Yash Atid.
2. See S Squire 'Six months of slaughter, six months of resistance' *Socialist Worker* April 3 2024.
3. "On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, the Kadomites, the Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaim, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and the Jebusites'" (Genesis xv, 18-1).
4. [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/total-immigration-to-israel-by-country-per-year](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/total-immigration-to-israel-by-country-per-year).
5. [www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees](http://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees).
6. See A Ben-Zvi *Decade of transition: Eisenhower, Kennedy and the origins of the American- Israeli alliance* New York NY 1998.
7. N Chomsky *The fateful triangle: the United States, Israel and the Palestinians* London 1983, p43.
8. [www.cfr.org/article/us-aid-israel-four-charts](http://www.cfr.org/article/us-aid-israel-four-charts).
9. [www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/israel-strategic-asset-united-states-0](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/israel-strategic-asset-united-states-0).
10. J Conrad *Weekly Worker* January 22 2009 - [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/753/zionist-imperatives-and-the-arab-solution](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/753/zionist-imperatives-and-the-arab-solution).
11. H Clinton *Foreign Policy* 'America's Pacific century' November 2011.
12. *The Times of Israel* October 8 2023.
13. The thesis of the Jewish-Israeli working class being a labour aristocracy is closely associated with Maxime Rodinson, see his *Israel: a colonial settler state?* New York NY 1973.
14. See M Macnair (intro) *Karl Kautsky: on colonialism* London 2013.
15. 'Colonialism and the natives' *Weekly Worker* December 17 2015 - [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1087/colonialism-and-the-natives](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1087/colonialism-and-the-natives).
16. M Shalev *The labour movement in Israel: ideology and political economy* Westview CO 1996, p1.
17. J Horton *Socialism Today* February 2 2024.
18. SWP pamphlet *Palestine, resistance, revolution and the struggle for freedom* London 2023, p28.
19. Tony Greenstein has repeatedly defended this position in these pages. For his most recent article see 'They are all Palestinians' *Weekly Worker* May 23 2024 - [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1492/they-are-all-palestinians](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1492/they-are-all-palestinians).
20. *Socialist Worker* August 5 2006.

## Fighting fund

### Make up the deficit

Unfortunately, I have to start this week with some disappointing - but not entirely unexpected - news: we fell a bit short of our monthly fighting fund target for May.

As I reported last week, we needed £300 in just two days if we were going to hit that £2,250 - and, of course, most of our readers would only have had a couple of hours left by the time they read my appeal. But two comrades responded brilliantly: JC immediately transferred £100 to the *Weekly Worker* bank account, while JS made payments of £25 and £30 on consecutive days! In addition, comrades VP and MD both came up with their usual monthly donation of £10.

So the extra £175 that came our way meant we ended May with £2,121 - in other words, we fell short by £129. And that means we could now really do with smashing through that £2,250 barrier in June and, after five days, as I write, we have a healthy £397 in the kitty.

Mind you, most of that came in the shape of those start-of-

the-month standing orders - our thanks go to AC for his £100 (fantastic!), EV (£55), MM (£31), CG (£30), RG (£25), BK and MS (£20 each), BG and MT (£15), TM (£13), MM (£11), AN, ST, CP, DI and YM (£10 each) and finally DC and JS (£6).

Not bad at all! But we really do need to see things continue at that rate. And that in turn means we need a lot more of our *Weekly Worker* supporters to boost the further standing orders we'll be getting with one-off donations. Please make a bank transfer, use PayPal or even send us a cheque to help us out - go to the link below for more details.

As I keep saying, this paper relies absolutely on our readers and supporters to aid the fight for that principled, democratic, Marxist party that is our top priority. Please do your bit ●

**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)

# Lining up to be president

Iran's Islamic regime will ensure that the right man is 'elected' to replace Ibrahim Raisi. Yassamine Mather reports on what is for the moment a crowded field of candidates

Given the litany of bad endings for all former heads of state in Iran's Islamic Republic, it is strange to see how many politicians have gone to the ministry of interior in the last few days to put forward their names to be the next Iranian president. Following the sudden death of Ibrahim Raisi the election is to be held later this month.

So far there are no surprises. For most of those who have entered their names this is not the first time they have tried their luck. Many know they stand no chance of even getting onto the ballot paper. The process is complicated. The initial step for all candidates is getting the approval of the Guardian Council and, as a result, most of the 40-plus candidates will fall at this stage.

However, some of this week's photo opportunities inside and outside the ministry have some value and it seems that token 'reformists' may be allowed to run. Supreme leader Ali Khamenei aims to ensure a larger voter turnout. In the latest round of mid-term parliamentary elections, in major cities such as Tehran, only *seven percent* of those eligible voted. This was considered humiliating for the regime and every effort is being made to avoid a similar low turnout in the presidential election.

On the conservative side, one of the most high-profile candidates is Saeed Jalili, who is close to the security services and a former nuclear negotiator. Jalili was down to contest the 2021 presidential election, but withdrew in favour of Raisi.

Several parliamentarians and former ministers have also registered, while former vice-president Ishaq Jahangiri, one of the founders of the 'reformist' group, Kargozaran Sazandegi, only went to the ministry of the interior on the last day of registration. He is the longest-serving parliamentary speaker and first deputy to 'reformist' president Hassan Rouhani. Presumably he is the faction's preferred candidate.

Jahangiri's campaign has already started on social media and, at a press conference after his registration, he said: "I am a reformist, but I think nationally." This in response to a question about whether he is a candidate for the Reformist Front. He added: "It is clear that the country is in a complicated and difficult situation. All the various achievements have not been able to create the feeling of growth and development."

Iran's 'reformists' present themselves as the 'left' and I am always amused by this representation. They are as pro-market and pro-capitalist as the conservative factions of the Islamic Republic.

Ali Larijani, who is considered more of a political pragmatist than those in the hard-line camp and might also have the support of some 'reformists', has also officially registered as a candidate (despite being disqualified by the Guardian



Ebrahim Raisi at a campaign rally in 2017: replacing him will rely on the supreme leader

Council in the 2021 presidential election). Although he remains a faithful ally of the supreme leader, the fact that he was not allowed to stand last time was presumably because the supreme leader was so keen on ensuring Raisi's victory that he did not want any serious contenders in the race. Larijani's registration this time around has led to speculation that Khamenei has already given him the nod to widen the scope of candidates permitted to run.

After filing his nomination on Friday, Larijani told reporters that "solving the issue of sanctions" will figure prominently amongst his priorities.

On June 2 Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a conservative who served as Iran's president from 2005 to 2013, added his name to the list. His allegedly fraudulent election in 2009 as a favourite of Khamenei led to major protests, known as the Green movement. However, in the latter years of his presidency, he fell out of favour with the country's top leadership and was disqualified in both the 2017 and 2021 presidential elections.

After filing his nomination, Ahmadinejad said the country's problems could be solved by making the "maximum use of available capacities", adding that he was joining the race again "at the request of the people".

At least two women have also registered: Hamida Zarabadi, a 'reformist' representative in the majles (parliament), and Zohreh Elahian, a former MP (she announced that her election slogan would be "Healthy government, healthy economy and healthy society!"). According to the constitution of the

religious state, the president should be a *rajol* - the Arabic term for 'man'. Despite that, in recent years women have been allowed to sign up as candidates - one assumes the clerics are confident that the Guardian Council will eliminate them!

### Conspiracy theories

All eyes are on who will eventually replace the supreme leader and the death of Raisi has raised a lot of speculation, as well as conspiracy theories. According to one such rumour, an alliance between Mojtaba Khamenei (son of the supreme leader) and former Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) commander Mohammad Qalibaf with the support of one faction of the IRGC, planned and executed the helicopter 'accident' that killed Raisi and paved the way for Mojtaba Khamenei to become a front runner to replace his father.

I find this is unlikely, Mojtaba is by all accounts a junior cleric, better known for his security activities and suppressing protests. Khamenei senior has ruled out such a scenario, mainly because of the low clerical rank of his son and accusations of 'hereditary' rule. Initially, the constitution of the Islamic Republic, stipulated that the supreme leader, the *rahbar*, should be the highest-ranking cleric in Shia Islam. In 1989, the constitution was amended and simply asked for Islamic "scholarship" to allow the supreme leader to be a lower-ranking cleric.

According to article 110 of the constitution:

The said leader will have the following responsibilities:

- determining the political direction of the government (in

consultation with an advisory committee);

- overseeing the correct implementation of the general policies of the government;

- calling referenda;

- commanding the armed forces;

- declaring war, peace and the mobilisation of armed forces;

- appointing and dismissing six of the 12 jurists of the Council of Guardians; the head of the state broadcasting agency; the chief of the general staff; the commander in chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC); the highest commanders of the armed forces and security bodies;

- facilitating relations between the legislative, executive and judicial branches;

- resolving issues in governance that cannot be settled through ordinary means;

- approving the appointment of the president after the presidential election;

- dismissing the president after a judicial conviction or legislative vote of no confidence;

- pardoning or commuting sentences upon recommendation of the head of the judiciary.

Very democratic!

### Palestine

Given the current genocide in Gaza, it is worthwhile reporting a recent spat between Iran's supreme leader and Mahmood Abbas, head of the Palestine Authority, regarding the Al Aqsa operation of October 7 2023.

On June 3, in a ceremony marking the anniversary of the death of

previous supreme leader Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989, Khamenei told the gathered crowd:

Operation Storm Al-Aqsa, which happened on October 7 last year, was exactly what the region needed ... The explanation is that a comprehensive plan was designed by the United States, the Zionist elements and their followers, and some governments in the region. Based on this plan, the relations and equations of the region were supposed to change. The relationship of the Zionist regime with the governments of the region was going to be adjusted, leading to the domination of the Zionist regime over the politics and economy of the entire west Asian region, but also the entire Islamic world.

Khamenei was referring to the normalisation of Israel's relations with several Islamic countries, based on the Abraham Pact and the attempt to establish political relations with Saudi Arabia.

He continued:

At such a critical moment, the Al-Aqsa storm attack began and destroyed all the plans of the enemy ... with the situation that has happened in the past eight months, there is not much hope that they will be able to revive this plan.

Apparently the aim has been to "victimise the Palestinians" and prevent "the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. We do not need wars that do not serve our desire for freedom and independence."

Khamenei's comments are rightly ridiculed by those who have followed Iran's empty rhetoric about Palestine. Despite decades of propaganda, Iran and its closest allies have done very little to support the Palestinians in their hour of need. The supreme leader praises student protests in the US and elsewhere, yet in Iran, we have not witnessed a single sizeable demonstration organised by the state in support of Gaza - and, of course, independent demonstrations are banned and anyone organising such protests will end up in prison. No wonder frustrated students have used social media to point out the hypocrisy of the supreme leader.

Of course, Abbas - the man who has presided over a corrupt, ineffective Fatah-led Palestine Authority, a man whose security forces have cooperated with the Zionist regime's occupation of the West Bank - is in no position to claim to represent the views of the Palestinians.

The spat between these two reactionaries demonstrates the challenges faced by Palestinians at a time when they are suffering genocide in Gaza ●