

weekly  
**worker**



**Without a fully worked-out programme,  
our party cannot navigate the future or  
guard against opportunist temptations**

- Letters and debate
- CPGB aggregate
- Starmer's sinister past
- Crisis of expectations?

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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# D-DAY AND ITS MEANING





## LETTERS



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

## Be ever so 'umble

I have some problems, putting it mildly, with your recent piece, 'Breaking the grip of Zionism' by Jack Conrad (June 6). I'll apologise upfront for this polemical response, but I appreciate that the *Weekly Worker* doesn't shy away from these kinds of debate.

Firstly, the oppressor's peace you rightly condemn is not just the final solution that Zionists dream of for Palestinians: an oppressor's peace is any peace that allows the continuation of their project of settler-colonialism (which revolves entirely around ownership of the land). So long as the land is occupied, whether by settlements or by the ethnic cleansing of the Nakba, the land question will never be resolved. The one-state solution (a free Palestine, from the river to the sea) that you dismiss as utopian is precisely the only condition that ends settler-colonialism.

I'm left with confusion when you make good points on the unremittingly bloodthirsty nature of Zionist settlers arising from the contradictions of settler-colonialism, but then you are too afraid to follow this to its natural conclusion; if Zionists will never allow Zionism to end peacefully, it must be destroyed militarily for settler-colonialism to end and justice to prevail.

I presume you have come to the conclusion that military victory is impossible due to a lack of faith in the resistance axis and their military strength. I would counter that never before in world history has the technological gap between the colonised and the coloniser been this close. This comes from hard-earned lessons in strategic adaptation from both state (Iran and Yemen) and non-state (Hamas, Hezbollah, etc) actors, whose interests and military production capabilities inherently threaten western imperialist hegemony. However, even if we accept your assumption that resistance-axis military victory over Israel is still impossible in the near future, it doesn't change the hard truth that military victory is what it takes to prevent an oppressor's peace.

Secondly, what right do you have to demand secularism from Palestinians? An Islamic Palestine is infinitely superior to continued genocide and settler-colonialism. I genuinely couldn't care less which group of Palestinians liberates Palestine, so long as it is first and foremost liberated from genocidal settler-colonialism. If it is not secular, I don't care, so long as national liberation is first achieved.

That's not to say national liberation won't run into inherent contradictions without socialist leadership (see *The wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon). However, this is still better than the open genocide we see unfolding in Gaza, as I type this response. I think of the horrifying images of the insides of children's skulls and dismembered limbs in plastic bags, I hear the desperate screams of Hind Rajab, surrounded by the corpses of her entire family, begging the dispatcher for a doomed ambulance before her own execution.

I genuinely am trying my best to give your position grace and I don't want to put words in your mouth, so I would like to ask: if Hamas/Hezbollah/Iran is the condition required to ensure an end to the

genocide of Palestinians, can you accept that? As a "genuine Marxist", yes, I can in fact "countenance" it. I lose no sleep over the poor Zionist settlers ("working class" or otherwise) committing genocide that requires "extraordinarily harsh measures" to be stopped. What do you think Palestinians have been experiencing for the past 70-plus years just for the crime of being born in a land needed for western imperialism?

That's not to subscribe to 'an eye for an eye' kind of philosophy; however, war is war. Read about the Battle of Stalingrad, try and imagine the kind of daily brutality you must give and take to stop fascism from wiping you (and everything you've ever known and loved) out. The war that the Palestinian resistance and civilians face in Gaza is the modern equivalent to the Battle of Stalingrad. And, when they win (whether it will take months, years or entire generations worth of blood), the land must be returned to their previous owners, whatever the cost for the settlers who initiated the project of colonialism.

I, for one, do not imagine most Israelis being willing to stay in Palestine if they do not have their fascist settler-colonialist state. I imagine there will be plenty of 'Operation Paperclips' prepared to receive Israeli Defence Forces war criminals. However, even if they stay, every new massacre they commit today only sows hatred and vengeance that will one day be reaped (although the resistance has actually shown remarkable restraint - both in rhetoric and militarily from the material evidence of hostages being treated humanely and settler-civilian reports of the brief military occupation of settlements on October 7 by Hamas).

Regardless of what happens after military victory, it would not be the "poles of national oppression" being "reversed" onto Israel. That is, frankly speaking, ridiculous. This is akin to claims of 'reverse racism' or 'misandry'; aka, claims so pathetic and risible as to be used as jokes. Palestinians would not be 'colonising' Israel if they took their own land back. This is the logic of playground bullies ('It doesn't matter who hits first, just who hits last'), not serious analysis. There is no equivalence between Palestinian resistance and vengeance against Israeli colonisation and genocide.

Thirdly, it does not sit right with me that "contemporary realities" can simply sweep away the history of "ghastly repression". Once again, this is the logic of playground bullies ('I can't give you back your lunch money - I've already spent it'), not some enlightened *Realpolitik* that leads to socialism. If you want to insinuate that the land question of settler-colonialism being solved is utopian, I struggle to see how your "realistic" oppressor's peace would be any more sustainable. Or how the Pan-Arab magic fairy creating a communist Arabia which grants Israel "federal status" and forms the "Israeli-Jewish working class ... into a positivity" is less utopian?

What we call 'utopian' isn't based on our political imaginations (and their limitations): it is based on our study of history and materialism. Pan-Arabism (and similarly, Pan-Africanism) failed, not because Nasser wasn't a great enough 'great man of history', but because the material conditions weren't suitable for pan-Arabism. Fanon in *The wretched of the Earth* concisely describes the failures of movements like pan-Arabism as inherent from the nature of culture: culture is always national, not racial. There is no material basis for 'Arabia' any more:

differentiated national cultures have already emerged. The only way to create 'Arabia' would be to eliminate those cultural differences by, using your euphemism, "extraordinarily harsh measures" (aka a process of cultural destruction), which I presume isn't your advocated solution.

When the Zionist state collapses (likely due to global economic crisis and escalating military pressure), it would not be "the poles of national oppression reversed": it would be national liberation via the destruction of a settler-colonial country.

For all your claims of being "realistic", did it really not occur to you, even if we count the post-Nakba abomination as a country, that countries can still be destroyed? No country has a "right to exist". Yugoslavia was destroyed. The Soviet Union was destroyed. Israel, *Insha'Allah* (God willing), will be destroyed. The complete destruction of Israel is the only realistic option to achieve the foundational basis for permanent peace in the region. Only from this foundation can the struggle for liberation continue (hopefully leading to communism).

It seems deeply misguided/arrogant/stupid to demand Palestinians free themselves from possibly the most brutal oppression currently existing in the world with our randomly added conditions (eg, 'The Palestinian resistance isn't secular enough for me to support'), when we are far inferior to Hamas (or the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) in challenging our own imperialist state with much more time, resources and leeway.

A little humility goes a long way to earning respect.

Haoyu Tai  
Brighton

## No soggy votes

Jack Conrad, having criticised the Manchester-based Communist Future group for being "vague, parochial and politically pointless" and counterposing capitalism to communism "in a manner reminiscent of the Socialist Party of Great Britain", winds up with this damp squib of a rallying cry: "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)'" (Letters, June 6).

Good grief, Jack - you surely can't be serious? Vote for the 'party of business'? Why? Don't tell me it's because they are the 'lesser evil'. Apart from anything else, it is capitalism that runs the politicians - not the politicians capitalism.

So much for the so-called Labour Party. But what about the left? What left group - be it Tusc, SPEW or the 'Workers Party' - actually stands for an alternative to capitalism? As far as I can see, none of them do. Jack talks about being "brutally honest", but, to be brutally honest, his description of the Communist Future manifesto as being full of "soggy abstractions and pious wishes" could very well apply to his own.

When, oh when, is the penny going to drop on the left? You can't have communism (aka socialism) unless a majority want it and understand it. That means talking about it and spreading the idea. Since when has the left advocated a moneyless, wageless, classless and stateless alternative to capitalism?

Sure, some might vaguely pay lip service to the idea, but all their energy is focused on implementing this or that reform of capitalism. If the history of the working class movement over the last 150 years has taught us anything, it is that you

cannot simultaneously try to mend capitalism and end capitalism. In the end, you have to make a choice and the choice the left has made has meant it being more or less swallowed up whole by the beast - reduced to being a miserable rump, hanging on to the coat-tails of their preferred 'party of business'.

Say what you like about the SPGB, but at least it provides a clear and ringing message in favour of communism - not some soggy excuse for endlessly postponing it in some mythical transition that is not going to take us anywhere different from where we are right now.

Robin Cox  
email

## Minimum replies

This letter is in further defence of the approach to communist politics expressed in the form of the fight for a political programme, containing:

- 'minimum' elements, primarily of political democracy, but including immediate economic and 'social' demands; and

- a 'maximum' element which lays down the long-term aim of a society superseding class and state altogether.

I am responding here to the two letters from Robin Cox and Adam Buick of the Socialist Party of Great Britain (May 30) and that from Andrew Northall (June 6).

I have a short question to both comrades Cox and Buick. Do you stand for the immediate forced collectivisation of small businesses and family farms (5.1 million among the UK's working-age population of around 40 million, or 12.5%)? If you do, you are proposing to repeat the disastrous policies of the USSR in 1929-40, and of the People's Republic of China in the 'Great Leap Forward' of 1958-62 and the 'Cultural Revolution' of 1966-76.

If you don't stand for forced collectivisation, you are not proposing the immediate implementation of the maximum programme, but taking political power in order to begin a period of transition. And you cannot propose the immediate abolition of money either, since you will need a medium of exchange to trade with the continuing petty-proprietor classes (urban and rural).

Of course, you might propose to wait before beginning socialist transformation for the capitalists to completely squeeze out the petty-proprietor classes. If so, you will wait forever, since the capitalist *state artificially preserves and promotes* the petty proprietor classes, through various forms of subsidy and regulatory preference, as a support for its authority. This has been very visible in the last 150 years; analogous forms of artificial state preservation-promotion of elements of a declining social order can be seen in the Roman empire between Augustus (27 BCE-14 CE) and the fall of Constantinople in 1453 CE, in Ming and Ching China (1368-1911), and on shorter scales in 'absolutist' Europe (1600-1800, and in some countries up to 1918) and in Tokugawa Japan (1603-1868).

That said, I agree with two of comrade Cox's points. The first is that "the transition period is what we are living through now". I made the same point, in fact, in my article, 'Minimal symmetrical errors' (May 23): "It is one that has already begun, in a deformed way, under capitalist rule ... it is only under working class rule that the transition can be completed."

The second is that "we don't need the forces of production to be 'further developed' to establish a socialist economy". I wrote about this in 2015 in the article, 'Socialism will not require industrialisation' (May 14 2015). It remains true that

getting from a mixed economy with a substantial petty-proprietor sector to full socialism will require a substantial period of transition.

Andrew Northall says: "Certainly, I could never see how some elements of the [*Weekly Worker* group'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." This is a startling claim, given that the militia system is the foundation of the current Swiss armed forces, and the general right to keep and bear arms is a (controversial) element of the US constitution. It is true that the *United Kingdom* is unlikely to break with the model that in 1991 David Edgerton called "liberal militarism" in *New Left Review*, without the overthrow of the UK *political regime*; but that is not the same thing as being inconsistent with the continuation of *money and markets*.

Comrade Northall counterposes to the CPGB's minimum programme - which is founded on *constitutional* change with some limited, immediate economic and social demands - the *Morning Star*-CPB's *Britain's road to socialism*. But the *BRS* project is (and indeed he presents it as) an 'economic issues first' project, like the Trotskyists' 'transitional programmes'.

In reality, as the Corbyn experience shows, we can't get to first base with the *BRS* project - a 'left government' - without first achieving effective mass hostility to the constitutional order, including the judicial power, the media 'fourth estate', the security service as a paramilitary wing of the Conservative Party (as in the 'Zinoviev letter' a hundred years ago, and as in the orchestrated smear campaign round 'anti-Semitism' recently), and so on.

Indeed, the Corbyn team's efforts to achieve a 'left government' - by clinging to the Labour right, and by allowing Starmer free rein to tail-end the Tory 'remainers' dodgy manoeuvres in parliament in the hope of bringing down the May government - prepared the ground for the shattering defeat of the Labour left in 2019. It is remarkable that the 2020 edition of the *BRS* does not draw any effective balance-sheet of the Corbyn disaster.

This, of course, is to leave aside the *BRS*'s illusions in "peaceful coexistence" within the framework of the United Nations and, going along with this, in 'socialist construction in a single country'. These fail to recognise the need for action on a scale sufficiently large to defeat US-imposed sanctions and are reflected in the delusions of 'Lexit' and so on.

Mike Macnair  
Oxford

## He's pro-Zionist

Daniel Lazare is not only a stuck record, with his obsession over Hamas: he is a social chauvinist and an unabashed Jewish supremacist.

Lazare purports not to understand Moshé Machover's reference to a 'porky'. It is cockney rhyming slang ('porky pie' translates as 'lie'). In other words Lazare is a liar. Unlike me Moshé chooses to be diplomatic. The allegation that Hamas is in the leadership of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement is one such lie. There are others that Lazare has told in his obsessive attack on the Palestinian resistance.

I have many criticisms of Hamas - not least their conservative social agenda, their religious conformism,



their refusal to criticise Arab regimes, etc. But I also applaud their determined resistance to the genocidal offensive of Israel and its imperialist allies.

Lazare's reference to Hamas being "ultra-reactionary" applies more to him. The suggestion that, because Israel demonises Hamas in its attack on Palestinian resistance to Zionist colonisation, we should therefore jettison support for it is disgraceful, even by Lazare's low standards. Since when do we take our stance from Israel? Israel has always demonised its opponents as the 'new Hitler' - from Nasser to Arafat, to Saddam Hussein. Israel weaponises anti-Semitism and the holocaust and Lazare is happy to oblige them.

Hamas has always differentiated between Jews and Zionists. Jews who have lived in or visited Gaza have never experienced any problem. Hamas condemned the attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018 and the anti-Semitic attacks in Paris in 2015. Hamas has, unlike Lazare, developed politically in the course of the struggle against Zionism and it is noticeable how well the Israeli hostages look compared to the broken bodies of Palestinian captives.

When Yocheved Lifshitz, the 85-year-old hostage, was released early on, alongside other Israeli hostages, she praised Hamas's humane treatment. One Zionist apologist explained this by referring to the Stockholm Syndrome. I asked this person on Twitter why it was that no Palestinian prisoners ever seemed to suffer from this syndrome. I'm still waiting for an answer!

Hamas did not "murder" hundreds of Israelis on October 7. All the evidence is that Hamas killed about 400 Israeli soldiers and that many, if not most, of the Israelis who died were victims of Israel's Hannibal Directive, which stipulates that it is better to kill Israelis rather than let them be captured and exchanged for Palestinian prisoners. Of course, there were some atrocities, but they pale in comparison with the medieval barbarities that Israel's military has engaged in, with its mass graves, execution of children, attacks on hospitals, torture of doctors and so on. The behaviour of Israel's 'moral army' is on a par with the atrocities of the Nazi SS.

Lazare calls on us to "make common cause with the Israeli proletariat". No doubt he would have had us make common cause with white workers in the US deep south who took part in lynchings, the South African white proletariat who fought for the colour bar and Protestant workers who drove Catholic workers out of the Belfast shipyards and formed the backbone of the Ulster loyalist militias.

We should recognise Lazare for what he is - an unabashed supporter of imperialism. He orientates to the working class of the oppressor, not the oppressed. There is no mention of the hundreds of Gaza workers who were working in Israel and who were imprisoned and tortured. Or the trade union premises in Gaza City which were bombed. Palestinian workers for him don't exist.

There is no example of Israeli workers coming out in solidarity with Palestinian workers and against the work permit system that allows them to be used as a superexploited workforce on Israeli building sites and in service industries. Lazare understands nothing of how Histadrut, the Zionist trade union federation, began its days destroying the mixed railworkers union or how it spawned the Haganah terror organisation that scabbed on the Palestinian general strike.

Lazare is no different from supporters of imperialism in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty or socialists like Henry Hyndman of the Social Democratic Federation in

the last century. They too oriented to the aristocracy of labour, including its settler-colonial counterparts.

The fact is that settler working classes are, without exception, complicit in the oppression of the native working class. In other words, they trade their interests as a working class for an identification with the racial ethno-nationalist state. They have completely lost any international class consciousness.

It is no surprise that Lazare is opposed to the BDS movement, since it may jeopardise the employment prospects of Israeli workers. The fact that Palestinian workers support it is irrelevant to him, because, like the Zionist he is, they are all but invisible.

I have no doubt that, when Jewish and non-Jewish workers supported the boycott of Nazi Germany in the 1930s (which was destroyed by Lazare's friends in the Zionist movement, who preferred to set up Ha'avara, a trading agreement with the Nazis) that Lazare would have joined the Zionists and the Jewish bourgeoisie, to say nothing of the non-Jewish bourgeoisie, in opposing the boycott because of its effect on German workers.

Moshé's comparison with laying off arms workers is, of course, quite valid. If the principle Lazare is advocating is opposition to making workers unemployed then that applies equally to workers in the arms industries. Perhaps Lazare would also have defended the right of IG Farben workers to continue making Zyklon B, the gas used to exterminate Jews?

The Israeli working class will be the last group in Israeli society to oppose Zionism, just as white South Africa workers never rejected apartheid. Under the guise of working class solidarity (always with the most racist, least oppressed workers), Lazare turns his back on the most oppressed workers, be they Palestinian, Irish Catholic or black South African.

Lazare uses the slogan of working class unity to disempower the most oppressed workers, because either he doesn't understand the relationship of the national question to the struggle for socialism or, if he does, he prefers to identify with the oppressor.

I have my disagreements with Moshé, but at least he, unlike Daniel Lazare, is an anti-Zionist.

**Tony Greenstein**

Brighton

## Makes me sick

Daniel Lazare talks about Hamas bringing about the massacre of up to 100,000 Palestinians (who knows what number) and the almost complete destruction of hospitals, schools, mosques, houses ... But he won't talk about Israel bringing about the attack that killed a thousand or several hundred Israelis some time last year by murdering tens of thousands of Palestinians, unrelentingly raining down death and destruction on them and the reserves they've been forced into year after year after year

You can't have it both ways. He makes me sick.

**Elijah Traven**

Hull

## Comrade Delta

As a reader of *Socialist Worker*, I would like to comment on the Socialist Workers Party's recent apology for the 'Comrade Delta' debacle.

I have yet to discover the relevant article outlining the apology, so deeply hidden on the SWP's website is it. To find out more details of the apology I read the recent article on it in the *Weekly Worker* and the scathing report, 'The SWP apology is too little, too late', by Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century, which split from the SWP over the Comrade Delta crisis.

The question arising from the apology is why now? Well, I think it

is due to the recent upsurge in student protests and encampments over the genocide in Gaza. The SWP's central committee has also seen how Socialist Appeal - now called the Revolutionary Communist Party - has grown from 50 members in 2010 to more than a thousand today, by making a conscious turn to student work. The problem for the SWP is that the Delta affair in 2014 has decimated its work amongst students - students being the prime source of recruits ever since its newspaper *Labour Worker* changed its name to *Socialist Worker* in 1968. Hence the apology.

Since the Covid lockdowns I have from time to time taken part in the SWP's Norwich and East Anglia branch's Zoom meetings. I have noticed that all of the participants are aged 50 or over apart from one or two recent graduates. This shows that the Delta affair has led to a dearth of recruits amongst students and graduates. The SWP members' average age is now in the mid-50s to mid-60s.

Whilst *Socialist Worker* is an excellent newspaper, in the long term the prospects for it and its sponsor, the SWP, are bleak. In spite of the Delta apology, I cannot see how the SWP can continue to exist, given the collapse in its work amongst students since 2014.

**John Smithee**

Cambridgeshire

## Unity psyche

I have barely read a leftwing site or newspaper in a decade and a half. My ideas are certainly half-baked, and my finger has well and truly lost track of an insightful pulse honed in intellectual and practical engagement.

I struggle to understand why those earnest enough to be part of left politics do not see the fundamental need for an overarching unity. I suspect it is that the notion of needing and being the vanguard within a capitalist dynamic has led to a tendency for left groups to become a home for a variant of petty bourgeois frustrations - at least at the (largely unchanging) leadership level. Not by intention or design, but by historical tendency. Giving a primacy to ideology and political lines, they become identified with the individual's psyche, and disagreements necessitate splits, expulsions and disengagement. Intellectual individuals or cliques compete for their own survival - often, I guess, also livelihood, if the position in the organisation can fund or opportunistise that.

I have heard it said that this is due to the low ebb of class struggle. Sure, that doesn't help to ground things. But is not the very act of agency to counteract tendencies of least historical resistance, at least if that is an historical possibility? Is communism/socialism/whatever rooted in human solidarity possible?

I don't know an answer, but I do think it would be a start if those who believe it would seek to be encompassed in one group, whose parameters are the international productive and distributive revolutionising of the means of social reproduction, on the basis that we choose to confer equal rights on all humans regardless of their differences.

The key orbit running through this is facilitating solidarity - solidarity despite differences, intellectual, political or in action. I don't see how the importance of any position on an issue or event overrides this.

Yes, things can get messy, with missteps aplenty - yet the need to act and learn together remains. To posit a societal change is a daring and risky (potentially to barbaric levels) endeavour - especially if it only gets partial traction.

**Adam Harper**

email

# ACTION

## Free Palestine - stop arming Israel

**Saturday June 15:** End the genocide; no ceasefire - no vote. Actions organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events). **Glasgow, 10.30am:** Scotland demonstration. Assemble Glasgow Green, Glasgow G1.

**Wrexham, 11am:** North Wales march for Palestine. Assemble Queens Square, Wrexham LL11.

**Lewisham, 11.30am:** March and rally. Assemble at MP Vicky Foxcroft's office, 82 Tanners Hill, London SE8.

**Hackney, 12 noon:** Protest and die-in. Assemble Gillett Square, Dalston, London E8.

## Orgreave 40th anniversary

**Saturday June 15, 1pm:** March and rally. Assemble City Hall, Barkers Pool, Sheffield S1. Marking 40 years since the miners' strike and the police attack on pickets at the Orgreave coking plant. Speakers include Arthur Scargill, Mick Whelan (Aslef) and Gareth Peirce (Lawyer for Orgreave miners).

Organised by Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign: [otjc.org.uk/orgreave-rally-2024](http://otjc.org.uk/orgreave-rally-2024).

## Save steel jobs in south Wales

**Monday June 17, 4.30pm:** Rally, Academy Roundabout, Harbour Way, Port Talbot SA13. Support steel workers in their fight to save the 2,800 jobs being axed by Tata.

Organised by Unite for a Workers' Economy: [www.unitetheunion.org/campaigns/the-fight-for-steel](http://www.unitetheunion.org/campaigns/the-fight-for-steel).

## 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).

## General election: what would Marx do?

**Thursday June 20, 7pm:** Online briefing introduced by Chris Williamson: 'Collective, Workers Party, Tusc ... - Why should we vote for you?'. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: [www.whymarx.com/sessions](http://www.whymarx.com/sessions).

## 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 Osborne 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: [www.facebook.com/events/3568144863448112](http://www.facebook.com/events/3568144863448112).

## 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. With over 50 brass bands and more than 100 trade union banners. Organised by Durham Miners Association: [www.facebook.com/events/343419915171132](http://www.facebook.com/events/343419915171132).

## Sheffield Transformed

**Friday July 19 to Sunday July 21:** Festival of leftwing politics, Sadacca, 48 Wicker, Sheffield S3. Talks, debates, workshops and culture. Tickets £15 (£8). Organised by Sheffield Transformed: [www.facebook.com/sheftransformed](http://www.facebook.com/sheftransformed).

## 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.



## WORLD WAR II

# Operation Imperial Overlord

Rishi Sunak committed a 'gaffe' by leaving the D-Day celebrations before Joe Biden's speech, it is claimed by an over-excited media. But, asks Mike Macnair, what was the military and strategic meaning of the Normandy landings?

There has been a brief media storm over Rishi Sunak's decision to attend only the first part of the celebration of the 80th anniversary of D-Day on June 6 - the beginning of Operation Overlord, the Anglo-American invasion of Nazi-occupied France.

Sunak attended the first (British) part of the event, and laid a wreath at the British Normandy Memorial of Ver-sur-Mer, but missed the international event at Omaha Beach, where US troops had suffered severe casualties in 1944. At this event Joe Biden gave a speech comparing Vladimir Putin to Adolf Hitler and warning against US 'isolationism' (code for Donald Trump's rhetoric against the Ukraine war and the US's Nato allies failing to pay enough for defence).

Making matters worse, Sunak had left in order to record an interview with ITV. The media storm was intense, but has proved short-lived. Nigel Farage banged the national-culture drum, and commented that Sunak "is completely disconnected from the centre of this country. He has proved that he is not a patriotic leader".<sup>1</sup> This led spokespeople from other parties to turn on Farage, arguing that he was engaged in a dog-whistle against Sunak for his race.<sup>2</sup> The effect has largely been to knock the story as a whole on the head. Even *The Daily Telegraph*, which on June 10 ran the story, 'Farage overtakes Sunak after D-Day gaffe',<sup>3</sup> had on June 11 dropped it from its election coverage.

It is pretty certain that Sunak did not choose to attend the British event only, and not the US-international event, as any sort of political gesture. The politics is *merely* embarrassment at a mistaken judgment over the relative importance of the event. It is nonetheless worth asking whether a British prime minister boycotting the D-Day event would be *desirable* (however unlikely such an occurrence would be).

I am not saying that we should not commemorate World War II. During that conflict my father spent three years in prisoner-of-war camps, one of my uncles lost an arm, and another a leg. Many people sacrificed more. The questions posed are, first, what all the sacrifices were actually *for*; and, second, what is meant by commemorating *specifically* D-Day, as opposed to the war in general?

## Good war

World War II tends to be seen as the 'good war', the war against fascism - as opposed to World War I, the 'bad war', the mistaken or senseless war, which brought an end to 19th century progress, or, from the left, the war for imperialist redivision of the world. This perspective is present on the left too. The *Morning Star*, for example, on June 5 ran the editorial, 'Fight the



Fighting for different things: US and French resistance

far right to commemorate the D-Day heroes', arguing that modern anti-immigration policy is "a betrayal of what the D-Day heroes fought for".<sup>4</sup>

This story of the war against fascism is not a wholly untrue one. In the early 1900s, the regimes Europe-wide began to be seriously concerned by the rise of the workers' movement on both the electoral and trade union front. The shift into nationalism and the celebration of empire temporarily headed off the problem, at the cost of a very destructive war from 1914; but the Russian Revolution in 1917 was widely understood by working class militants globally to pose the possibility of overthrowing capitalist rule and establishing socialism. From 1921, the means of a counteroffensive were found in the Italian fascist movement, unifying the pro-war nationalist socialists round Mussolini, with traditional conservatives, with veterans' groups, to wage an undeclared civil war against the workers' movement.

The 1922 March on Rome and the fascists' (gradual and legal) acquisition of exclusive power made this offensive, and what followed - that is, an aggressively nationalist and militarist regime - a model copied widely in Europe, most notably in German Nazism. As emerging out of this history, 1939-1945 was in part the apogee of a European-wide civil war between the classes, in which the workers' movement was at first crushed by German armies and their local collaborators, and then began to fight back, exploiting Allied support to resistance movements - to the point that, as Marc Mulholland has pointed out in *Bourgeois liberty and the politics of fear*, the post-war period saw a fairly extensive

July, the first battle of El Alamein, though stalemated, made clear that the German and Italian armies in north Africa could not be effectively supplied sufficiently to conquer Egypt.

The US now embarked on the Solomon Islands campaign in the Pacific, while the British and US moved onto counteroffensive in north Africa: the second battle of El Alamein in October-November 1942 and Operation Torch, US and British invasion of French north Africa, also in November. The western allies were prioritising British and US imperial interests over any restoration of democracy in Europe.

Axis troops in north Africa surrendered in May 1943; the Allies now elected to invade Sicily and Italy. The Italian government surrendered in September 1943, but German troops in Italy fought on with considerable success: the 'D-Day dodgers' took Rome on June 5 1944, the day before D-Day, but they did not break through the Gothic Line in the northern Apennines until April 1945 (to the accompaniment of a massive insurrection of Italian anti-fascist partisans in northern Italy). Churchill had aimed for a breakthrough in 1944 from Italy into Austria and Yugoslavia to block Soviet movement into eastern Europe, but the chiefs of staff had rejected this scheme.<sup>9</sup>

The judgment that the western allies were delaying the opening of the second front in their own interests, and expecting the Russians to bear the main burden of the fighting with Nazi Germany, is not a modern invention. It was a live political argument, in Britain in particular, through 1943. It was not only the left wing which raised it.<sup>10</sup>

## Eastern front

Meanwhile on the eastern front ... Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the USSR, began in June 1941. The Red Army had been pulled forward out of prepared positions and its plans dislocated by the annexation of eastern Poland under the Hitler-Stalin Pact; it was decisively defeated in the invasion, and the siege of Leningrad began in August. Vast areas of the USSR were occupied, including places which are back in the news today, like Kharkov/Kharkiv. But the German attempt to take Moscow in September-December 1941 failed and the invaders were driven back.

July 1942 to February 1943 saw a German offensive towards the Caucasus leading to the battle of Stalingrad - prolonged and savage fighting causing more than two million total casualties, and ending with the surrender of the surrounded German army. July-August saw the battle of Kursk, in which a German attempt to pinch off a Russian salient ended in German defeat. Now the Red Army was on the offensive, and August-November saw the battle of the Dniepr and November-December the battle of Kiev. December 1943-May 1944 was the Soviet Dnieper-Carpathian offensive, and in April-May in a sideshow the Red Army took Crimea. By the time of D-Day, therefore, the German position on the eastern front was collapsing - and it was doing so in the general area being fought over since 2014. Operation Bagration in Belarus, which collapsed the German army's

position in the north-central sector of the eastern front, started on June 22, 16 days after D-Day.

It is fairly clear, therefore, that the eastern front battles were decisive and that, if the British had dragged their feet further on Operation Overlord, the result would not have been Axis victory, but rather a cold war period with Soviet troops on the Rhine, rather than (as actually happened) on the Elbe.

Soviet military casualties were 9-10 million, while Axis casualties were around five million. In the invasion of Normandy and down to the liberation of Paris, the Germans suffered around 320,000 casualties and the western allies around 220,000. The Italian campaign was on a somewhat smaller scale: 60-70,000 Allied and around 100,000 Germans.

## Celebrating

The meaning of all this is that celebrating D-Day in particular - as distinct from remembrance of World War II and its casualties in general - has a very particular meaning. It pretends that Anglo-American war operations were mainly directed towards liberating Europe (they were not!) and that these operations were decisive in the defeat of fascism (also untrue). It symbolises a 'good war' without the horrific casualties of the eastern front and its decisive role.

It is only natural, then, that Biden should use his D-Day speech to paint Vladimir Putin as Hitler and that, a few days later, he should announce that the USA is lifting its bar on arming the Azov regiment, on the basis that it has outgrown its neo-Nazi origins.<sup>11</sup>

If Rishi Sunak *had* boycotted the Omaha beach event on political grounds, he should have been praised, not damned! ●

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## Notes

- news.sky.com/video/nigel-farage-sunak-not-a-patriotic-leader-after-leaving-d-day-event-early-13149348.
- www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx005vddg5yo.
- www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/06/10/rishi-sunaks-popularity-falls-beneath-nigel-farage-d-day.
- morningstaronline.co.uk/article/editorial-fight-far-right-commemorate-d-day-heroes. The author has perhaps not noticed the previous history of nationality and anti-immigration policy, including the Aliens Act 1905, the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act 1914 and the British Nationality Act 1948 (www.gov.uk/government/publications/historical-background-information-on-nationality/historical-background-information-on-nationality-accessible).
- N Moss *Nineteen weeks: America, Britain and the fateful summer of 1940* Boston 2003. The Brits subsequently attempted to wriggle out of the agreements, both at Bretton Woods in 1944 (see B Steil *The Battle of Bretton Woods: John Maynard Keynes, Harry Dexter White, and the making of a new world order* Princeton NJ 2013) and with the Suez adventure in 1956, but failed.
- Eg, americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2017/01/world-war-two-provides-the-into-british-breaking-point; on the ambiguities of Indian collaboration with the British, see CA Bayly, "The nation within": British India at war 1939-1947' *Proceedings of the British Academy* Vol 125, 2004, pp265-85.
- A Jackson *Persian Gulf command* New Haven CT 2018.
- Eg, www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce99vz560dno (May 31).
- Wikipedia at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian\_campaign\_(World\_War\_II) cites US general Mark Clark's memoir of the Mediterranean campaign.
- Eg, *Hansard* HL February 23 1943: api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1943/feb/23/second-front-in-europe.
- www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1v6p9k1z1o.

## Communist University

Saturday August 3 to Saturday August 10 (inclusive)

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

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

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

Make payments to account 'Weekly Worker'. Account number: 00744310.

Sort code: 30-99-64. Please quote payment reference 'CU2024'

Email your booking, stating single or double room, to: office@cpgb.org.uk



## AGGREGATE

# Focusing our commitment

As the Tories stumble and tumble, and the country prepares to go to the polls, we discussed both who to support and the prospects for after July 4. If there is going to be a ‘crisis of expectations’, it is likely to be on the left. **Ian Spencer** reports

Comrade Jack Conrad opened the June 9 aggregate of CPGB members and supporters with the highly uncontroversial assertion that Sir Keir Starmer is very likely to be prime minister after July 4. This at a time, though, when the left is in disarray - in part due to its inability to do anything worthwhile, given the open goal represented by the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader.

Another feature of the present, which is likely to persist well into the Labour term of office, are the Palestine solidarity demonstrations. The war is likely to continue, ‘Genocide Joe’ Biden is likely to lose the US election to an authoritarian populist Trump presidency - which Benjamin Netanyahu is probably counting on.

The Tory election campaign has been risible. The latest example is the decision of Rishi Sunak to leave the D-Day commemoration early, which presented a golden opportunity for a Reform Party reinvigorated by the candidacy of Nigel Farage (who has assumed the leadership of what is, after all, not a party at all, but a limited company, in which he is the major shareholder). The direction of the Tory Party after the election is difficult to predict, but a move to the right seems likely, given the political stripe of those jockeying for Sunak’s job.

Comrade Conrad’s assessment of the post-election Labour Party was similarly forthright. For the auto-Labourite left, there is likely to be a crisis of expectations. The Labour front bench is already playing down any significant increase in public spending or support for workers’ demands. A contrast was drawn between France in May-June 1936 when the working class sought to carry out, through strikes, through occupations, what was imagined to be the programme of the Léon Blum Socialist Party-Radical Socialist Party government (a government supported by the French Communist Party). That was a real ‘crisis of expectations’. The 40-hour week and paid holidays had to be conceded along with greatly strengthened trade union rights.

The CPGB continues to characterise the Labour Party as a ‘bourgeois workers’ party’ and therefore recommends: ‘Vote for the left where you can, vote Labour if you must’. While it is imperative to get the Tories out, a good vote for the left may aid a process of consolidation after the election, as well as provide the possibility of at least some in parliament who will continue to fight British support for genocide in Palestine. It seems likely that the ‘Corbyn movement’ will see some development, probably along the lines of ‘Momentum’ and, however flawed such an outcome is, communists should at least consider some sort of organised intervention.

Our critical support for some Labour and independent candidates means taking every opportunity to question those such as John McDonnell on their position regarding the arming of and support for Israel. Clearly, Starmer would rather not have had Diane Abbott as a Labour candidate, but was forced to back down by the furore around her candidacy. In Hackney North and Stoke Newington, communists should support Abbott. We should similarly offer critical support to Faiza Shaheen in Chingford and George Galloway in Rochdale. Comrade Conrad also



War in Gaza will continue, and so will the mass demonstrations

noted the sudden personality cult around the Revolutionary Communist Party’s Fiona Lali, following her confrontation with Suella Braverman. This seems to be a feature of some left sects, such as the way Derek Hatton or Tommy Sheridan were lionised by the old Militant Tendency. By contrast, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition appears to be sticking to largely economic demands and is in some disarray.

Discontent can take many forms and comrade Conrad moved to a consideration of two recent currents: Communist Future and *The Partyist*. It is not as if there had not been similar manifestations in the past, where there is an attempt to reduce or jettison the programme of a Communist Party in favour of an accommodation with reformist or opportunist elements. It was reiterated that the CPGB has no difficulty accommodating differences of opinion, but it is the duty of communists to argue their position openly rather than walk away for fear of being in a minority.

### Debate

Comrade Stan Keable advanced a critique of *The Partyist*, focusing on the fact that, while the comrades retain a significant part of the CPGB perspective, their critique of our supposed ‘fetishisation’ of the print media is facile. The aim of *The Partyist*

seems to be to reproduce the success of *The Cosmonaut* online publication in the US in a quest for followers. Comrade Keable pointed out that we do have a significant online presence and are justifiably proud of producing one of the most influential weekly print publications on the left. The aim of the CPGB is not to simply recruit numbers, but concentrate on the quality of our cadre and intervention in the wider Marxist milieu.

Comrade Carla Roberts offered a perspective of the way some on the left have had an uncritical approval of the number of ‘independent’ parliamentary candidates. She pointed to the naivety of thinking that they would constitute a bloc in parliament. ‘Independent’ representatives are not accountable to any democratic recall or the discipline of an organisation. Moreover, the fact that many are standing against other left candidates does not bode well for future cooperation.

In her view, Corbyn and Galloway are unlikely to work together in the same organisation after the election, while Tusc is unlikely to have any impact at all. Comrade Roberts reported that Chris Williamson has agreed to take part in a pre-election debate with Communist Future, but that Tusc had not even replied to the invitation.

While critical of *The Partyist*,

other comrades pointed out that young people need to feel that they had a space to organise in and learn the necessary skills for political organisation. Comrade Farzad Kamangar stressed the importance of the *Weekly Worker* as a Marxist paper, contrasting it with the poor-quality output of *Socialist Worker*. In her view the students currently engaged in Palestine solidarity university encampments have a better understanding of contemporary events in Palestine than the Socialist Workers Party.

The characterisation of the Labour Party as a bourgeois workers’ party was robustly defended by comrade Mike Macnair, who argued that the Labour Party constitutes the ‘bourgeois politics of the working class’ - and he castigated the left for tail-ending Labourism. Comrade Macnair went on to point out the fallacy of *The Partyist* in assuming that the conditions that are propitious for Cosmonaut in the US pertain to the UK. For example, the Democratic Socialists of America constitute a ‘coalition of shifting caucuses’, which offer a space for Cosmonaut in a way that UK left sects do not.

I intervened to point out that, while few in the working class, let alone the left, have any expectations of the incoming Labour government, that administration will still have to contend with the objective problems faced by the Tory government. Using the example of the health sector, I pointed out that the NHS will still face a staffing crisis, social care will continue to be a crucial political issue and the private sector cannot bridge the gap, despite the absurd assertions of Wes Streeting. Moreover, I argued that we need to think beyond July 4 to the local elections afterwards in order to build a left that can offer credible alternative in the future. The problem with a very small group is not only that it has fewer opportunities to intervene, but that it lacks a strong sense of community. The importance of community was supported by comrade Paul Cooper. He also emphasised that different generations sometimes use different media and that they are by no means incompatible.

### Recruitment

Comrade Keable pointed out that, given the similarity of *The Partyist* to the CPGB, we may find that we have tangible gains in terms of potential influence. However, it is important to stress that the CPGB does not aim for a ‘halfway house’ version of a party - a pale reflection of a broad front. Our interest is in serious, committed comrades. Comrade Keable was critical of those who just talk the talk, but are unwilling to turn that talk into any kind of disciplined work to promote the idea of building a mass Communist Party.

I replied that there does not have to be a conflict between different media and cited the example of comrade Michael Roberts, who has a successful blog and also contributes frequently to the *Weekly Worker*. Comrade Ryan Frost, who has signed up as one of the six editors of *The Partyist* and is a CPGB member, defended *The Partyist* project as complementary to the work of the *Weekly Worker*. Concerned that the rightwing nature of the Labour Party may lead to demoralisation on the left, comrade Frost pointed out that *The Partyist* can be an important

vehicle for young comrades to develop their writing and other skills.

Comrade Macnair acknowledged that the CPGB is keen to recruit more and younger members and welcomed local and diverse interventions to put forward a communist perspective. He agreed that things are hardly likely to improve under a Labour government and maintained that there will be a ‘tipping point’, in which the UK government will face difficulty in borrowing, which could well produce a crisis, if not collapse. Despite all this, it is difficult to predict the direction of politics, given the high level of demoralisation.

Comrade Roberts welcomed the commitment to recruiting and discussed the crisis of expectation that workers face. Her assessment was that, while things in the short term are likely to get worse, the future crisis will inevitably challenge the trade unions and it is then that a serious Communist Party will be able to have a significant impact. We will have to fight for democracy in whatever political formations are thrown up in the post-election period. She went on to support the intervention of comrade Cooper, pointing out that Why Marx? and the Communist Culture Club have had recent additional success thanks to the use of short discussion videos which have been aired using TikTok and other platforms. She went on to make a series of suggestions as to how the CPGB’s weekly Online Communist Forum could be enhanced.

In summary, comrade Conrad stressed the importance of democratic centralism. Members have the right to openly air their differences, but they also have definite duties. He went on to stress the importance of the CPGB’s *Draft programme*: members are expected to accept it, they are also expected to defend its general scope and perspectives.

Comrade Conrad was frank in acknowledging that in the short term the post-election landscape is unlikely to be better. The much-vaunted growth of the RCP and the Young Communist League are most certainly exaggerated. The RCP has grown, but not by that much. It is a Potemkin village, not a budding mass party. Heady talk of revolution being just round the corner is bound to bring bitter disappointment and various splits and breakaways. As for the YCL, it already seems to have winked away.

In the concluding part of the meeting, comrade Kamangar provided details about Communist University, which will be held this year in central London from August 3-10. We have invited a range of speakers, most of whom have accepted, and she confirmed that the timetable would be available soon.

Kicking off the Summer Offensive, she emphasised the importance of raising funds to support the CPGB’s political activities. The target is £20,000, to be raised by the end of CU 2024. Those at the meeting themselves pledged a total of just over £12,000 - a very promising start, surpassing the equivalent early pledges of previous years.

In summary, despite the parlous state of the left, the aggregate made a significant commitment to continuing the fight for a mass Communist Party ●



## MEDIA



# Sir Keir's sinister past

Rightwing pundits have finally begun bringing up deep entryism and long-gone political affiliations to Pabloism. But Trot-baiting is unlikely to save Rishi Sunak, says **Paul Demarty**, he is a loser

If, in 1986, you had asked a politically aware person to name the Trotskyist groups active in the Labour Party, you would get back a fairly consistent answer.

All would be able to name the Militant, which had already been the object of witch-hunting and had its flagship Liverpool organisation put to the sword. The well-informed could perhaps have also named the Socialist Organiser Alliance (today known as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty) and Socialist Action, which still exists as a Stalinist grouplet and also gave us, via a long and circuitous route, today's 'idpol'-poisoned, pro-imperialist outfit, Anticapitalist Resistance.

Few would have known much of *Socialist Alternatives*. It was a rare enough bird - an example of the Pabloite political tendency, which had preached deep entry in the 'official communist' parties and, in Britain, the Labour Party since its heyday in the eight years after

World War II. Michel Pablo - pen name of Michalis Raptis, a Greek Trotskyist - had been the effective leader of the Fourth International during this period, and held to the theory that the war was not really yet over, and would resume imminently between the western and the eastern bloc countries. There was no time to build new parties; instead Trotskyists, where they remained marginal, should embed themselves in the communist parties, and expect the contradictions in the "deformed workers' states" to perhaps work themselves out over centuries.

By the end of the decade, the FI had split, and neither half had much use for 'Pabloism', which in particular became the catch-all name for all that was wrong with the world for the 'orthodox Trotskyist' International Committee for the Fourth International, and others who followed in its wake. Pablo was expelled from the reunified international in 1963. However, he

went on to live a good, long life, and never retired from politics. He even got a state funeral in Greece (he had been close friends with the then-outgoing Greek president, Andreas Papandreu). In 1986, he had his own oil-slick international on the boil, the International Revolutionary Marxist Tendency; and he found some promising young British comrades to fly the flag that year. Comrades like a certain Keir Starmer.

### Then and now

It has become a matter, we admit, of some puzzlement here at the *Weekly Worker* that more has not been made of this history. It is hardly some obscure secret. Nothing I have said so far is more than three clicks from Starmer's own Wikipedia page. It seems that, finally, the media *omertà* on this has been breached by *The Telegraph*, which offers us an amusing point-by-point comparison of "what he says now" and "what he said then".<sup>1</sup>

It is such great sport, and we really do wonder at its appearance at such a late hour. In those days, he denounced the policing of the Wapping strike, while now he says that we must "put 13,000 extra police ... on the beat". Today he states that "the left has to start caring a lot more about growth, about creating wealth, attracting inward investment and kick-starting a spirit of enterprise". Back then he criticised Neil Kinnock for "showing little regard for the freedom of the workforce and community to extend their political control". So it goes on.

On closer reading, the *Torygraph* piece cannot even make enough hay out of the *Socialist Alternatives* material, and it is amply bulked out by snippets from 2020, where Starmer is still plainly trying to gull the Labour left into accepting him - something he achieved with laughable ease (and repaid the favour with witch-hunting and humiliation).

Indeed, it is really rather embarrassing for the *Socialist Alternatives* crowd, such as they still exist, that there is not even enough scandalous Trottery to fill out a single hit-piece. Were they so timid, so unambitious? Was the opportunism of the Pabloites (and, however hypocritical and overblown the attacks of the anti-Pabloites, opportunist they certainly were) so ingrained that nobody would even really notice they were entryists at all?

That we can ask this question somewhat frames our view of what the likely effect of this line of attack will be - in short, not terribly

impressive. It is hardly atypical for a Labour politician of that general vintage to have a past in some left organisation. There was a lot of it about at the time; many served a couple of years in service to the cause and then got on with their careers.

Indeed, the various governments of Tony Blair were positively stacked with such people. A few had been Trotskyists - we can think of Alastair Darling and Alan Milburn. Many more were former Communist Party people - Peter Mandelson was one; so were Charles Leadbeater and John Reid. Jack Straw was never a CPGB member, but a fellow traveller, and apparently felt so strongly about the matter that, when in the 2000s he was incorrectly labelled in *The Independent* as an "old Trot", he angrily took to their letters page to pay homage to the CPGB's Bert Ramelson - the man who taught him to "spot a Trot at fifty paces" - and urged his critics to read Lenin's *'Left' wing communism: an infantile disorder*.

Indeed, we need not even end our survey in the Labour Party, or even the right wing of social democracy as a whole. Christopher and Peter Hitchens both began their political careers as Trotskyists, but Christopher was, for practical purposes, a neo-conservative by the time of his death, while Peter rapidly found himself among the traditionalist religious right, where he remains (albeit an eccentric and unusually honest example of the species). The American conservative movement may have found its great leader in the lifelong Catholic reactionary, William F Buckley, but ex-communists formed its intellectual striking force, from Whittaker Chambers to James Burnham. The first generation of neo-conservatives was notoriously staffed by many erstwhile Trotskyists, whose anti-Stalinist leftism mutated into a ferocious, messianic anti-communism *per se*.

Yet it does not seem to have done any of them any harm. The right has always had a place for a sincere turncoat. Communism was simply alien to Buckley, but not to Burnham and Chambers, who were therefore better placed to theorise it. Neither did the ex-communist (in reality, mostly ex-Eurocommunist) Blairites really suffer for it, though in their case the rightwing press did sometimes bring this history up. Pressed on his former affiliations once, John Reid replied: "I used to be a communist. I used to believe in Santa Claus." Nobody could really confuse these people with communists. And of

course nobody, today (and perhaps not even in 1986), could confuse Sir Keir Starmer with a Trotskyist.

### Red Ed

It remains to be explained *why* the likes of the *Telegraph* have kept their powder dry for so long, when it comes to Starmer's former Pabloism. It was just as much a matter of public record back in 2019, when he succeeded in pinning Jeremy Corbyn to a remainer position that proved suicidal in that year's election. Why not then? And why not beat him with it in his early period in the leadership? For comparison, you could look at Ed Miliband, the son of new left celebrity, Ralph, whose outlook was constantly held over his son, and who was even denounced in the *Daily Mail* as "the man who hated Britain".

It is difficult to do more than speculate at this point, but we may advance a hypothesis. The 2015 election looked competitive; and the preference in the capitalist class was clearly for its first eleven under those circumstances. The rightwing press found no very great difficulty in backing the Tories. The trouble with Sunak, however, is that he is a loser. Though Starmer has recently had a rough ride, between the Diane Abbott fiasco and a dreadful debate performance and all the rest, his polling lead is intact. Tory victory was already a long shot, but now Nigel Farage is back in the fray and so Reform is likely to present a renewed challenge to Sunak's right flank.

For the most part, the press hates a loser, because it likes to maintain the glamour of power. "It's *The Sun* wot won it!", the tabloid's front page famously crowed when Neil Kinnock went down to a surprise defeat in 1992. In order to look like an important influence, it is necessary to "win it" every time. Thus Murdoch's papers backed Blair against John Major's disintegrating government in 1997, after proper assurances had been obtained. The *Telegraph* is simply a Tory paper; it plays a different role in the bourgeois media than the Murdoch papers, and so is free to scaremonger. The *Times* and *Sun* are not. They must reconcile themselves to the change of guard that looks all but inevitable at this point.

How fortunate for them that the new boss looks so very like the old boss ●

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### Notes

1. www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/06/09/keir-starmer-political-views.

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday June 16 5pm

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

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

Organised by CPGB: [communistparty.co.uk](http://communistparty.co.uk) and  
Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk)  
For further information, email Stan Keable at  
[Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk)

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



LEFT

# Illusion springs eternal

A Starmer government will supposedly trigger a ‘crisis of expectations’. But, asks Carla Roberts, how can it? With promises of financial responsibility and keeping to Tory spending limits, popular expectations are almost non-existent

Remember the crisis of expectations? In 1997, it was all the rage. Apparently, there were huge hopes in Tony Blair, despite the fact that he did not actually promise anything much at all for the working class. He would betray those huge hopes, and this would cause a social explosion. The Socialist Party in England and Wales, Socialist Workers Party, Labour Representation Committee, Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, Workers Power, etc - most of the groups on the British left were shouting it from the rooftops: ‘Vote Labour to get ... well, revolution - or something.’<sup>1</sup>

Despite the fact that no serious working class fightback occurred in the wake of Blair’s 1997 landslide, the SWP’s Lindsey German insisted a couple of years later that Britain was being pushed to the brink of revolution: “It is increasingly obvious that even one major national strike or an all-out strike in one city would lead to a rapid crisis of Blairism and Labourism, as society polarised along class lines.”<sup>2</sup> In terms of theory, these groups get their ability to make such predictions from Trotsky’s 1938 *Transitional programme*: he predicted defeat for Stalinism, a political revolution in the USSR and the death of global capitalism.

Perhaps the most idiotic proponent of the crisis of expectation back in 1997 was the AWL, which yammered on about the “fructification of hope”, as AWL leader Sean Matgamma put it at the time: “Millions have expectations that Labour will serve their interests. Disappointed, they will react against New Labour. These are the elements of a future revolt. That potential can only be made real by a Labour election victory.”<sup>3</sup>

## Auto-Labourism

Incidentally, the AWL has just republished this dire article - partially to explain why it is once again calling for a “vote for Labour everywhere”.

While Blair did actually spend some additional money on schools, the NHS, etc, there is absolutely no chance of that happening under a Starmer government. He has not just refused to overturn the Tories’ spending caps: he is promising to actually enforce them, where the Tories have failed to do so.

Yet the AWL wants socialists to go out and campaign for Starmer’s party (and against Jeremy Corbyn, Andrew Feinstein, etc):

Even those of us whom Labour has expelled for our socialist views will be out on the doorstep doing the electoral work, while also having the conversations which will be necessary to push for working class policies against a Starmer-run Labour government.<sup>4</sup>

While few are daft enough to use the exact words, ‘crisis of expectations’, the political method of auto-Labourism remains very much alive. Instead of independent working class politics - even in embryonic form - the left acts as Labour’s tail.

Take, for example, the semi-comatose Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, which explains its position in a mere half-sentence in a short email: “Elect a Labour government and continue the fight



French Socialist Party anti-fascist demonstration in 1934

for progressive policies.” Momentum is using its targeting software to “elect socialist and trade unionist Labour MPs”. So, if you live in a constituency with a candidate from the so-called Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, you will get an email informing you of campaigning times and dates. Having declared that it will stick uncritically to the Labour Party, accepting all the bans and proscriptions, Momentum cannot, of course, campaign for its reason for existence - one Jeremy Corbyn.

I do not actually know if the Labour Representation Committee still exists - its website was last updated on July 28 2023. But on *Not the Andrew Marr Show*, LRC veteran Graham Bash recently explained why he would be voting for Labour and “a number of independent socialists”:

“I want a Labour government with a working majority, not because it is a lesser evil, but because it provides the best conditions for rebuilding the left ... There will be a real collision between the Starmer government and the resistance in the trade unions”, because the “only remedy” Labour has to deal with the economic crisis is “to attack the working class and many of our freedoms”. So-called “socialist MPs” like Jeremy Corbyn, Diane Abbott and John McDonnell “and even George Galloway” can then give these views “political expression” in parliament. “Under Starmer, we might be approaching the endgame of the Labour Party as a party with links to the trade union movement.”

The “endgame” refers to the idea that the unions would be under pressure to finally “split” from the Labour Party - but in order to build what, exactly? Well, another Labour Party, but a bit more leftwing, like the original Labour Representation Committee formed in 1900.

For many of our auto-Labourite friends, a lot rides on “the unions”. Of course, Labour has promised them very little either, so it seems unlikely they or their members will be so disappointed that they split. Angela Rayner’s ‘New Deal for Workers’ is, when it comes to the finer detail, hardly worth the paper it is written on. There have already been attempts to water down the only concrete pledges to “end zero hours contracts” and an “end of fire and rehire”, because it is “important businesses can restructure to remain viable ... when there is genuinely no

alternative”.<sup>5</sup>

Still, even under those circumstances, many union leaders will hope that they get some crumbs from Labour’s table and will continue with the affiliation link. But even those who have broken from Labour remain wedded to *Labourism* and the idea that we cannot possibly build anything other than a Labour Party mark two.

Even if we presume for a moment that major unions disaffiliate, what kind of party do comrade Bash and co envisage these bureaucrats might form? It is one thing, of course, to engage with such an organisation when the struggle throws it up - but it is something entirely different to actively campaign for its foundation. But those like comrade Bash have no vision beyond *Labourism*. In fact, despite many of these comrades calling themselves Marxists, they argue *against* the formation of a Marxist party - which is, of course, the only kind of party that could even attempt to fight for the system change that we so desperately need.

## Anti-Labourism

The opposite of auto-Labourism still exists too - auto-anti-Labourism. Pride of place on this goes to the newly renamed Revolutionary Communist Party (previously Socialist Appeal), which has only just been thrown out of the Labour Party. Just like the old Militant in the 1980s, the dramatic change in its political perspective is not down to any change in political reality - but the group’s own position. The RCP too is peddling its version of a ‘crisis of expectations’:

Once in office, as night follows day, Starmer will continue with the Tories’ anti-working class policies. But the working class will not take this lying down. Given the accumulated anger in society, a Starmer government will face an avalanche of struggle, and will become one of the most hated governments in recent history. ... Class war will be on the order of the day ... Our relatively untested party will, within the next five or 10 years, be hurled into the turmoil of the British revolution.<sup>6</sup>

Wow. We reckon the RCP leadership will have some explaining to do after July 4, when this ever so exciting, pre-revolutionary situation has translated

into what will no doubt be derisory results for its lone candidate, Fiona Lali, who is standing in Stratford and Bow. Not because she is a bad candidate, but because we are clearly *not* in a revolutionary situation. This is simply a lie, and not a particularly convincing one, designed to keep the RCP’s new members excitedly busy. Lali will do no worse and no better than most of the left candidates; ie, not very well at all.

Similarly deluded are what we might call the Corbynite flotsam and jetsam - the thousands of unorganised lefties who joined Labour in 2015 in the hope that Corbyn would deliver them ‘socialism’ of some sort or another. A few of them congregate once a week in the *Not the Andrew Marr show* on Zoom, where they tell each other that there will be a “bloc of 20-30 independent MPs” in parliament after July 4. You will see this trend on social media too.

Jeremy Corbyn is likely to win in North Islington and George Galloway *might* win in Rochdale - and that is about it. There is very little chance of any other ‘independents’ winning. Sowing such ridiculous illusions will simply add to the already existing pall of demoralisation.

Most of the organised left is at least aware of that reality - though SPEW too believes that “the potential exists for a bloc of workers’ MPs being elected, who could, from July 5, articulate the demands of the working class in parliament”. It is going to be a very small “bloc” indeed! SPEW is still reeling from the utter disdain with which the rest of the left has treated its efforts to bring together different groups to fight the elections under one umbrella - obviously, its own umbrella, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. It is putting forward 40 candidates - ie, considerably fewer than their original target, which is the “fair media coverage threshold”.<sup>7</sup>

The only group that has at least tried to join Tusc recently is the Spartacist League - it was hoping to have one member of the Spartacist League standing under the Tusc banner. But to no avail - they were rebuffed, allegedly over their opposition to trade union rights for prison guards. I reckon the SP would have found a different reason to avoid a Spart standing as Tusc. Anyway, the Sparts are still calling for a vote for Tusc, albeit less enthusiastically than they now do for the Workers

Party, while explaining how “a vote even for Zarah Sultana [or Diane Abbott or John McDonnell] is a vote for genocide”.<sup>8</sup> No, it clearly is not. Sultana in particular has been openly speaking out in solidarity with the Palestinians, including on anti-war protests. Her victory would be a victory for the Palestine solidarity movement.

## Rest of left

Most of the rest of the left is somewhere in between, supporting this or that set of independent candidates plus the odd left Labour MP like Zarah Sultana. Some are standing a few candidates themselves: the SWP, which calls for a vote for 14 independent candidates and Labour elsewhere,<sup>9</sup> is putting forward Maxine Bowler in Sheffield (under the banner of ‘Independent for Palestine’), while the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain will be “contesting its highest number of Westminster seats for 40 years”, as general secretary Robert Griffiths boasts - only three CPB candidates can be seen on its website<sup>10</sup>, though apparently there are 14 in total.<sup>11</sup> Arthur Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party is putting up a dozen (not very exciting) candidates.<sup>12</sup>

George Galloway’s Workers Party of Britain claimed it would be putting forward “over 500 candidates”, but seems to have registered only 152.<sup>13</sup> It admits that it has withdrawn in some areas to avoid clashes - interestingly though not in Sheffield, where it supports Mark Tyler against comrade Bowler. There is, of course, no love lost between Galloway and his former comrades in Respect. The SWP, on the other hand, cannot possibly call for a vote for the WPB, because it is so very dismayed by Galloway’s opposition to trans rights (while, of course, the SWP itself voted against including gay rights and the right to have an abortion in Respect’s manifesto).

Collective, meanwhile, the proto-party set up by Andrew Feinstein (which Jeremy Corbyn is rumoured to be joining after the elections), is supporting over 100 candidates, including seven standing for the Green Party.

In other words, these elections highlight once again the utter uselessness of what much of the left is doing ●

## Notes

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**LABOUR**

# We'll always have Parris

Sir Keir is now open to charges of dithering after Diane Abbott was allowed to stand, writes **Eddie Ford**. But the suggestion that he has 'lost control' over the Labour left is risible

**Y**ou could say Keir Starmer's backing down over Diane Abbott in Hackney North has done him no harm. Opinion polls are still running overwhelmingly in Labour's favour with a consistent 20-point or more lead, and - even more ominously for the Tories - it seems that Reform UK has increased its standing by a couple of points since Nigel Farage entered the race.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, Grant Shapps, defence secretary, is now saying that the Tories are fighting not actually to win, but to prevent Starmer winning a "supermajority" - even bigger than Labour's 1997 landslide. So you could be forgiven for thinking that the Abbott affair has had no impact either way on the Labour Party.

But that would be to look at things too glibly. While we cannot read Sir Keir's mind, there can be little doubt that he wanted to block Diane Abbott from standing as a Labour candidate in the seat she has held for an impressive 37 years. Why else take 13 months to make a decision about her short letter to *The Observer* - are they slow readers or inundated with work, fitting up other party members? No, it was obvious from the start that the 'independent' national executive committee - a fairy story - had intended to drag out the whole process for as long as possible in an effort to prevent Abbott from standing by delaying it right up to the June 7 deadline for nominations - and, of course, justice delayed is justice denied.

Yes, there is no denying that the letter that saw her getting the whip withdrawn was pretty dumb, as it appeared to reduce racism simply to a question of skin colour - effectively proposing a hierarchy of racisms, where being black trumps being Jewish or whatever. Nor did she seem to appreciate that today's Romany gypsies and Irish travellers are often subject to overt racism by politicians, the media and the police, - unlike black MPs these days, for example - meaning that we are dealing with far more than mere prejudice. Yes, Diane Abbott did say that it was an initial draft sent by mistake, with the *Jewish Chronicle* claiming that actually it had been sent twice - but how the hell do they know? And who believes in anything they say anyway? Like the NEC, they are hardly a fair-minded arbiter.

In fact, talking of the *Jewish Chronicle*, the Abbott story has to be seen in the overall context of the witch hunt against the left using trumped-up charges of anti-Semitism. So in the case of Abbott we had the usual suspects like hypocritical MPs from the Labour right, the Jewish Labour Movement, and the Board of Deputies of British Jews lining up to condemn her comments as "disgraceful", "unacceptable", "bigoted", and so on - yet more proof that the party is "riddled with anti-Semites" and other patently absurd accusations.

Yet surely stupidity is only a venal sin, compared to malicious fabrication and character assassination. Abbott's letter was clearly not anti-Semitic either in intent or effect - was she expressing a hatred of Jewish people, or a form of hostility towards Jews as Jews? Any honest person knows the answer to that. As this publication has pointed out, her real crime was being someone identified with the left and close to Jeremy Corbyn, and other such unforgivable transgressions - not for her race or gender, as made out by some of her hopeless leftwing defenders.



**Diane Abbott: vote for her even as an official Labour candidate**

Given her undesirable politics, it was clearly not part of Keir Starmer's original game plan for Abbott to have the whip restored and then allowed to stand. Rather, she was meant to be made an example of, like Faiza Shaheen in nearby Chingford and Woodford Green. Shaheen, when out canvassing, suddenly lost access to the Labour Party's campaigning app - only to discover later that she had been blocked - and that the news had reached journalists that she had been summoned to appear before the NEC in five hours time!

One of the reasons given for her brutal deselection was posting a video on Twitter last November of one of the massive pro-Palestine marches in London with the damning caption, "Happening right now". Another was 'liking' a sketch from the US satirical TV series, *The Daily Show*, that talked about the methods of the "Israel lobby" - with one of the hosts of the programme, Jon Stewart, later describing Shaheen's ousting as "the dumbest thing the UK has done since electing Boris Johnson". In a perfect act of symbolism, she was replaced by Shama Tatler, a member of the Jewish Labour Movement - a much more desirable person for today's Labour Party, it seems.

Naturally, the CPGB gives critical support to Faiza Shaheen, who resigned from the party in disgust and is now standing as an independent in a bid to slightly spoil Sir Keir's party on July 4 - especially as she came a close second in 2019 to the former Tory leader, Sir Iain Duncan Smith, losing to him by just over 1,000 votes. She can therefore be expected to pick up a reasonably good number of votes this time. If she wins (unlikely), we can enjoy a certain satisfaction from watching Starmer squirm.

## Ruthless?

Anyway, returning to Diane Abbott, there was an interesting article about her at the weekend in *The Spectator*.<sup>2</sup> It was by former Tory MP for West Derbyshire, now a TV and radio presenter and award-winning columnist, Matthew Parris - it is almost as if he had been reading the *Weekly Worker* - not something to be discounted.

After confessing to an "admiration" for the MP, as she is "more than capable of giving as good as she gets", he mocks the Labour leader, because he "half-tried to go in for the kill via subordinates" - then "without himself

putting his head properly above the parapet, but finding support collapsing, backed off". Parris writes that Starmer is now "treating the whole episode as if it hadn't happened", but by his inaction he has guaranteed that Abbott will "return to the Commons nursing an unconcealed grudge against a party leader who tried, and failed, to destroy her career" - which could well be true.

## Flagpole

Parris then goes on to wonder if this is an "emerging pattern" that sees Starmer "run a plan halfway up the flagpole then, if nobody salutes it, run it back down". But he warns that prime minister Starmer "will find himself with tougher nuts to crack than a truculent backbencher with a handful of supporters but no real gang", possibly emboldening "other Keir-sceptics" in the party who may now "kick back hard and fast, call the leader out publicly" - and "get Angela Rayner on side" in her capacity as deputy leader. Parris goes on to argue that Rayner "displayed the opposite qualities to her leader" by emphasising that "her power source is the party that elected her, not her leader's patronage", which for him can only mean that "she was challenging him, and wanted us to know it" - clearly the case.

Hitting home, Parris further writes that "the irony is that Starmer's initial strategy, before he lost his nerve, was the right one" - recalling the advice he received from Lord Tristan Garel-Jones, who worked in the whips' office under both Margaret Thatcher and John Major. According to him, what you need to do is single somebody out from among the troublemakers. It does not matter who - it can be quite random, though preferably someone without an organised gang of their own - and then pick on something they have said or done as your line of attack (again anything plausible will do). Then in the view of Garel-Jones, come down on them like a ton of bricks and very publicly, as MPs are pack animals who will see the fate of their colleague and run quickly the other way - never leave your victim standing.

But that was not what Starmer did, of course, as Parris has fun pointing out. If the Labour leader had been "shrewd", he believes, the real objection to Abbott should always have been "that she's on the party's left, indifferent to office,

insolent and careless what offence she gives the leadership" - though not in any way a ringleader - with the MP for Hackney North offering Starmer "the excuse" he needed with her *Observer* letter that the racism black people face is in a different league from other minority groups - "a remark defensible, but easy to misconstrue". From then onwards, Parris comments, "the Starmerite plan was to stay quiet then shaft her, minutes - as it were - before a general election" - an analysis that is hard to disagree with and would have made Garel-Jones proud.

However, if that is the plan, the worst possible outcome is to lose your nerve at the last minute under the combined pressure of elements from the left, centre and even right of the party - so, instead of Sir Keir making an example of Abbott, she made an example of him (at least in the opinion of Parris).

Beth Rigby, political editor of Sky News, presented a similar analysis two weeks ago.<sup>3</sup> If Starmer is truly

"ruthless about changing Britain, the fewer leftwing firebrands on his benches, the better", she wrote. Therefore "de-selecting potentially unruly future MPs and replacing them with loyalists" makes perfect sense.

But where Matthew Parris gets it completely wrong in his *Spectator* article is by saying that, when the Labour leader decided *not* to force out Diane Abbott, that was "the moment Starmer lost control of the Labour left". He may have muddled the change narrative - after all, where Parris has led Rishi Sunak and the Tory election machine will follow. It will definitely be the case that leftwingers in the Labour Party will take a sliver of comfort from Abbott managing to remain in her seat by using her "any means necessary" threat.

Yet, as proved time and time again, the official Labour left is totally spineless, including Diane Abbott, particularly when it comes to Nato's proxy war in Ukraine and the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' big lie. We had, after all, the miserable spectacle of her pulling out of speaking at a Stop the War Coalition meeting about the Ukraine war following threats from Starmer to withdraw the whip or even possibly expel her - she has even given explicit backing to Nato as a "defensive alliance", marking a new stage of wretchedness.

In other words, the CPGB is calling for a vote for Abbott on July 4 not because we have any illusions in her as a principled socialist - she is not. But getting a few unwanted leftwingers elected would represent a small victory against Sir Keir ●

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## Notes

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## Fighting fund

# We can do it!

**T**his week's fighting fund received a boost just as I was preparing to write this column, when US comrade PM's regular £50 PayPal donation landed in our account - good timing!

It was actually one of three £50 contributions that came our way via PayPal - thanks also to comrades SO and RL. Also helping us out by doing that were MH (£10) and KF (£5) - more modest, but still very welcome donations.

On top of that were the usual batch of standing orders/bank transfers. Thank you, comrades PB (£70), BO (£35), NH (£30), OG (£29), DV and GD (£25 each), and finally comrades IS, SM, PM and LG, who each gave us a tenner!

All that comes to £447 - and takes our running total up to £826 towards our £2,250 monthly target. Just a bit below the going rate for June, which only has 30 days, of which 12 have gone, as I write. But I'm confident that other readers and supporters

will step on the gas - there are so many who understand the central role played by the *Weekly Worker* in arguing and campaigning for the one thing the working class urgently needs - a principled Communist Party.

But this role needs financial as well as political support. We're faced with continuing cost increases, particular for printing and mailing, and we want that to be matched by a rise in financial support too!

Can you help us out? If you can, you can do so by sending us a cheque (the address is at the bottom of page 2), making a bank transfer or clicking on that PayPal button (details for both below).

With your help we can do it! ●  
**Robbie Rix**

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## FOUNDATIONS

# Programme makers

Without the working class organising itself into a political party there can be no chance of socialism. But, argues **Jack Conrad**, without a comprehensive, fully worked-out programme, that party has no chance of taking coherent form, guarding against opportunism or navigating the road to socialism

**S**ocialism cannot be delivered from on high. So no socialism via an ‘onwards and upwards’ would-be labour dictator; no socialism by winning over trade union officialdom to sponsor non-Labour election candidates; no socialism by voting Labour and triggering an entirely fanciful ‘crisis of expectations’. Certainly, no socialism via Sir Keir Starmer - that despite him running *Socialist Alternatives* from his Highgate home in the 1980s and his youthful dalliance with Pabloism.<sup>1</sup> He is, of course, a “harmless moderate”.<sup>2</sup>

Socialism is an act of self-liberation by the great mass of the working class for the sake of the great mass of humanity. The working class smashes the old state machine of the bourgeoisie, constitutes itself as the ruling class and begins the transition to the communist mode of production. A necessary precondition being the fight for the most extensive democracy, the highest level of class-consciousness and, correspondingly, organising the working class into a disciplined political party.

Though it may appear paradoxical to some, that party is built top-down. As Lenin bluntly explained, doubtless simplifying for the sake of the argument:

We have said that there could not have been social democratic [communist] consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness: ie, the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals.

By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of social democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.<sup>3</sup>

Lenin had in mind the role of the Emancipation of Labour group founded by Georgi Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich, Leo Deutsch and Pavel Axelrod - members of the “revolutionary socialist intelligentsia” who had gone over from Narodism to Marxism in the early 1880s. They studied, adapted and applied the theory of Marx and Engels to Russian conditions and then brought it to the working class from the outside - the outside in this case not being from Switzerland, where they were exiled, but, as Lenin made clear, from outside the economic struggle between workers and employers.

Economic struggles in and of themselves produce nothing more than trade union consciousness and



**Lenin in 1919: he went to great lengths to formulate and then defend the programme**

therefore trade union politics - what Lenin called the “bourgeois politics of the working class”, because trade unionism primarily involves selling, bargaining over the market price of labour-power (a commodity in principle no different to any other commodity).<sup>4</sup>

Does that mean the party we envisage - its proper, scientific name being ‘Communist Party’ - is going to consist of a thousand or so activists, managed, controlled and directed by a self-perpetuating central committee or some all-knowing guru? No, not at all, and that is why we consider the perspectives and political culture of groups such as the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales, Workers Revolutionary Party, etc, etc, so problematic.

### Class party

No, what we mean by ‘party’ is the kind of mass organisation fought for by Karl Marx. At the Hague congress of the First International, held in September 1872, he moved a successful resolution, which called for workers to form themselves “into a political party”. Otherwise the “working class cannot act as a class”.<sup>5</sup>

The kind of *class party* Marx had in mind was realised, to some considerable degree, by the Social Democratic Party of August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht and Karl Kautsky. A million members and, in the 1912 elections, 34.8% of the popular vote. Over a hundred Reichstag deputies and well over a hundred, largely autonomous, specialist, local and regional papers, all of which featured robust debate. Politically viewpoints ranged from the overtly revisionist (who should have been expelled, but in the main were not) to those who would later be called ‘left’ communists (who needed to be patiently brought around). The SDP constituted almost a ‘state within the state’: it not only had its own press and politicians, but its festivals, mass trade unions, libraries, sporting clubs, pubs, cooperatives and local government strongholds too.

Although there were exceptions - such as the British Labour Party - most parties of the Second International took the German party, along with its 1891 *Erfurt programme*, as their template.<sup>6</sup> Amongst them, indubitably, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and its Bolshevik (majority) wing led by Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov

(aka Lenin).

Lenin, it should be stressed, was perfectly candid about his desire for the RSDLP to imitate the German SDP programmatically:

... a few words are in order on our attitude to the *Erfurt programme* ... we consider it necessary to ... bring the programme of the Russian social democrats closer to that of the German. We are not in the least afraid to say that we want to imitate the *Erfurt programme*: there is nothing bad in imitating what is good, and precisely today, when we so often hear opportunist and equivocal criticism of that programme, we consider it our duty to speak openly in its favour.<sup>7</sup>

A little later Lenin advises those who want to “understand the whole of our programme” to:

get hold of two pamphlets to use as aids. One pamphlet is by the German social democrat, Karl Kautsky, and its title is the *Erfurt programme*. It has been translated into Russian. The other pamphlet is by the Russian social democrat, L Martov, and its title is *The workers’ cause in Russia*.<sup>8</sup>

With good reason the pro-Bolshevik historian, Lars T Lih, dubs Lenin a “Russian Erfurtian”.<sup>9</sup> Not that any of the confessional sects take a blind bit of notice. Their version of Bolshevism is that of the confessional sect which suddenly, almost out of nowhere, grows into mass proportions, given a strike wave and peace demonstrations. In other words, a patently false version of the Russian Revolution.

The actual parties of social democracy, including, of course, the RSDLP, sunk deep social roots in the working class and, through tireless, often heroic struggles, managed to become a power in their own right in the politics of continental Europe - an achievement which rested in no small part on thoroughgoing internal democracy, the lively, frank and open debate of differences, the willingness of minorities to stay and abide by majority votes - that and the very considerable room allowed to local districts and branches to take their own initiatives. However - and this is the main point here - these parties were built around their programmes.

The RSDLP was no exception. The real founding congress happened in

1903 (the 1st Congress in 1898 proved abortive: it failed to unite Russia’s social democrats and most delegates were arrested soon after it finished). What about the programme? Well, as early as 1895-96, while he was in prison, Lenin wrote the ‘Draft and explanation of a programme for the Social Democratic Party’.<sup>10</sup> At the end of 1899, during a period of exile in Siberia, he prepared another draft programme - ‘A draft programme of our party’.<sup>11</sup> And, with the launch of *Iskra*, in December 1900, Lenin declared, that its key task was to overcome opportunist tendencies - most importantly economism - and achieve the political unity of Russian social democrats around a definite party programme.<sup>12</sup>

With talk of convening a 2nd Congress gaining momentum, drafting a party programme became a matter of extreme urgency. Lenin suggested that the theoretical part be written by Georgi Plekhanov (the ‘father of Russian Marxism’ and a fellow *Iskra* editorial board member). However, he was unhappy with the results and once again took up the task himself. That resulted in *Iskra*’s six-strong editorial board being presented with two drafts. Though Plekhanov’s was taken as the basis of amendments, many of Lenin’s suggestions were adopted.

The draft programme of the RSDLP, finalised by *Iskra*’s editorial board in Lenin’s absence, was published in June 1902. And it was this draft that the RSDLP’s 2nd Congress, held over July 30-August 23 1903, took as its starting point. After agreeing standing orders and dealing with the Bund - its demand for a federal party was rejected - the draft programme was the third item on the agenda.<sup>13</sup> Many sessions followed before the programme was overwhelmingly agreed (there were a few minor amendments and just one abstention).

There were, it should be noted, 43 full voting delegates representing 26 organisations: they included 33 *Iskra*ists, five Bundists and two economists. There were also those with a consultative voice, but no vote (eg, the Polish social democrats). We shall not deal with the Bolshevik/Menshevik split - suffice to say that both main wings of the party agreed that the rules should begin by stating: “A party member is one who accepts the party’s programme ...”<sup>14</sup>

Rank opportunists, who know a smattering of Marx, often, too often, gleefully quote this statement:

“Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes.”<sup>15</sup> This is certainly true - think 1848, 1871, 1905 and 1917. But anyone who fields these words, or other similar such phrases - in these days of fragmentation, confusion and disorganisation - to dismiss, mock or play down the centrality of programme scabs on the cause of partyism.<sup>16</sup>

### Taken from

No less to the point, these words - taken from Marx’s letter to Wilhelm Bracke - are commonly attached to his ‘Critique of the Gotha programme’ (1875), where he eviscerates the compromising, the backtracking, the trading away of principled programmatic formulations by his comrades in Germany. So, far from downplaying the need for a programme - and this is obvious with even a cursory reading of his critique - Marx was striving to reorientate, to rescue, the proto-SDP programmatically.

Needless to say, Marx fully appreciated the role and importance of programme - after all, he (co)authored the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and the *Demands of the Communist Party in Germany*. Then there was the International Workingman’s Association, the First International - Marx was responsible for its rules and fundamental documents. Marx was, in fact, a consummate writer of programmes: eg, the role he played in drafting the *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier*. Marx dictated the maximum section (the preamble), while the two parts of the minimum section, the immediate political and economic demands, were formulated by himself and Jules Guesde, with help coming from Frederick Engels and Paul Lafargue. Their programme was adopted, with certain amendments, by the founding congress of the Parti Ouvrier meeting at Le Havre in November 1880.

Incidentally, after the programme was agreed, differences arose between the Marx-Engels team in London and their French comrades. Whereas Marx saw the minimum section of the programme as a set of demands which, while technically realisable under capitalism, serves to train - not least through mass agitation and mass mobilisations - the working class and thereby readies it for taking power, Guesde took a very different approach. He discounted the possibility of obtaining reforms such as the “abolition of standing armies and the general arming of the people” and the “legal reduction of the working day to eight hours for adults”. In fact, Guesde regarded the minimum programme not as a means to rouse millions into action - no, for him the minimum programme was to be nothing more than “bait with which to lure the workers from radicalism”. The rejection of such reforms would, Guesde believed, “free the proletariat of its last reformist illusions” and convince them of the need for a workers’ 1789.<sup>17</sup>

This practical dismissal of the minimum programme - somewhat in the manner of the Socialist Party of Great Britain - meant, unsurprisingly, that what was known as ‘Marxism’ in France was widely ridiculed by practically-minded workers, leading



# FOUNDATIONS

an exasperated Marx to accuse Guesde and Lafargue of “revolutionary phrase-mongering” and delivering this well known put down: “*Ce qu’il y a de certain c’est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste*” (“If anything is certain, it is that I myself am not a Marxist”).<sup>18</sup>

Back to Germany. It is doubtless true that a party should be judged primarily by what it does, rather than what its programme says. But a pre-party, a proto-party, a new party, will rightly be judged by its programme. And the *Gotha programme* represented a considerable retreat, compared with the prior *Eisenach programme*.

A little background. The Social Democratic Workers Party was founded at Eisenach in 1869 under the leadership of August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht - an organisation of just a few thousand. Its programme had, though, definite shortcomings: eg, it demanded an altogether vague free people’s state and universal male suffrage. But there were also calls for the liberation of the working class, abolition of the standing army, establishing a people’s militia and the separation of church and state. And it constituted the SDWP as “a branch” of the First International - “to the extent that the associational laws permit”.<sup>19</sup> Bebel and Liebknecht, note, both served lengthy prison sentences for membership of the International.

Contemporaries regarded the SDWP as a Marxist party. So everything the SDWP said and did in Germany reflected on the reputation of the Marx-Engels team - a reputation they were determined to uphold. Eg, Mikhail Bakunin attacked what he called Marxism in his *Statism and anarchy* (1873), in no small part by laying hold of the failings, real and imagined, of the “dumvirate of Bebel and Liebknecht” and the “Jewish literati behind or under them”.<sup>20</sup> The Slavophile, Bakunin, hated Germans and Jews with a horrible passion.

Anyhow, put together jointly by Bebel and Liebknecht, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, by the followers of the state socialist, Ferdinand Lassalle, a new programme was to be presented to the unity congress of the two groups meeting in Gotha. After much haggling Marx’s comrades agreed a series of rotten compromises. Not only the “iron law of wages”, but other Lassalleian drivel, such as “state”-financed industry and the claim that “all other classes are only a reactionary body”.<sup>21</sup> The justification for making such compromises? The opportunist dictum of beginning where people are at and pursuit of the holy grail of ‘unity for the sake of unity’.

Disobeying doctor’s orders, Marx took to his desk to compose a blistering commentary. He also offered the advice that, unless his alternative formulations - or something very much like them - were adopted, then it would be better, far better, for the SDWP and the Lassalleans to remain separate organisations and find issues where they could engage in common action. Rather disunity and maintaining principle than unprincipled unity.

## Unity and unity

Without a revolutionary programme there can be no successful socialist revolution. That truth cannot be insisted upon too strongly, especially at a time when: (1) the numbers genuinely committed to building a mass Communist Party remain frighteningly small; (2) single-issue campaigns and so-called united fronts dominate, when it comes to mass actions; (3) much of the organised left remains trapped in confessional sects; (4) with the reformist left and refugees from the confessional sects, prime energies, hopes and expectations are vested in working towards yet another broad-left alliance, network or privately owned company.

By contrast, communists aim for nothing short of an explicitly Marxist party - a mass Communist Party that is fit for the burning tasks of the 21st century: breaking the hold of the labour bureaucracy; transforming the trade unions; delegitimising the existing constitution; securing an active majority for socialism; winning working class state power and superseding the malfunctioning, ecologically destructive, historically exhausted system of capitalism on a global scale.

## Easy to grasp

Bertolt Brecht’s wonderful poem, ‘In praise of communism’ (1931), calmly insists that the truths of communism are easy to grasp and “simple” ... unless you are an exploiter. The working class has a vital interest in fighting capitalism and realising a communist society. The common struggle for improved wages, the common struggle to set legal limits on working hours, the common struggle for conditions which allow for full individual and collective development, drives - or at the very least tends the working class - in that direction. So, looking to the future, we have every reason to be confident. Millions upon millions can be won to the cause of communism.

Yet Marxism, rightly, is spoken of as a science. After all, another term for it is ‘scientific socialism’. The Marxism of Marx and Engels richly deserves that title, because it is always rigorous, logical, critical and open-ended. Of course, science is not easy. While Marx and Engels undoubtedly possessed first-rate minds, they had to put in endless hours of study (not forgetting their leading role as practical organisers and revolutionaries, which immensely enriched their theory). As with Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Darwin and Einstein, their genius was 99% sweat.

Likewise, explaining current problems: the persistence of capitalism, the betrayal of social democracy, the contradictory role of ‘official communism’, the collapse of bureaucratic socialism in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, the nature of modern-day China, how to put a stop to the ecological destruction wrought by production for the sake of production, while not allowing billions of people to be impoverished ... such problems cannot be solved with trite catchphrases and bestowing ready-made labels. There has been far too much of that over the years and that is why so much of what today passes for ‘Marxism’ - certainly what comes from the sects, including the sects of one - ought to be regarded as being closer in spirit to religion than science.

Things have to be studied, grasped, in all their many-sided complexity, and, of course, interpretations, hypotheses and results must be transmitted with *far more* energy and imagination than displayed by physicists, evolutionary biologists and mathematicians. We emphasise the term, ‘far more’, because Marxism is dedicated not merely to explaining what is: the goal is to completely transform what is.

Brecht’s poem ends with this neat twist, calling communism “the simple thing, that’s so hard to achieve”. We not only have the state machine of the ruling class against us: we have the ruling ideas of the ruling class against us too.

The *Weekly Worker’s* ‘What we fight for’ column says this: while there are “many so-called ‘parties’”, there “exists no real Communist Party”. So at this moment in time, though there are members of the CPGB, there is no CPGB. One of those paradoxes which exist in the real world that so confuses narrow-minded pedants and incurable cynics

alike.

While doing our best to support key strikes and mass movements, taking a disproportionately prominent role in all manner of unity projects on the left (and not forgetting opposition to the witch-hunt in the Labour Party), we put the aim of establishing a mass Communist Party at the centre of our work. Today that means not only combining political education with ongoing class struggles: it means ending the debilitating disunity of Marxists - not least in the confessional sects and their systematic mistreatment of members (they are typically considered as mere speaking tools).

Of course, it is no good just calling for ‘unity’. It is necessary to have a definite political programme. Without that there can only be unprincipled lash-ups, empty sloganising, the chasing after marketing opportunities and then, usually within a very short time, the inevitable floundering, break-up and bitter recriminations.

That is where programme comes in. We have devoted some considerable time and effort to drawing up a *Draft programme*.<sup>22</sup> Not to present others with an ultimatum - an accusation made by the ignorant, the embittered or the plain dishonest. No, our *Draft programme* comes with the same idea in mind as when the *Iskra* editorial board printed, published and then presented the Plekhanov-Lenin draft programme to the RSDLP’s 2nd Congress.

It is a contribution, a means of provoking thought and stimulating debate, and, hopefully, it will provide the substantive basis for amendments at the Refoundation Congress of the CPGB, when it eventually happens. That is, of course, entirely a matter for the assembled delegates. If we have the majority, as was the case with the *Iskra*ists, then debating our *Draft programme* will certainly be one of the first agenda items.

As the leading and only authoritative, pro-party centre, we might expect a clear majority of congress delegates. Who knows? But, even without that majority, there are very good reasons for delegates to take our *Draft programme* as their starting point.

We are proud of what we have produced. There is nothing faddish, doctrinaire or myopic about our *Draft programme*. It is not a warmed-over wish list of Keynesian nostrums - eg, the Corbynite *For the many, not the few* (2017). Nor does it consist of the bland medley of economic and tailist demands served up by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. Nor is it one of those attempted ‘transitional’ tricks designed to put the working class into motion and the confessional sect into power. Nor is it a national socialist prognostication that repeatedly proves itself to be spectacularly wrong, as in the case of the old, ‘official’, CPGB’s *British road to socialism*.<sup>23</sup>

No, the communist programme stems from the needs of a clear majority of population. Hence, firstly, it is a guide to action: ie, how to go about organising the working class into a political party. Secondly, the programme represents the crystallisation of our principles - spun not out of thin air, but derived from the accumulated theoretical knowledge and practical experience of the global working class historically.

Our *Draft programme* thereby constitutes a sound basis for the refoundation for the Communist Party. It links everyday struggles with the goal of communism and full, collective and individual, human development. To use a well-worn formula, the programme represents the dialectical unity between theory and practice. It thereby constitutes the basis for agreed actions. It is the standard, the reference point, around

which the unity of communists is built, tested and strengthened.

Naturally, the Communist Party - organising the advanced part of the working class - reformulates and adjusts the programme when necessary. But in many ways the Communist Party is in itself an outgrowth of the programme. Recruits are attracted to its far-reaching, inspiring, but theoretically well-grounded demands. Members are then trained, encadred, made into mass leaders by the struggle to realise its goals. In that sense the programme is responsible for generating the Communist Party. For certain, the main determination runs not from the needs of the organisation, but from the programme and its principles to the organisation and its membership.

## Form and content

Our *Draft programme* is as short and concise as possible. Everything that is not essential was deliberately kept out. Passing facts, prime ministers, presidents, opposition leaders, demonstrations, opinion polls on Scottish independence and episodic parliamentary arrangements have no place in the communist programme. Engels himself urged exactly that approach: “All that is redundant in a programme weakens it”.<sup>24</sup> Our *Draft programme*, rightly, concentrates on principles and strategy. Particular tactics, theoretical and historical explanations - all that should be dealt with elsewhere: party meetings, articles in our press and on the internet, seminars, pamphlets and books. As we confidently stated back in 1991, it should follow that our programme “will therefore not of necessity need rewriting every couple of years, as with the programmes of the opportunists, let alone go out of date even before it has come off the press, as was the case with the CPB’s version of the *BRS*”.<sup>25</sup>

Evidently, the communist programme has a twofold function. On the one side, it presents chosen demands, principles and aims. On the other side, it charts an overall strategic approach to the conquest of state power, based on a concrete analysis of objective socio-economic conditions. Naturally, to state what should be obvious, we seek to navigate the shortest, least costly route from today’s cramped, crisis-ridden, ecologically unsustainable socio-economic conditions to a truly human world.

Our programme owes nothing to holy script - it is not fixed, timeless and inviolate. On the contrary, given a major political rupture - eg, Brexit, the break-up of the United Kingdom and its historically unified workers’ movement, the abolition of the monarchy, etc - then various passages in our programme ought to be (and have been in the case of Brexit) suitably reformulated.

The programme must become the political compass for millions. Again, as I argued not a few years back,

Every clause of the programme must be easily assimilated and understood by advanced workers. It must be written in an accessible style, whereby passages and sentences can be used for agitational purposes and even turned into slogans.<sup>26</sup>

We have sought to learn from the best that history provides: eg, in my opinion, the Marx-Engels *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, the *Erfurt programme* of the German SDP and the first and second programmes of Russia’s social democrats/communists. Of course, we have not mindlessly aped them. Conditions in the UK, its history, economic peculiarities and specifics, and, not least, its constitution and class structure must be, and are, fully taken

into account.

## Structure

Let me briefly describe the structure of our CPGB *Draft programme*. There are six sections, one logically leading to the other - form and content being closely connected.

The opening section is a brief preamble, describing the origins of the CPGB and the inspiration provided by the October 1917 revolution. We also, rightly, touch upon the liquidation of the ‘official’ CPGB by its various opportunist leaderships and conclude with the organised rebellion staged by the Leninist forces and the subsequent struggle to reforge the party.

The next section - the real starting point - outlines the main features of the epoch: the epoch of the transition from capitalism, by way of socialism, to communism. Then comes the nature of capitalism in Britain and the consequences of its development. Following on from there comes the economic, social and democratic measures that are needed if the peoples of Britain are to live a full and decent life.

This minimum, or immediate, section of programme is most definitely *not* an attempt to throw the social weight of the working class into the ‘liberal’ task of completing the bourgeois revolution.<sup>27</sup> That happened in 1688. The monarchy, the House of Lords, the established Church of England, the Privy Council, etc, are not feudal relics. They are thoroughly embourgeoisified forms, through which capital rules - bourgeois democracy being, in my opinion, an oxymoron. The only democracy the capitalist class considers ‘natural’ is ‘One share, one vote’. Hence every *real* democratic advance has been won from below, crucially by the organised working class - that in the face of savage opposition from those above. To credit capitalism with democratic rights, such as universal suffrage, free speech and the right to strike, is ahistorical and politically naive to the point of treachery.

Though our minimum programme is *technically* feasible within the framework of present-day capitalism, in actual fact, its demands can only be realised, genuinely, comprehensively by way of revolution. So the minimum programme is not a programme to reform capitalism, so that it conforms to some entirely bogus liberal ideal. On the contrary, our programme is designed to shift the main focus of the class struggle from the day-to-day economic, to high politics and the question of state power.

There will be those who might want to call some, or all, of the demands contained in this programmatic section ‘transitory’. I am fine with that, as long as the democratic question remains central and there is no retreat into relying on routine economic struggles to spontaneously generate mass socialist/communist consciousness. That would be fatal. The real point though is the necessity of having a minimum programme. Those who reject the minimum programme, as Rosa Luxemburg did in 1918, disarm the party: “socialism”, she proclaimed, “this is the minimum we are going to secure”.<sup>28</sup> In the midst of a revolutionary situation it is doubtless right to raise slogans such as “All power to workers’ and soldiers’ councils”. But, if the revolutionary situation is drowned in blood and becomes a counterrevolutionary situation, what does the party have to say then?

From our minimum demands we move on to the character of the British revolution and the positions of the various classes and strata. Marxists, let it be noted, do not consider non-proletarian classes to be one reactionary mass. Sections of the middle classes can and must



be won over. Next, again logically, comes the workers' government in Britain and the worldwide transition to socialism and communism. Here is our maximum programme. Finally, the necessity for all partisans of the working class to unite in a reformed Communist Party is dealt with.

The essential organisational principles of democracy and unity in action are then stated and we underline in no uncertain terms why the CPGB must combine unity in action with internal democracy and the open expression of differences.

## SWP vs programme

Though communists treat their programme with the utmost seriousness, talk to any SWP loyalist and I guarantee you that they will adopt a completely dismissive - even an aggressively hostile - attitude, if you dare suggest that it would be a good idea for them to adopt a programme. There have been, thankfully, various members of the SWP who have agreed with us on this subject. But now, of course, they are mostly ex-members.

Anyway, in justifying the SWP's bizarre aversion to adopting any kind of programme, its loyalists typically insist that a programme would be too rigid, inflexible and constricting. Chains and manacles are often mentioned. Therefore, it supposedly follows, a programme is a horrible danger that must be avoided at all costs. To provide themselves with the sanction of 'orthodoxy', SWP loyalists will invoke the ghost of Marx and, yes, the "Every step of the real movement" statement. That is meant to clinch the argument. In fact, it does no such thing.

Neither Marx nor anyone standing in the authentic Marxist tradition has ever denied the necessity of a programme. It was the revisionist, Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932), who openly scorned the maximum programme and tried to theoretically justify elevating the organisation of the party into a thing for itself. Unconsciously this was echoed and turned into dogma by the SWP's Machiavellian founder-leader, Tony Cliff. He routinely warned against adopting a programme. Gaining recruits and petty factional advantage was his sole guide.

Yes, a democratically agreed programme would have created intolerable difficulties for the SWP central committee, with its many and sudden about-turns under comrade Cliff. True, in the early 1950s, when his Socialist Review Group was a mere bacillus in the bowels of the Labour Party, he agreed to a pinched, 12-point programme of "transitional demands", which were meant to attract and recruit "individual" Labour and trade union activists.<sup>29</sup> It was Duncan Hallas who wrote and submitted the original "transitional programme" to the SRG. Tony Cliff, however, ensured that even this was stripped, shorn of anything too radical: eg, the "overthrow of the Tory government by all the means available to the working class" and "defence of socialist Britain" against Washington and Moscow.

Inspiration, clearly, came from Leon Trotsky. Here, the 'transitional method' is taken to the point where democratic questions, both in the workers' movement and society at large, go ignored, along with the attitude towards the middle classes. The tasks of the workers' movement are thereby reduced to trade union politics. As to the "final aim" of working class rule, socialism and the transition to communism, that is, yes, left to spontaneity. Hallas explains the duplicity involved. The "programme of demands" must be "made to appear both necessary and realisable to broad sections of the workers, given their present (reformist) level of understanding, but which in

reality pass beyond the framework of bourgeois democracy. Naturally ... [this is] only part (a fairly small part) of what we advocate."<sup>30</sup>

With the Cliffite turn away from Labour Party deep entryism in the mid-1960s, economic minimalism was abandoned for a heady brew of eclectic Luxemburgism and the International Socialists. Cliff sought distance from what then, in the aftermath of World War II, passed as Leninism and Trotskyism, because he was at least able to recognise both Stalin's palpable success in creating an empire in eastern Europe and the palpable reality of the long economic boom in the west. Events had, after all, beached Trotsky's 1930s expectations. Stalinism did not collapse with the Nazi invasion. Nor was capitalism in its "death agony".<sup>31</sup> In fact, it was the Trotskyites who were spiralling into crisis. As Cliff wittily put it: guided by Trotsky's 1938 *Transitional programme*, they were like people trying to navigate the Paris metro using a London tube map.

Cliff readily admitted how "excruciatingly painful" it was to face up to the reality that Trotsky's predictions had proved false.<sup>32</sup> But false they were. Cliff, therefore, reluctantly concluded that the *Transitional programme* had been "belied by life" and that reformism was enjoying a second spring.<sup>33</sup> In the fourth volume of his Trotsky biography, Cliff argued, surely rightly, that its demands, such as a sliding scale of wages, were adopted in response to a "capitalism in deep slump" and therefore "did not fit a non-revolutionary situation". He concluded:

The basic assumption behind Trotsky's transitional demands was that the economic crisis was so deep that the struggle for even the smallest improvement in workers' conditions would bring conflict with the capitalist system itself. When life disproved the assumption, the ground fell from beneath the programme.<sup>34</sup>

In the 1950s at least, Cliff was no fool.

Nonetheless, his blasé attitude towards programmes can be judged by what might appear to be the glaring exception. Namely the International Socialists' programme of the early 1970s. Cliff, and industrial organiser Andreas Nagliatti, took the lead by writing an article with this revealing title: 'Main features of the programme we need'.<sup>35</sup> Drafts were discussed over several meetings of the IS national committee.

The main motivation behind the programme move seems twofold. First, induct the growing body of recruits into the belief-system of the confessional sect. Second, draw lines of demarcation. The IS had just suffered two jarring faction fights - first with Sean Matgamna's Workers Fight group, then the Right Opposition (the origins of today's *Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism* and the pro-Zionist online journal *Spiked*). Both factions showed an unwelcome fondness for Trotsky's *Transitional programme*.

Ian Birchall recounts that the draft programme was mainly the work of Chris Harman and Duncan Hallas, though others made contributions. It ran to some 15,000 words. Far, far too long. Programmes should be precise, succinct and short.

Submitted to the 1973 IS conference, the draft was remitted to the NC for further consideration - a job given over to a sub-committee, consisting of Cliff, Hallas and Birchall. "However, Cliff, without consulting the sub-committee, let alone the NC", passed it on to the (new) industrial organiser, Roger Rosewell, who "turned it into a pamphlet" (*The struggle for workers'*

*power* 1973). Incidentally, Rosewell, a rather pathetic figure, dropped out of the IS soon afterwards and quickly moved to the right. He joined the short-lived Social Democratic Party, serving on its industrial committee, then worked for the free-market Aims for Industry outfit and wrote leaders for the *Daily Mail*.

Anyhow, showing the importance attached to programme, the September 1974 conference took just 30 minutes to debate and agree the whole thing ... and then nothing more was heard of it! As a result Cliff was free to do and say what he pleased without reference to any map: tube, road or anything else for that matter. What went for Cliff went double for his chosen heir and successor, John Rees, especially with his Respect popular-front adventure. The *modus vivendi* of Respect was to unite "secular socialists with Muslim activists" on the basis of whatever it took to get local and national candidates elected.<sup>36</sup>

Much to the discredit of the post-Rees SWP, it has steadfastly refused to conduct any kind of *serious* autopsy into the Respect popular front debacle.<sup>37</sup> What goes for the SWP goes double for Counterfire.<sup>38</sup> Same with Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st century.<sup>39</sup>

The problem runs deep and the problem goes back to the refusal to learn from the Marx-Engels team, the German SDP, the French PO and the RSDLP, when it comes to the *central importance* of programme ●

## Notes

1. M Kosman 'Keir Starmer: from "Marxist" to "cop in an expensive suit"' - see libcom.org/article/keir-starmer-marxist-cop-expensive-suit-mark-kosman.
2. For an amusing, if somewhat eccentric, opposite opinion, see Peter Hitchens *Daily Mail* June 9 2022. Also, 'Starmer's history of leftwing views revealed' - a first attempt at Trot-baiting Starmer in the 2024 general election campaign as far as I know, it is written by one Gordon Rayner, associate editor of *The Telegraph*, who exposes Sir Keir's "younger years" - see www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/06/09/keir-starmer-political-views.
3. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 5, Moscow 1977, pp375-76.
4. *Ibid* p426.
5. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 23, London 1988, p243.
6. For those interested, Ben Lewis gives a fascinating "synoptic overview" of the numerous drafts produced by the party leadership, along with the various suggestions coming from Engels and *Die Neue Zeit*'s editorial board - see B Lewis (ed and trans) *Karl Kautsky on democracy and republicanism* Leiden 2020, pp307-28.
7. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 4, Moscow 1977, p235.
8. *Ibid* p429.
9. LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered: 'What is to be done?' in context* Chicago IL 2008, p111.
10. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 2, Moscow 1977, pp99-121.
11. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 4, Moscow 1977, pp227-54.
12. *Ibid* p324.
13. See B Pearce (trans) *1903: second congress of the RSDLP* London 1978.
14. www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/rsdip/1903/rules.htm.
15. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 24, London 1989, p78.
16. In terms of the most recent example of this sordid phenomenon, there is the ludicrously named web journal, *The Partyist*. On a first read, it appeared to me to be a spoof - a lame attempt at humour. But, no, despite the utterly crude plagiarism, the numerous basic errors, the jejune attempts at theory, it wants to be taken seriously. Have a read: thepartyist.com/our-principles.
17. BH Moss *The origins of the French labour movement, 1830-1914: the socialism of skilled workers* Berkeley CA 1976, p107.
18. This is Engels quoting Marx in a letter to Eduard Bernstein in Zurich dated November 2-3 1882 (K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 46, London 1992, p356).
19. ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub\_document.cfm?document\_id=688.
20. libcom.org/files/statismandanarchy.pdf.
21. archive.org/stream/GothaProgramme/726\_socWrksrParty\_gothaProgram\_231\_djvu.txt.
22. CPGB *Draft programme* London 1995, 2011, 2023 (communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme).
23. The *BRS* and its precursors went through a whole number of versions. Most were completely outdated even before they came off the press. *Britain's road to socialism* (2020), the programme of the *Morning Star's* CPB, is credited with being "up to the minute". Inevitably then, short-termism,

inane news commentary dominate and become more outdated with each passing day. Par for the course. Take the November 1989 version. Its Labour government 'road to socialism' was premised on what was supposed to be the "decisively" shifting international balance of class forces. "Socialism" in the Soviet Union, eastern Europe and China would allow a peaceful road to national socialism in Britain through the election of Labour, CPB and progressive MPs. Needless to say, when the CPB rewrote its programme in 1992, we find though that the Soviet Union and the "socialist countries" in eastern Europe have been crudely airbrushed out. However, predictably, the parliamentary cretinism, the popular frontism, the national socialism remained. Therefore, the claim, made by our resident Stalinite letter-writer, Andrew Northall, that the successive editions of the *BRS* constitute "by far the best and most credible programmes which have been developed for Britain" is simply laughable (*Letters Weekly Worker* June 6 2024). As an aside, in his letter, the comrade gets into a complete muddle over our demand to abolish the standing army and establish, in its place, a popular militia. He thinks that we believe this is a maximum demand - a demand that can only be realised the other side of the socialist revolution. Possibly - life will decide; but for us, meanwhile, it is a minimum demand. Firstly, because it is perfectly realisable this side of the socialist revolution; secondly, because a socialist revolution in the absence of a popular militia of some kind is impossible to imagine (except for parliamentary cretins). Note, in 1917, the Bolsheviks' red guards and effective leadership over whole army regiments and naval units.

24. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 27, London 1990, p220.
25. J Conrad *Which road?* London 1991, pp239.
26. *Ibid* pp235-36.
27. The thesis of Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson presented in a series of *New Left Review* articles beginning in January-February 1964 and subsequently demolished by EP Thompson (*The poverty of theory* 1978) and Ellen Meiksins Wood (*The pristine culture of capitalism* 1991).
28. M-A Walters (ed) *Rosa Luxemburg speaks* New York NY 1997, p413.
29. *Socialist Review* Vol 1, No1, February-March 1953.
30. grimanddim.org/tony-cliff-biography/duncan-hallas-and-the-1952-programme-for-action.
31. L Trotsky *The transitional programme* New York NY 1997, p111.
32. T Cliff *Trotskyism after Trotsky* London 1999, p14.
33. T Cliff *Neither Washington nor Moscow* London 1982, p117.
34. T Cliff *Trotsky* Vol 4, London 1993, pp299-300.
35. *Internal Bulletin*, January 1973. In those far-off days this publication came out all year round. It was not confined to the two months prior to the annual conference. Incidentally, my information here comes from a short article authored by Ian Birchall - 'The programme of the International Socialists 1972-1974' (May 2013).
36. *Socialist Worker* November 20 2004.
37. Joseph Choonara's "Revolutionaries and elections" is apologetics of the worst kind. Nowhere does he question the profoundly unprincipled nature of the Respect lash-up. Though he admits the involvement of "Muslim notables" such as "millionaire restaurateurs and building contractors", he cannot bring himself to utter the damning phrase, 'popular front' (or words to that effect). As for George Galloway, today he is pictured as promoting "anti-woke", "patriotic" class politics via his Workers Party of Britain. Back in 2004, however, when Respect was founded, he was "a firebrand MP, one of the most celebrated orators of the anti-war movement and the most prominent figure to be expelled by Labour for opposition to the Iraq war". In reality Galloway has been pretty consistent, when it comes to the reactionary side of his politics. What comrade Choonara is actually attempting to do with his two Galloways - and, as it happens, not very convincingly - is to cover up for the fact that within Respect the SWP used its numbers to vote down motions, moved by CPGB comrades, which supported abortion rights, open borders, MPs taking only an average skilled worker's wage, republicanism ... even international socialism (*International Socialism* No179, July 2023).
38. I cannot find a single reference to Respect on Counterfire's website. If any reader knows otherwise I would be grateful to know.
39. RS21 has, though, the virtue of running a thoughtful piece by David Renton, the leftwing barrister and author: 'The Socialist Alliance, George Galloway and Respect: left electoralism the last time around' March 18 2024 (www.rs21.org.uk/2024/03/18/the-socialist-alliance-george-galloway-and-respect-left-electoralism-the-last-time-around). However, while comrade Renton highlights many instances of rank opportunism in Respect, including by the Rees-German SWP leadership, he cannot locate the fundamental problem: popular frontism, which saw the right systematically set the political agenda on a whole range of issues.

# 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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# The centre is cracking

EU parliamentary elections have shocked the political establishment and the soft left alike. **Barış Graham** looks at the far right's surge in support



European parliament in Strasbourg: more and more seats for the far right

Spend enough time on certain sectors of the left and one starts to notice a general attitude of aloofness when it comes to any significant discussion of electoral politics and elections themselves - as if it was all a simple façade to brainwash the masses, while, no matter who wins, bourgeois politics continues as normal.

While this is a rather crude description of how capitalist dictatorship functions, it is quite surprisingly a reasonable description of the EU parliament. Of course, whatever *de facto* practical political control it lacks, it still possesses a symbolic value as the *de jure* voice and representative of Europe's peoples.

The 27 countries of the EU went to the polls between June 6 and 9 to decide the composition of its next parliament. The results show a surge for the far right on a supranational basis (driven mainly by votes from Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands) and the trouncing of the centre-left, along with the mushy green-liberals.

European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, bravely says, the "centre is holding". But while her European Peoples Party remains the biggest bloc in the EU parliament, it is clear that the whole project of 'ever closer union' is dead in the water. Especially if Donald Trump is elected in November, the EU could be facing a Frexit, a Dexit and a Nexit.

The remainder left in Britain - Momentum, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Anticapitalist Resistance - marched again and again in 2016 under the banner of 'Another Europe is possible'. In reality they simply provided radical cover for the mainstream liberal bourgeoisie and

business as usual. No wonder financial backing came from George Soros and other capitalists.

Well, another Europe is taking shape in front of their eyes right now. It is anti-migrant, bigoted and xenophobic, yes - but, for a short while at least, it offers hope, given the years of austerity, decaying social services and lack of well-paid job opportunities that have come with neoliberal globalisation.

### Collapse

The collapse of the green-liberal vote is not exactly surprising, given that promises of liberal and ambiguously 'green' reforms were never going to be viable in the medium or even short run, due to the cost of living crisis across Europe, on the one hand, and American demands that Europe pay the main price for Nato's proxy war in Ukraine, on the other. Largely cosmetic greenwashing is hardly going to stop global warming and the danger of ecological catastrophe anyway. And the programmatic capitulation of green parties in return for seats in centre-left coalition governments certainly led to a feeling of betrayal from younger, more idealistic voters.

But, whatever von der Leyen says, there can be no hiding the increase in the vote for far-right parties - in particular the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Brothers of Italy (FdI) and France's National Rally (RN). Given that Germany, Italy and France form the political, economic and strategic core of the EU, this matters.

Of course, the far right does not constitute an ideological monolith. Each national party has slightly different bases of support and its own political needs. RN, for example, has

called for AfD's expulsion from the far-right Identity and Democracy bloc in the EU parliament. That, after AfD's lead candidate's favourable comments on the Waffen-SS.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the FdI sits with the more 'moderate' European Conservatives and Reformists. Nonetheless, all of them share a common hostility to migrants, are keen to fight 'culture wars' against 'woke' liberalism and cosmopolitan integrationism, and adopt a 'sceptical' attitude towards environmental policies. Nation, not class, is where people will find their sense of belonging, their sense of community.<sup>2</sup>

As for the left, no doubt its craven opportunism, its complete capitulation to bourgeois nationalism, is a major factor in its lack of appeal. Germany, the EU's most populous country, saw the far-right AfD come second to the CDU/CSU centre-right. Energy shocks caused by Nato's proxy war, the sabotage of Nord Stream 2 and the decommissioning of nuclear power stations have caused huge economic strains - especially in the crucial manufacturing sector, where the production index has failed to return to pre-pandemic levels.<sup>3</sup>

Germany's main left party, Die Linke, once the hope of disorientated leftwingers everywhere, is now in a hopeless mess. Having joined the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' chorus, having backed Nato over Ukraine, having joined regional governments as the junior partner, DL finds itself splintered and completely marginalised. The Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW, named after its leader) has meanwhile garnered support of disaffected voters from both left and right, positioning itself as opposing more migration

and supporting both 'anti-woke' traditional social values and left-populist economics - a model for George Galloway and his Workers Party. Either way, the first time it has been tested in the polls, BSW has managed to surpass Die Linke's electoral numbers twice over, gaining 5.7% of the vote.

Wagenknecht, it should be noted, opposes more arms deliveries to Ukraine and calls for a diplomatic solution. "Many people", she says, "are worried that the war will also come to us." When asked where the BSW sits on the political spectrum, Wagenknecht, a former Die Linke star, replies: "It's not on the right." We should expect more of this red-brown politics in the period to come.

### Aftermath

Unlike previous EU elections, however, this year's have caused major national changes in their immediate aftermath. RN's resounding victory over Emmanuel Macron's Ensemble list has seen him announce snap elections for the national assembly - a decision that could conceivably see an RN victory and an RN prime minister cohabiting with Macron, while he remains the French president. (His second term in office ends in 2027 and he cannot run for a third term - well, not until the 2032 election).

Not exactly convinced of Macron's 'strategy' and with the threat of Le Pen ever looming, the participants of the previous leftwing Nupes alliance - headed by the 'charismatic', though visibly ageing, Jean-Luc Mélenchon - once again united sufficiently to run a joint list in the election, this time under the somewhat quixotic 'New Popular

Front' label.<sup>4</sup> On the other side of the aisle, however, the leader of the Gaullist Republicans Party, Éric Ciotti, has toyed with the idea of a joint list with the RN - too much for the hierarchy. He has been dumped. But one thing is clear: RN is less and less viewed as untouchable.

Belgium, having its general elections concurrently with the European elections, has also been affected. The former Maoist/Stalinist PTB/PVDA has extended its reach in Flanders and Brussels, while retaining its influence in Wallonia, its primary support base. It now boasts of winning 14% of the vote. Meanwhile, the Flemish separatist, far-right Vlaams Belang also gained support, causing the government to fall. There will surely be a lengthy period of hedging before the centre parties cobble together another coalition.

Leave aside the exact make-up of the EU parliament, one thing is clear: the centre of gravity in Europe is shifting to the right. What of the left? Tailism will get us nowhere. Selling principle in return for junior coalition status is a disaster. No, what is needed is class politics and building a serious working class party that fearlessly champions internationalism, solidarity and socialism ●

### Notes

1. [www.politico.eu/article/far-right-national-rally-marine-le-pen-says-it-will-cut-ties-with-german-afd-after-recent-statements](http://www.politico.eu/article/far-right-national-rally-marine-le-pen-says-it-will-cut-ties-with-german-afd-after-recent-statements).
2. In Germany, those of 'working class' and 'low-income' backgrounds were the most likely to vote for the AfD: see [www.tagesschau.de/europawahl/wahl/europawahl-wer-waehlte-wen-100.html](http://www.tagesschau.de/europawahl/wahl/europawahl-wer-waehlte-wen-100.html).
3. [www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2024/06/PE24\\_222\\_421.html](http://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2024/06/PE24_222_421.html).
4. [www.france24.com/en/europe/20240610-france-french-left-calls-unity-ahead-snap-legislative-elections-nupes-melenchon-far-right](http://www.france24.com/en/europe/20240610-france-french-left-calls-unity-ahead-snap-legislative-elections-nupes-melenchon-far-right).