

weekly **Worker**



Labour on course for a landslide. But what happens then? Formation of the Conservative and Reform Party?

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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NOUVEAU VIEUX FRONT POPULAIRE WON'T STOP HER IN '27



LETTERS



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

Minimum muddle

Mike Macnair in his article, 'Minimal symmetrical errors' (May 23), provided what I previously described as "a highly novel interpretation" of the role and purpose of the "minimum programme" (Letters, June 6), when he stated: "The minimum programme is a programme for working class rule right now" - ie, can only be implemented through working class rule.

Surely we agree that "working class rule" can only come about as a result of a socialist proletarian revolution, so is not Macnair saying the minimum programme can only be implemented *after* a socialist revolution? I completely get that there is necessarily a long period after the socialist revolution and the establishment of working class power/rule before we, globally, arrive at full communism. Indeed I outlined three sets of factors which need to be overcome before we could possibly get there.

It is these very factors which comrades in the Socialist Party of Great Britain (Letters, May 30) completely ignore when they assume full socialism or full communism can be "immediately" established after a socialist majority has come to power, the state is "immediately" and completely abolished, we all have instant free access to goods and services, and working people have suddenly and comprehensively developed such a high level of social consciousness that they will freely work to produce those goods and services for the good of society.

But for Mike Macnair to state that the minimum programme can only be implemented through working class rule - ie, *after* the socialist revolution - was genuinely startling and contrary to most communists understanding of its role and purpose.

Jack Conrad in his article, 'Programme makers' (June 13, note 23), makes very clear that the minimum programme and minimum demands are part of strategy *towards* making the socialist revolution happen and be successful; they are minimum demands *because* "they are perfectly realisable this side of a socialist revolution".

So we have Macnair, on the one hand, saying the minimum programme can only be implemented through working class rule: ie, *after* a socialist revolution. Conrad, on the other, (rightly) states it is an essential component of a strategy *for* socialist revolution - indeed many of its demands are "perfectly realisable" under capitalism. So, is it me in a 'complete muddle' or is it the *Weekly Worker* group, with its two leading (competing?) ideologues speaking with two contradictory voices?

I have to say Conrad's interpretation of the role and purpose of the 'minimum programme' is far more in line with classical Marxism-Leninism than Macnair's - although we tend nowadays to use the term 'immediate demands'. However, Conrad in an attempt to score a point manages to add to the confusion even further. He claims I think that the demand for a people's militia is a *maximum* demand (Do I? Did I say that?!) because it is in practice a *revolutionary* demand and will indeed be fully implemented *after* a socialist revolution - when the capitalist state's armed forces, including the police, have been fully abolished and replaced by the people's militia and the general arming and self-

organisation of the working people.

This is now a pretty novel interpretation of the 'maximum programme' - this time from Conrad! And, of course, it conflicts directly with Macnair, who thinks it is the '*minimum* programme' which is actually implemented with working class rule.

My understanding of the 'maximum programme' is that it is a programme - after the socialist revolution and the establishment of working class rule - for the implementation and development of full socialism and then full communism - to a point where the state, classes, money and all other remaining vestiges of capitalist and class divided society have 'withered away' or otherwise ceased to exist and/or exist only as bad memories.

Is the demand for a people's militia part of the maximum programme? Well, it will almost certainly exist for a long time under the initial stages of working class rule (ie, socialism) and potentially towards fully developed socialism. It *may* well be still necessary as we start to approach the stages of full global communism. But surely, almost by definition, the need for its continued existence will decline and fade away as we approach such a state of full global communism. If it is still needed, then the complete conditions for full global communism are clearly not yet fully in place.

It seems to me the *Weekly Worker* group is trying too hard to prove it is not really infected with Trotskyism and is really *ever so* opposed to the 'transitional programme' and all the practices of the openly Trotskyist groups and sects that its own two leading ideologues have got themselves and their little group into a frightful muddle. Or is it that the *Weekly Worker* group has lost sight of what communists are actually trying to achieve - namely, the overthrow of capitalism through working class socialist revolution, the establishment of working class power and then the implementation and development, over time, of first full socialism and then full communism? It is not really that complicated, comrades!

Andrew Northall

Kettering

Maximum muddle

I don't want to pre-empt Robin Cox and Adam Buick in their response to the issue of minimum and maximum, as discussed by Mike Macnair (Letters, June 13), but I will anyway.

The strategy of the SPGB is to gain a majority of people on their side before any radical changes take place - long before there is any radical change most people by definition will be on board with the changes that will have been democratically agreed upon. So there will be no need for "forced collectivisation" or forced anything. If there was to be anything forced, it wouldn't follow on from anything the SPGB would be doing or advocating, as it would be antithetical to their beliefs.

The term used by Macnair, "petty-proprietor classes" (PPC) - composed of small businesses and small landowners (farmers, etc) - is relevant. In my view they may own a bit of capital or land, but they're basically working class. In fact, they are probably the hardest working people in society. I know that it's more to do with one's relationship to the means of production that gives one their designated class, but I just think in today's world the distinction between having to work for a living and relying on rent, interest and profit are muddled. I would think a large proportion of people gain some

income from capital they own, even if it's just renting a back room out to someone, or they have shares in Unilever, or whatever. What about premium bonds? Am I part of the capitalist class because I own them?

The PPC will be just as keen on societal change as any person firmly embedded within their working class designation. Yeah, Marx got it wrong. Just to reiterate, the ordinary small business owner and the farmer work damn hard. Why wouldn't they embrace the prospect of a society where they could share in the total wealth? Why wouldn't they desire a society organised in a far more rational way - cutting out all the non-productive jobs like advertising, to give one example, or banking to give another, that add nothing to people's health, happiness and wellbeing? Why wouldn't they want this transformation in society as much as those in the working class supposedly want it?

It's suggested that the PPC have some truck with the system because of "various forms of subsidy and regulatory preference". Maybe so, but it's hardly going to consolidate their support of a system which is rapidly destroying their means of livelihood. Farmers and small businesses are barely surviving the latest disasters to hit the economy - whether it be austerity 2010 onwards, the pandemic, the banking crash of 2008, leaving the EU, spiralling energy costs ...

Most farmers I know need a second income to keep their farming enterprise up and running. Look at the high streets. They're disappearing. Small businesses are going under at unprecedented levels. The PPC may at one time have been the bulwark of the capitalist system, but not any more - not when that system is bleeding them dry and actually conniving to destroy them. So the 'maximum' argument makes sense, in that a majority of people will have to desire it firstly and will democratically choose to go this way without the need for sections of society to be forced into anything.

I would foresee, if a majority of people did desire revolutionary change in the terms set out by the SPGB, that the substantial minority or the rest of the people wouldn't necessarily be opposed to the same revolutionary aims, but would be sceptical about their achievement, that's all. So actually a majority of people confident in desiring revolutionary change and knowing that it's possible would be opposed by a substantial minority of people who, although agreeing with the revolutionary changes, would have some notion that 'It will never happen' or 'They wouldn't allow it to happen'. That's how I see things. People won't need to be won over to the merits of revolution, come the end phase of the struggle: they'll just need to be reassured and filled with confidence that it will happen.

Saying this, I consider myself a sceptic in the sense that I'm not confident a majority of people will ever favour revolutionary change in the sense the SPGB sees it. The forces against it are so strong. None more so than technologies to produce externally generated frequencies that have been developing since at least the 1950s, which can plant thoughts and perceptions in the minds of people (see the work of Neil Sanders, to give but one). At some point we may not even know if what we are thinking are our own thoughts or someone else's! That's what we are up against.

We can all play leftist party politics and enjoy expounding our revolutionary parlance, but the forces against any meaningful progressive change in society are vast and neither

democratic centralism, vanguardism, Stalinism or ventriloquism will play any part in achieving a kind of freedom, if our very thoughts are maliciously manipulated in the method just outlined.

Louis Shawcross
County Down

Labour muddle

I would like to comment on the report of the recent CPGB aggregate ('Focusing our commitment', June 13). My view is that after July 4 there will be a crisis within all leftwing organisations and sects. This will allow the CPGB to intervene on many fronts and enable it to grow substantially.

In 2011 François Hollande led the French Socialist Party to a landslide victory. The result was that working class people *en masse* rejected the Socialist Party to such an extent that it now gets just five percent in elections. The same collapse in support amongst working class people in Britain for Starmer's Labour Party will occur very rapidly. However, there will be no upsurge in the number of strikes under Labour. What is likely is that, as in France, the working class will swing to the right and support Nigel Farage's Reform Party and its takeover of the Tory Party.

As in France, where working class young people who don't go to university now support Marine Le Pen's National Rally, there will be mass support from non-graduates for Reform, especially as it seems highly likely that Nigel Farage will become the MP for Clacton. It must be pointed out that Clacton includes Jaywick, which is the poorest area in Britain, with 57% of residents receiving state benefits. Farage has spent most of 2024 observing how Donald Trump took control of the Republican Party and he plans to do the same with the Tory Party. Hence the article in *Socialist Worker* headlined 'Farage is no friend of the Tories - yet!'

I am now an ex-member of the Green Party - I recently cancelled my membership direct debit. I did this for two reasons - One, after reading a *Workers Hammer* article criticising the Greens, and two, after the Workers Party put up a candidate for July 4 in the constituency where I live. The CPGB is therefore right to call for left candidates from outside the Labour Party, and to warn that the Greens will support Starmer's foreign policy, especially over Ukraine.

However, I believe that Jack Conrad and Mike Macnair are profoundly wrong when they continue to describe the Labour Party as a "bourgeois workers' party". Labour is now a party just like the Democrats in the USA. It is therefore wrong for the CPGB to call for a vote for Labour candidates, whereas at the same time it opposes any support for the Democrats as a "lesser evil".

Jack and Mike may ask me when Labour became just another bourgeois party. Well, the rot started with Tony Blair and his renaming of Labour as New Labour following the abolition of the Fabian-inspired clause four, part four in 1994. Dialectically a gradual change has happened over the last 30 years following the name change to New Labour. Now under Starmer a qualitative change has taken place.

Jack and Mike use the description of Labour as a bourgeois workers' party that can only work because they see politics in a cycle and that one day in the distant future the Labour Party will swing to the left. However, the ruling class had a major heart attack under the Corbyn leadership of the Labour Party.

Never again will the ruling class allow the Labour Party to swing to the left. Hence the complete rout of the left in the Labour Party, including the shutting down of all avenues for democratic change within the party.

Jack and Mike point to Labour's trade union link. However, this is a red-herring. The trade union bureaucracy in the US gives the Democrats \$250 million each presidential election year, but has no influence. The result is that working class trade union members go over to support the Republicans. The trade union bureaucrats both in the US and Britain are the labour lieutenants of capital and are now part of the capitalist fourth estate. One just has to read David North's ground-breaking pamphlet on the subject as published by the International Committee of the Fourth International in 1993.

As *Workers Hammer* points out, calling for a vote for Labour is to cross class lines and is a vote for a party of big business, as evidenced by the recent letter supporting Starmer's Labour Party by 120 leading business people. Communists who called for a Labour vote will have their reputation severely tarnished by the inability of Starmer's Labour government to solve the urgent problems faced by working class people.

John Smithce
Cambridgeshire

Con-Reform

Just a short note on Jack Conrad's article about needing a programme. I think what's much more interesting is the *lack* of a programme by the Conservative Party, as every political party needs a programme of sorts, but they've never had one and didn't think or even know they needed one - such was the worldwide power of the British state before 1947.

Programmes unite large and sometimes very different interests and that's why they're necessary. Without a programme and without an empire the Conservative Party may well vanish from history on July 4. Up to 50% of people in various polls that have been conducted said they don't want them to get a single MP. Now 46% of their supporters want them to merge with the Reform Party, to be named perhaps Conservative Reform Party.

What this means for Britain is unclear, but in the meantime we will have the Labour Party back in government. They are bad enough to *inspire* a revolution - programme or no programme.

Elijah Traven
Hull

Different picture

Mike Macnair surely has a point about the British and American focus on the status of European colonies, as they planned the post-war world ('Operation Imperial Overlord', June 13). But he misses the picture, when it comes to France. The suggestion that a western front might have been needed to secure West Germany from the Soviet Union understates the case.

The United States and Britain attempted to treat France as a perpetrator state and at one point planned to take her over, as they did Germany. They also, as the French North African territories were liberated, and the status of France needed resolution, tried to curate regimes combining Free French, Pétainist collaborators and assorted nobodies whom they happened to like. Both the eventual full recognition of the French government in exile as an Allied victor nation - after General de Gaulle's refusal to accept any other status - and the Normandy landings

were forced on them by facts on the ground in France.

If France had liberated herself, which she surely would have done, given time, help from overseas, and the collapse of the Nazi war effort on the eastern front, the post-war regime might easily have been either Stalinist or Tito-style socialist. De Gaulle saved the Anglo-Saxon allies from themselves by making possible a capitalist and democratic France, where, as in Italy, communists were tolerated, in part because of their war record of sacrifice and resistance, but held at arms length from power. The history of Europe in the second half of the 20th century might have been very different, had he not done so.

Jack William Grahl
email

Profound Gerry

Jack Conrad has taken more than 7,000 words to get to his real point: that, although the SWP rejects having any programme at all, Trotsky's transitional programme (TP) was so bad that Trotskyists are as bad as him ('Programme makers', June 13). At least that is what I could understand from that very convoluted argument, which designates the Tony Cliff-led SWP as model Trotskyists to be exposed as charlatans.

Trotsky's 1938 document, *The death agony of capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth international*, was just plain wrong, he assures us: "Events had, after all, beached Trotsky's 1930s expectations. Stalinism did not collapse with the Nazi invasion. Nor was capitalism in its 'death agony'. 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."

This passage speaks of a profound misunderstanding of the whole point of a revolutionary socialist programme. It presents the socialist revolutionary capture of state power as an objective process, independent of political leadership and intervention - in fact exactly what the old German Social Democratic maximum-minimum programme did and what Stalinists and centrists do today.

Outside of the brief period of a revolutionary situation - a few weeks or months at the most - the revolutionary party intervenes in the class struggle with transitional demands, using the transitional method of the workers' united front to prepare the vanguard of the masses with its educational propaganda and the masses themselves with its agitational slogans; they are part of the subjective struggle for the ear of the masses, particularly its more seriously-thinking vanguard. The April theses for the vanguard, 'Land, bread and peace' for the masses - that is the usual example. This was elaborated first in the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1920; "The centrists want to divert the workers from the real, vital struggle for their immediate goals by holding out the hope that industrial forms can be taken over gradually, one by one, and that 'systematic' economic construction can then begin. The social democrats are thus retreating to their minimum programme, which now stands clearly revealed as a counterrevolutionary fraud." Trotsky did not invent the TP in 1938: he merely elaborated it for that time.

Once the revolutionary situation arrives, which it did in September/October 1917, then bold action like the storming of the Winter Palace for the capture of state power is on the immediate agenda. The subjective factor of the revolutionary leadership then becomes a part of the objective forces of the revolution, whereas previously it was merely the

subjective part of the preparation.

Of course, we know that Kamenev and Zinoviev, backed more cautiously by Stalin and others, opposed this, and went to the Menshevik press to stop what they regarded as a mad, ultra-left adventure. Had they succeeded, there would be no lack of serious historians today proving it was never possible in the first place - look at the number of troops surrounding Petersburg and Moscow who were still loyal to the Provisional government. It turned out they were not loyal at all - the period of dual power from March to October allowed the soviets to win them over, while the Petrograd soviet, under Trotsky's leadership, succeeded in winning the allegiance of the ranks of that army.

Inspiration for the SWP/Cliff confusion-mongering clearly came from Leon Trotsky, Jack assures us. He goes on: "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." Anyone who has read the TP knows this is just nonsense - he's hoping his readers won't take the trouble to check it out.

Trotsky was not the new Nostradamus: he was not projecting a course of events that was inevitable, but a programme for the revolutionary party to put into practice to lead the revolution. Stalinism did not collapse, but in the same issue of the paper Mike Macnair gives us a potted version of the history of World War II and what happened on the eastern front; the siege of Leningrad, the Battle of Stalingrad, the break-out from Kursk, etc. But there is no political characterisation of the nature of this war: merely that Operation Overlord, the D-Day Landings, were not where Hitler's Nazis were defeated in the main: that was indeed in the east and by the Red Army.

But this was totally different to the civil war fought by the Bolsheviks, which was a revolutionary onslaught against the forces of reaction and imperialist intervention. Stalin's war was 'the great patriotic war' embracing the Orthodox church and glorifying the tsarist wars with no mention of the great heroic revolutionary tradition of the civil war. Stalin fought the war in this way to appease imperialism; both were dedicated to preventing revolution breaking out, as it did in 1917.

Jack quotes Tony Cliff: "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." Of course, when capitalism had stabilised itself after the war, because the Stalinists and the imperialists had formed their popular fronts to defeat the revolution and assassinate the revolutionaries, it was necessary to change the parts of the transitional programme that foresaw the coming crises. When the revolutionary opportunities that arose were crushed by the Stalinists in alliance with the imperialists - in Warsaw in alliance with the Nazis - then it was necessary to change that programme, whilst retaining the method. Infamously James Cannon in the US kept declaring that the war was not over in order to retain the bits that were now outdated and Gerry Healy maintained the revolutionary catastrophism in the cult that was the

WRP, with the revolution always just around the corner.

The left split of Alan Thornett in 1974 reaffirmed the validity of the TP and method, despite the later degeneration of that group into Pabloism.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Dave Spart

Don't worry, comrades. It will take more than defending a vote for Starmer's Labour to 'hammer' the Spartacist League! (see Jack Conrad, Letters, May 30).

We would have been glad to attend the Communist University. The reason we can't is that, given the election campaign, we had to rearrange the rest of our work and priorities for the whole summer, which leaves no comrades available in early August.

However, we would like to propose another debate in the autumn. We would suggest the theme, 'How to build a new Communist Party'. This would allow for a broader and more fundamental debate on communist strategy in Britain and would get to the heart of our disagreements. Apart from benefiting our two organisations, it would also be of interest to the whole left.

We would insist this time on holding it in person (with live streaming, if you wish, for those who cannot attend). An in-person debate will facilitate discussion between ourselves and others who attend. Would a Saturday in October or November work for you?

Vincent David
Spartacist League

Bad influence

The founding conference of the Revolutionary Communist International has just ended and has been described by the organisers as a "resounding success" - an event of "world historic importance". Whilst it is certainly true that the comrades grouped around this tendency should be congratulated for promoting communism and organising new layers, some habits die hard.

Alan Woods, who later described the conference as the most inspiring he has ever attended, ended his keynote speech with reference to the ... "erm, what do they call it? Yes, the *Weekly Worker*." In time-honoured tradition, Woods proceeded to write off the rest of the international Marxist left as sects on the fringes of the labour movement and a waste of time.

Readers of the *Weekly Worker* should though take heart in what can be seen as a back-handed compliment. It is without question that the claimed growth of the Revolutionary Communist Party/RCI is a good thing. However, parodies of what others say suggests a distinct unwillingness to admit that the rebrand operation is little more than a cynical marketing operation that relies on half-lies and lies.

In an age of instant communication, following the presumed infallibility of central bodies on all questions, the RCI seems likely to come a cropper sooner rather than later. A tension already exists within it. One foot is firmly stuck in the dull Labourite writings and statements of the past, while the other foot seeks out r-r-revolutionary pastures new.

Presumably, the apparatus running RCI worry about the free exploration of ideas. Ironically introducing Alan Woods, comrade Fred Weston explained how younger people access information and correctly identified their tendency to explore all avenues open to them. Hence, the concern that their youthful intake will be 'corrupted' by publications such as the *Weekly Worker*.

Paul Cooper
email

ACTION

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.

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.

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.

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.

Miners' strike: lessons for broken Britain

Saturday June 22, 2pm: Public meeting, Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7. Marking 40 years since the miners' strike. Speaker: Dick Hall, NUM striker, Warsop Main Colliery. Organised by Spartacist League: icflfi.org/gbr/events/2024-miners.

Palestine, protest and the ballot box

Tuesday June 25, 7pm: Public meeting, Gorilla, 54-56 Whitworth Street West, Manchester M1. With the Tories and Labour refusing to stop arming Israel, many 'no ceasefire, no vote' independents are standing. Who should we vote for? Speaker: Chris Nineham. Organised by Manchester Counterfire: www.facebook.com/events/897969718764940.

Don't vote for genocide - welfare, not warfare

Thursday June 27: Workplace day of action. Organise actions to raise the anti-war voice in the run-up to the election. Solidarity with Gaza is key to defeating the warmongers' agenda. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

General election: what would Marx do?

Thursday June 27, 7pm: Online briefing introduced by Roger Silverman and Ian Spencer: 'The SPD, Parti Ouvrier, the Bolsheviks and their electoral tactics'. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

No US nukes here!

Thursday June 27, 7pm: Public meeting, Jacksons Lane Arts Centre, 269A Archway Road, London N6. Oppose deployment of US nuclear bombs at Lakenheath in Suffolk. Speaker: Kate Hudson. Organised by Haringey CND: cnduk.org/events.

Protest at Wimbledon - drop Barclays!

Monday July 1, 10am: Protest outside the tennis complex (opposite centre court), Church Road, London SW19. Demand the tournament sponsor, Barclays, stops bankrolling arms companies supplying Israel with weapons for its genocide of Palestinians. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: caat.org.uk/events/protest-at-wimbledon-drop-barclays.

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.

End the genocide - stop arming Israel

Saturday July 6, 12 noon: National demonstration, central London, details to be announced. Tell the new government to act for Palestine. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

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.

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.

Tolpuddle Martyrs festival

Friday July 19 to Sunday July 21: Annual commemoration festival, Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum, Dorchester Road, Tolpuddle DT2. Tickets £60. Organised by Tolpuddle Martyrs: www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk/festival.

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.

RIGHT

From abyss to reform

Barring some freak accident, Labour is on course for a landslide. But what happens after that on the right? **Eddie Ford** discounts extinction, but not a merger and the formation of the Conservative and Reform Party

In many respects, the election campaign has been increasingly dominated by an insurgent Reform UK and its founder-leader, Nigel Farage - who appears to be everywhere.

This phenomenon accelerated after a YouGov poll conducted a week ago showed that Reform was *one point ahead* of the Tories on 19% - an amazing finding, even if the pollster did give the caveat that this lead was still within the margin of error.¹ The rest of the survey had Labour on 37%, with the Liberal Democrats on 14% and the Greens on 7%. Another poll a few days later by Redfield and Wilton Strategies had the Tories and Reform each on 18%.²

Without doubt this is a huge problem for Rishi Sunak and the Conservatives - not least with Nigel Farage's latest outfit standing in 609 out of 650 constituencies. It is not that Reform is set to sweep into parliament with dozens upon dozens of MPs. It won't do that - the expectation is of five or six seats at most. No, Reform votes will cause the Tories to be pipped at the post mainly by Labour, but also by Lib Dem candidates.

Meanwhile a not widely known electoral pact with the almost totally forgotten Social Democratic Party - originally founded by the 'gang of four' in 1981, then reconstituted nine years later - sees over a dozen candidates standing under a joint Reform-SDP banner.

Real opposition

Unsurprisingly, the YouGov poll emboldened Farage. At an impromptu press conference he declared - much to the derision of the liberal commentariat - that he was now the real leader of the opposition and issued a direct challenge to Sir Keir Starmer to meet him in a head-to-head debate. Believing that there was a growing momentum behind Reform, he predicted that it will receive a greater share of the popular vote than the Tories. Indeed, Farage is undeniably ambitious - wanting to establish a "bridgehead" in parliament as part of the "first important step" on the road to the 2029 general election, where he might even make a bid himself to become prime minister.

Of course, it is easy to dismiss such talk as delusional - Michael Gove accused Farage of being part of a "great entertainment machine" and on "a giant ego trip", not somebody fit to govern the country any more than Jeremy Corbyn. However, in the short term there can be no doubt that the main beneficiary of Faragism is Sir Keir and the Labour Party. A short while ago leftists of the Labourite and other such varieties were insistent: Sir Keir is 'useless', 'does not want to win' against the Tories, 'can't win' because of the purge, the statistical odds, lack of ambition, etc. Now the talk is of a Labour landslide and a "supermajority" (whatever that is).

For example, an Ipsos poll shows a 15% swing away from the Tories since 2019 with more than 100 Conservative-held seats appearing to be on a knife-edge.³ Hence it estimates that Labour could win 453 seats and the Conservatives 115 (an implied vote share of 43% to 25%) - a majority of 256 that would represent an even worse defeat for the Tories than the one suffered at the hands of



Meet your future leaders?

Tony Blair in 1997, when the party won just 165 seats and went into a collective trauma.

When it comes to high-profile names, Nigel Farage is on track to overturn a huge Tory majority in Clacton, while Jeremy Corbyn, standing as an independent, is predicted to lose in Islington North. Big Tory names at risk of losing their seats include Penny Mordaunt, the Commons leader; Gillian Keegan, education secretary; Grant Shapps, defence secretary, and Jacob Rees-Mogg.

In you are a Tory, a Survation poll makes for even more depressing reading, showing the party heading towards the abyss - the Conservatives could be reduced to just 72 seats.⁴ Meanwhile, a survey by Savanta puts the Tories on 21% - the lowest share for the party recorded by the pollster since the weeks before Theresa May resigned in May 2019, with her government paralysed over Brexit. Conservative hopes are being shot to pieces poll after poll, day after day, with the distinct possibility that things could get still worse. Well, every time Rishi Sunak opens his mouth ...

What next?

Putting it another way, the really interesting question is not so much how the Tories will be hammered - they will - but what happens afterwards? The YouGov poll seems to have disproved our expectation that Reform support would eventually bleed into the Tory Party as July 4 approaches. But that was before Nigel Farage threw his

hat into the ring (of course, it might still happen). But if anything, at the moment, we are seeing the reverse - Tory support bleeding into Reform.

Maybe Nigel Farage will win in Clacton - a seat, remember, that Ukip briefly held - and the odious Lee Anderson will take Ashfield, along with a few others here and there. But that won't matter much at all when it comes to the real drama, which will be played out in the Conservative Party.

Already there is jockeying and manoeuvring about who will become the new Tory leader - Sunak will immediately fall upon his sword when the final election results are announced. Of course, he is saying for the moment that he will stay on as an MP for a full parliamentary term, but those who say he will "disappear off to California" for a better life might well prove right. Obviously, a lot of what comes next has a speculative character. But we might see a situation where Nigel Farage is in parliament and the likes of Priti Patel, Suella Braverman or Jacob Rees-Mogg find themselves amongst the leading contenders.

Needless to say, such individuals are highly sympathetic towards the politics of Farage and Reform. Braverman recently said that the Tories should embrace Farage, as there is "not much difference" between them, and Rees-Mogg too has urged colleagues to "unite the right" by forming a sort of "coalescence", not "divide the Tory family". Farage has openly said that one possibility was for Reform to

engineer a "reverse takeover" of the Conservative Party.

It is worthwhile thinking a bit about the nature of the Tory Party itself, leaving aside those who spout nonsense about it being historically finished. Just as it was equal nonsense to say that the Labour Party was dead under Michael Foot, with "the longest suicide note in history", etc, etc.

Of course, it is conceivable that Labour could eventually die or become completely deLabourised with the breaking of the trade union link, and so on - all perfectly possible under certain circumstances. But a merger between Nigel Farage's private company known as Reform UK and the Tory Party is quite conceivable in the relatively near future - particularly in the aftermath of a likely electoral humiliation that will leave the Tories shell-shocked and looking for a saviour.

Merger

After all, Farage for the last week and more has been hawking himself around various studios saying precisely that - telling LBC radio "something new is going to emerge on the centre-right". Whatever it will be called, he would be "happy" to lead a merged Reform-Conservative party. Interestingly, he has suggested that his political inspiration comes from Canada's Stephen Harper, who - as part of the Unite the Right Movement - orchestrated a merger between the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, when it became

clear that neither of them were independently capable of defeating the governing Liberal Party. This led in 2003 to the formation of the Conservative Party of Canada that ran two minority governments after the federal elections of 2006 and 2008.⁵

Just take the proper name of the Tories - the Conservative and Unionist Party. Its origin dates back to 1912, when the Tories merged with the Liberal Unionist Party - itself a split from the Liberal Party in opposition to Irish home rule. Indeed, if you look back at the entire history of the Tories, it has been a history of splits and mergers - beginning with a faction inside the Whigs that went over to them, leading to the Conservative Party as we now know it, which over time has brought into it all sorts of disparate elements. Therefore it would not be too surprising if sometime fairly soon we ended up with a new name - eg, the 'Conservative and Reform Party', or the 'Conservative, Reform and Unionist Party'. How long such a name would be used as a worthwhile tag is an entirely different matter, of course.

Idiot left

Except for a few on the left, who actually think the Tories might win (using whatever peculiar reasoning), everyone is waiting for Sir Keir to get the call from Charles Windsor on July 5. Politics in Britain, as in the USA and many parts of Europe, is going sharply to the right. Okay, we might just end up with Jeremy Corbyn or George Galloway returned to parliament. But in terms of its manifesto, this will be the most rightwing Labour government we have ever had. And think again if you imagine for one moment that the Tory Party will do the 'sensible' thing by moving to the centre - because the centre is moving to the right, as the right moves further rightwards, while the left is also moving to the right under its gravitation pull.

Look at what passes for 'common sense' on the left - vote Labour across the board in the vain hope that this will trigger a 'crisis of expectations' (AWL, etc); opt for the pro-Nato Green Party of England and Wales (Graham Bash, Jennie Formby, etc); place faith in the rag, tag and bobtail melange of so-called independents; have a red, white and blue nationalist socialism, aka, George Galloway's Workers Party; or bank on the dubious prospect of the trade union bureaucracy backing the Tusc Labour Party mark two project (ie, SPEW, and, despite being rudely spurned, the Spartacist League UK).

This is wretched stuff that presents absolutely no alternative to the mainstream bourgeois parties. But it does testify to a bankrupt left ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/49735-reform-now-1pt-ahead-of-the-tories-although-this-is-still-within-the-margin-of-error.
2. redfieldandwiltonstrategies.com/latest-gb-voting-intention-14-17-june-2024.
3. ipsos.com/en-uk/uk-opinion-polls/ipsos-election-mrp.
4. survation.com/mrp-update-first-mrp-since-farages-return.
5. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unite_the_Right_(Canada).

MEDIA

Where it don't shine ... yet

Murdoch's papers have yet to endorse Sir Keir - Paul Demarty wonders how long they can hold out from backing a winner. Meanwhile Rupert is on honeymoon and indecision rules

Last week, we discussed the decision of *The Daily Telegraph* to belatedly red-bait Keir Starmer over his youthful Pabloite flirtations: a brave attempt to fight back against what still looks like a Labour cakewalk on July 4.¹

True to its nickname, the *Torygraph* has already sprung for Rishi Sunak, though its output is notably Reform-curious, and we suppose the grand plan is the Tory-right wet dream of somehow parachuting Nigel Farage into the leadership. For such purposes, of course, he will need to prevail in Clacton, or else inveigle himself into some future by-election.

Also on the war-path against Starmer is the *Daily Mail*, whose front page on June 13 warned that "a Tory wipeout risks one-party socialist state" - on the face of it, a classic Rothermerian paranoid hallucination, except that this is more or less the official line of Sunak's campaign at this point. Even John Major saw fit to pretend to be in with a shot until election day. Barring a miracle, it seems that the Tory goose is not so much cooked as incinerated.

This poses a certain problem for the other great empire of the British rightwing press: that belonging to Rupert Murdoch, though he formally retired from management last year. *The Sun*, in particular, has attempted to cultivate a certain mystique of infallibility in electoral politics. In every general election since 1979, the Currant Bun has backed the winning party. In all but three of those polls, that party has been the Tories; their post-Thatcher combination of fanatical Atlanticism, plutocratic economic policy (which soundly benefits a mogul like Murdoch) and absurd demagoguery (which he can sell to his readers) suited his interests fine. The interregnum of the Blair years was acceptable to the Murdoch papers - so long as his pecuniary interests were unmolested and no great distance was taken from the Tory politics of his papers. When Labour was widely expected to win the 1992 election, *The Sun* famously claimed credit for John Major's victory: "It's *The Sun* wot won it," the paper crowed the morning after.

Lose, lose, lose

Something like this idea in fact enters into the explanations offered by New Labour figures regarding the party's success. We think of Peter Mandelson's stark recent statement of Labour's electoral returns in this period: "Lose, lose, lose, lose, Blair, Blair, Blair, lose, lose, lose" - exactly the same starting point as *The Sun*'s perfect record. Blair's famous meeting with Murdoch in Australia in 1995 gave the latter an off-ramp from Tory support, as the Major government rapidly frayed.

Formal support did not come until the first day of the election campaign two years later, but in the interim Murdoch's tabloid muck-rakers set to work on the government. Blairites, not unfairly, give the left short shrift for its petulant complaints of media unfairness - what else is to be expected? For them, of course, Blair's success proves that a sufficiently business-friendly, 'competent' Labour Party can overcome the disadvantage.

The campaign is in full flow, however, and still there is no endorsement in *The Sun* or *The Times*. Some Kremlinologists suspect that this might be something to do with Murdoch being away on his



Wouldn't be able to make such a claim on July 5 2024

fifth honeymoon, although surely his younger, more inky-fingered self would either have delayed the getaway or rudely interrupted it to ensure his papers took the correct line. In any case, they seem gun-shy, perhaps afraid of what the boss - not officially any more, but in reality now - will do if they get the call wrong.

In the meantime, the papers' coverage is cautious and tepid. A *Sun* leader from June 14, on Labour's manifesto launch, is typical. Starmer is praised for a few things: ruling out certain tax rises, and "reforming" the NHS rather than "treating it like a shrine". "Likewise, Labour seems better placed than the Tories to finally build the 1.5 million houses the country needs, being less in thrall to Nimby's." But then there are the downsides - a refusal to rule out fuel duty increases, pro-LGBT "wokery", imprecision on immigration numbers, "closer ties with Brussels", and more. The paper demands he clarify every vague assurance he has made to his various constituencies on these diverse questions.

Yet the closing sentence seems almost resigned to the result: "The country needs to know" these details "before July 4. Not after Sir Keir already has a super-majority in the bag." But why would he tell us, if he believes - as *The Sun* is probably

right to say - "that voters want to boot the Tories out - so he just needs to keep things vague"? If he comes clean, it can only hurt him. The editors can only threaten - rather lamely given the state of things - that "he should now expect the next three weeks to be all about what is *not* in his manifesto".

The indecision of the Murdoch papers, however, is also a story here, reported by the hated BBC and *Guardian* alike. Both have noted that, quite apart from the political calculation, there is special bad blood between them and Starmer, who was director of public prosecutions at exactly the moment that the time came to round up all the usual suspects after the phone-hacking scandal broke. There is a vindictive streak to the gutter press in this country. GK Chesterton famously said that the problem with the Irish is that they forget nothing, and with the English that they remember nothing. Murdoch is certainly a man who can nurse a grudge or two. (He and Blair have been splits since he came to believe that Blair had made the beast with two backs with his third wife, Wendi Deng.)

Lurking in the background, perhaps, is anxiety about how much the power of the press has declined since 1997. Per the BBC's Katie Razzall:

Newspaper circulation is a fraction of what it once was and that offers up a 'more healthy' media environment, Andrew Neil, the journalist and Spectator Group chairman, told me on BBC Radio 4's *Media show* recently. The era of *The Sun* and the *Mirror* as really powerful forces in the land has gone, he says.

Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair's former spokesman and a former *Daily Mirror* political editor, says the papers are less important than they were, due to a combination of falling sales and aging readership. But he believes that the news cycle means the press's influence on the broadcast media "remains important".²

Neil and Campbell, as quoted here, have different emphases, but there is agreement that the power of the press has declined. This seems undeniable, and the question is really: how much?

Inheritance

The "impartiality" rules of the British broadcast media have, it is true, preserved largely for the press the prerogative of agenda-setting (not the case in the United States, where the honours are shared with the shamelessly partisan cable news networks).

The big question is how the internet media fit into this. In the early 2010s, the left became very excited about the apparent ease with which social media could be exploited to achieve impressive results, at least in terms of short-term reach for some slogan or campaign. Ultra-viral internet phenomena regularly seemed to swamp legacy media, whose owners scrambled to keep up.

By the end of that decade, utopia had curdled into dystopia, and now the worry was the ease with which largely rightwing 'disinformation' could spread. Liberal media ceased to see the social media world as one of grassroots idealism, and instead began indulging in slightly silly conspiracy theories about the diabolical reach of the Russian secret state, which could be blamed for Brexit, Donald Trump and (for that matter) Bernie Sanders taking the shine off their holy anointed, Hillary Clinton.

Agenda-setting

At a more fundamental level, however, the internet has not inherited that agenda-setting power. How could it? After all, the Russiagate ranters were wrong - Vladimir Putin was never the secret manipulator of all this. There is none to be found. Leaving aside digital outlets with the same ad-funded corporate model as legacy media, and indeed the perfectly respectable web operations of most legacy outlets, the remainder is a disordered cacophony - alienation and atomisation whistling in our ears like wind in the trees. This is not the type of thing that could take on the role of the bourgeois press (and US cable news).

It has, of course, provided a steady stream of the same sort of idiotic balderdash that the rightwing press always has. One thinks of the absurd cluster of grand narratives that have emerged, especially since the Covid lockdowns - the Great Replacement, the Great Reset, and now the idea that every mundane traffic-calming measure is an attempt to imprison people in their homes, like a low-tech version of the human-battery racks in *The Matrix*. The tastiest morsels from this stew are picked out and served up by legacy media (and legacy-like digital media), just as 'straight banana' Euromyths and the like were served up long ago. The imprimatur of a 'respectable' outlet matters too much to suppose that there has been any "great replacement" of the old guard.

Indeed, the power of the tabloids to manipulate the docile masses was always somewhat overstated. For all *The Sun*-wot-won-it bravado, that paper's readers have, in general, tended to lean towards Labour throughout this whole period, reflecting the overall class composition of the different parties' votes and of the tabloid's readership. It is not that it made *no* difference, but there has always been a level of theatre involved in the appearance of it making all the difference.

For now, we wait and see - will *The Sun* sit this one out, for the first time in its history? That would be a remarkable admission of defeat and decline ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. 'Sir Keir's sinister past' *Weekly Worker* June 13: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1495/sir-keirs-sinister-past.
2. www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cw88x6ww1p80.

DISCUSSION



Which road should our movement take?

Another Israel is possible

What kind of solution is workable, is acceptable? **Steve Freeman** refuses to discount Hebrew workers as an agency for change. They can be won, he argues, to give up their national privileges in return for legal equality in a democratic, federal Israel-Palestine

This is a response to two articles: Moshé Machover's 'Not a zero-sum game' (*Weekly Worker* May 30)¹ and Mike Macnair's 'Minimal symmetrical errors' (May 23)², which both addressed the Republican Labour Education Forum's (RLEF) case for a democratic, secular, federal republic of Israel-Palestine. In addition there are comments on Jack Conrad's 'Breaking the grip of Zionism' (June 6),³ which addresses our case only indirectly.

The RLEF position paper 14 directly takes up what Moshé calls the minimum requirements for a democratic Israel. The last paragraph (72) says in summary:

The aim of building a real and lasting peace must be a democratic, secular, federal republic of Israel and Palestine - one state and two nations - from the river to the sea. Twenty one million people, including Palestinian refugees, living in peace, with a more united working class movement and the hope of building a democratic commonwealth for all its citizens.

Another Israel is both possible and necessary. It is possible because it is a deeply divided society. As Tony Greenstein says, "half of the Israelis identify as Israelis and half identify as Jews and most of the latter identify as messianic fundamentalists" ('Thinking beyond ceasefires' *Weekly Worker* March 21).⁴ As with all nations, ethnic, religious and class identities divide Israel. There was a struggle going on over the nature of Israeli society and its democracy before October 2023 and it is now growing again.

Another Israel is not just possible, but urgently necessary, because of the disaster that the Zionist republic

has imposed on the Palestinian and Israeli people. The numbers of Palestinians and Israelis dead and injured is proof enough. We could add that the economic cost is massive in the loss of infrastructure and productive capacity. Financial capital will extract a huge premium from the burden of national debt.

The Zionist project is finished. Its moral authority is shredded, as its crimes against humanity are exposed. It is opposed and condemned by every civilised person not in the pay or pocket of the United States. *Ha'aretz* says: "The brutalisation of Israel is well under way. If we do not act, its collapse is only a matter of time." If Israel's centre does not act against the extremists "and remove the malignant growth of occupation from the body politic, Israel's final fall is a matter of time. The countdown has begun."⁵

Israeli historian Ilan Pappé says: "Israel is a failed project and it is destined to fail, despite the huge human cost paid by Palestinians ... The truth is, it is not sustainable". He continues: "The problem is that its disintegration could be a long process and a very bloody one, whose principal victims would be the Palestinians." He then adds: "It is also not clear if the Palestinians are ready to take over, as a united liberation movement, following the final stages of the disintegration of the Zionist project."⁶

Readiness is a key question. How long can reactionary, imperialist forces prop up and sustain the dying Zionist republic? Who is ready to deliver the *coup de grâce*? Ilan Pappé looks to the Palestinians, but for us it is a matter of class. The working class in Israel-Palestine is the only class that can strike the fatal blow if it is ready. Note that

Israeli workers (Hebrew and Arab) are only part of this class and cannot succeed 'alone' without unity with Palestinian workers.

Is the Israel-Palestine working class politically ready for a democratic Israel? This is a question about programme, culture and party. Do they have a minimum republican programme and democratic culture around which unity can be forged and organisation developed? The Zionist state must be replaced by a democratic, secular republic - not limited to the current Israeli borders, but to the whole territory, from the river to the sea. The constitutional form that recognises two nations is the binational federal republic. On this point there is more agreement with Moshé than might be imagined. Moshé says:

Steve's blueprint, a "federal republic of Israel-Palestine", is ideologically bourgeois-liberal. This, in itself, is not a sufficient argument against it: it clearly ticks some of the boxes essential for a benign resolution of the conflict, which I listed in my recent article: equal rights for all, including equal personal rights, and - secondly and importantly - equal national rights for both groups involved: namely Palestinian Arabs and Hebrews (aka Israeli Jews).

In fact the federal republic ticks *all* the boxes "essential for a benign resolution of the conflict".

Return

Moshé adds: "An additional condition, which Steve fails to mention (due to an oversight?), is the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland". The reference our paper makes to "21 million people" is 15 million currently living in Israel

and Palestine, and an estimated six million refugees.

In the Labour Left Alliance 'Great Debate', I stated: "This partition state is a massively expensive system not least in the exclusion of 5-6 million refugees. The partition state must be ended and replaced by a single state ... *including the freedom for returning refugees*."⁷ So in response to Moshé's query I am happy to confirm our democratic proposal cannot and does not forget the Palestinian refugees, even if that should have been made clearer.

Moshé then says: "With this necessary addition [ie, the right of return], the blueprint could, if implemented, go a long way to resolving the conflict." It is a credible proposal, because it meets the requirements for democracy and working class unity. But Moshé questions or indeed denies it can be implemented and hence he claims it is utopian. This brings us back to the revolutionary potential of even backward sections of the working class to break free. This is not a superstitious belief, but derived from scientific analysis of the struggle between capital and wage labour.

This is the point of divergence between Moshé and Tony Greenstein. Tony writes off the Israeli-Palestinian working class and looks to Palestinian nationalism. Moshé says:

Contrary to the caricature drawn by Tony, the Israeli Jews are not a reactionary Zionist monolith; nor are the Hebrew workers uniformly extreme-right racists. In addition to a small minority of committed Hebrew genuine socialists (and *ipso facto* anti-Zionists), there is quite a sizable floating minority whose commitment to Zionist colonialism is far from

firm - they can be won over to internationalism, given the right circumstances.⁸

He adds:

... not all Hebrew workers support the racist ultra-right; there are many manifestations of cross-national class solidarity and mutual support, particularly in workplaces where Palestinian and Hebrew workers rub shoulders. Class consciousness and common interests can sometimes surmount colonial-national, supremacist ideology.

In opposing Tony's attitude to Israeli workers, Moshé gives indirect support to the democratic case.

He writes: "What makes Steve's bourgeois-liberal position politically utopian is his insistence that his blueprint does not require a regional socialist transformation, but can be implemented under capitalism." I do not accept that "bourgeois-liberal" is the correct way to characterise working class republicanism. No democratic republic, in and of itself, can abolish capitalism in one country. I agree that democratic revolutions across the Middle East would unlock the situation in Israel-Palestine.

Liberal democratic demands must be won with the political leadership of the working class. If the working class won political power in this republic, it would not survive without a regional democratic and social transformation. The point about 'liberal democratic' demands (eg, the democratic republic, right of nations, right to vote, freedom of speech, right to strike, etc) is not that they are liberal and do not require capitalism to be abolished: it is that the liberals, who claim to support these demands, betray the

fight for them, act half-heartedly and surrender prematurely. The liberals betray liberalism because they are in the pay of capital.

Not minimalist

Mike Macnair's article on the minimum programme is useful and informative on one level. It is ruined by his attempt to engineer a bogus argument against the Israeli-Palestinian working class adopting a minimum republican programme. The Israeli Mikha'el Macnair is sitting in Tel Aviv without any programme except to tail the economic 'minimalist' reformism and hold on until the cavalry of revolutionary liberation arrives from Syria, Egypt or Saudi Arabia.

This is not to say that the cavalry will not come. How great it would be if it did turn up! It is simply to argue that we should not put all our eggs in that basket and rely upon them. The national question inside Israel-Palestine has to be addressed in a programmatic way by Israeli-Palestinian workers themselves. There is no escape from their need for self-liberation.

In the *Death agony of capitalism* Trotsky says:

Classical social democracy, functioning in an epoch of progressive capitalism, divided its programme into two parts independent of each other: the *minimum programme* which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society, and the *maximum programme* which promised substitution of socialism for capitalism in the indefinite future. Between the minimum and the maximum programme no bridge existed.

We should change the terms of this argument. The minimum is the *republican* programme of social democracy and the *maximum* is the communist programme. So Trotsky is saying that between the republican programme and the communist programme we need a transitional programme to bridge the gap. As it happens, I agree with his argument. History tells us that communists need three programmes (republican-transitional-communist).

It is not a matter of hiding these various programmes, but of understanding which is the immediate programme for now. These three programmes are all revolutionary if used in the right way. Leftwing communism is built on the substitution of the transitional programme or the communist maximum programme for the republican programme. It is this that renders left communism out of touch with the masses of the people.

The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party had a minimum or republican programme of achievable reforms. It was a revolutionary programme, because it was based on a scientific, materialist analysis of the development of capitalism and hence the expansion of the working class and the growth of its political power. It begins by describing the development and contradictions in capitalism that lead the world towards socialism. It soon turns from the general to the particular.

It says that the RSDLP "takes as its most immediate political task the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy and its replacement by a democratic republic, the constitution of which would ensure ..." Then follows a series of democratic and economic reforms. These stand on their own two feet, because they mean real democratic and social progress for the people of Russia and the working class, regardless of whether the word 'socialism' is attached to it or not. Achievable reforms had a powerful attraction to the mass of the working class.

If the republican minimum programme is not relevant or achievable for the working class in Israel-Palestine, is it applicable in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iran or Egypt? Is the republican programme redundant throughout the Middle East? This poses some fundamental contradictions for the CPGB. Is Great Britain an exceptional case or is it Israel-Palestine?

There is, of course, a fourth kind of programme in left reformism. This is *not* a republican programme or a transitional one. We could call it 'minimalist' (which is in danger of being confused with the minimum programme). A reformist programme of reforms is significantly different from a republican (ie, revolutionary) programme of reforms. Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour manifestos of 2017 and 2019 are examples of reformist sub-republican reforms. This type is found in the Socialist Alliance, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, and Left Unity.

The whole of Mike's intellectual construction against the Israeli-Palestinian working class adopting a republican minimum programme rests on the phrase I used about "achievable reforms". The republican programme is a programme of reforms, to quote Trotsky, "which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society". It would be dishonest for any communist to dress this up in socialist rhetoric.

I deliberately said "achievable reforms" that are achievable under capitalism in order to speak the truth, even though I thought it would excite leftwing communists to fury. From a working class perspective, reforms are improvements which benefit the working class and strengthen its position in society: for example, higher wages, the right to strike, votes for women or free abortion on demand.

The republican minimum programme of achievable reforms raises the ambition of the working class from everyday economic reforms. It puts the idea of reform on the basis of scientific theory, as opposed to what is thrown up spontaneously on a daily basis. The key point is that the minimum republican programme is, despite appearances to the contrary, a revolutionary programme.

Mike's attempt to construct a theory of the republican programme that does not comprise reforms, is unachievable, unattractive, overthrows capitalism in one country and is, exceptionally, not applicable to Israel-Palestine, does not stand up. The conclusion is that communists should not leave their comrades in Tel Aviv in the lurch or in the dark about the republican (ie, revolutionary) programme for Israel-Palestine.

Brit left

Jack Conrad's 'Breaking the grip of Zionism' (*Weekly Worker* June 6)⁹ provides very useful information about the history of the struggle in Israel-Palestine. However, I want to focus on the sections headed 'Brit left'. After setting out the shift that the British socialists made from supporting Labour Zionism to rejecting it, Jack discusses the two main misleaders of the left in the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the Socialist Workers Party.

Democracy is not socialism. Capitalism still exists even in the most democratic republican state. However, such a republic will not be at peace with capitalism, but in a higher state of war. It is a war that leads directly to the extension of socialisation and internationalisation. This is why capital does not welcome more democracy, as wanted and needed by the working class.

Some socialists (ie, economists) have been opposed to democratic demands, such as votes for women, proportional representation (PR) or self-determination, because they do not abolish capitalism or because they are impossible under capitalism and unnecessary under socialism. Others say we do not want capitalist PR but only socialist PR! The word, 'socialism', is being used to muddy the waters. We should strip out that word in order to reveal the real argument.

Jack says that the Socialist Party calls for "a 'socialist' Israel alongside a 'socialist' West Bank, Gaza Strip Palestine". If we remove the 'socialist' disguise, all this amounts to, in reality, is the two-state solution. I therefore agree with Jack's comment that

... we are presented with, on the one hand, a socialistic version of the current PLO's Israel-Palestine two-state 'solution' - the Socialist Party in England and Wales being perhaps the most prominent advocate. It calls for a 'socialist' Israel alongside a 'socialist' West Bank, Gaza Strip Palestine.

The national socialist rhetoric means we avoid thinking concretely about the two-state solution. It is worth considering two versions of two states - Zionist and democratic. The first version means a continuation of a Zionist state alongside Palestine. This is the totally unacceptable continuation of a racist state on principle. There are two objections to it - apart from being proposed by the US, UK and EU. First is the objection on principle that a racist Israeli state will never be able to establish relations that are free, democratic and equal between the two nations. The second is that on practical grounds it has become impossible because of the fragmentation of the West Bank and the extensive intersection of settlers and Israel Defence Forces roads, etc.

A democratic two-state solution would require the overthrow of the Zionist state, replaced by a democratic, secular Israel, which would necessitate the unconditional withdrawal of the IDF from all the occupied territories, recognition of the Palestinian state, the release of all Palestinian prisoners, the end of the blockade of trade and travel, and elections for a Palestine constituent assembly. No matter how unlikely this scenario seems, it would not be a 'solution', because, as Jack says, "Anyway, why on earth two such states would remain separate, especially given substantial population crossover, is something of a mystery." In other words, if this happened, it would lead almost directly to a single state as the only thing that makes economic sense to the people.

The case against the SWP is different, because it argues straightforwardly for a democratic, one-state solution and does not load it up with the word, 'socialism', as a cover story. The SWP calls for "the abolition, the dismantling, of Israel" and in its place "one secular, democratic [capitalist - JC] state built on the principle of equal rights for all citizens, including Israeli Jews." Jack feels the need to warn readers that "democratic" means "capitalist", as if to put us off it.

The real case against the SWP's "one democratic state" is twofold. First it is not democratic, because it does not recognise there is an Israeli nation that has a right to exist. This includes the 20% Palestinian Israelis who nobody recognises as fully Israeli, neither Zionists nor leftists. Second is the question of

agency. It seems that the SWP can only see the Arab nation as the force for change. Jack says: "Perhaps what the SWP therefore envisages is a combination of Lebanon's Hezbollah, Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood governments in Egypt, Syria and Jordan acting together against Israel." He adds: "An anti-working class agency if ever there was one". Jack exposes this as a Marxist version of Palestinian nationalism that looks to the agency of Palestinian nationalism.

Jack spells out the fact that liquidating the Israeli nation, either by state oppression or the denial of national rights, would lead ultimately to ethnic cleansing and genocide. As he says, "The poles of national oppression would thereby be reversed. Not something any genuine Marxist would countenance." I do not think I am a genuine Marxist, but I would never countenance such a thing! He lays down the acid test that "No democratic solution can be won without the consent of Israeli Jews - that is, a clearly expressed majority of them".

I believe that the Israeli working class, with its Palestinian minority and in alliance with Palestinian workers in the West Bank and Gaza, could pass that democratic test. We can observe that fear has driven Israeli workers into the arms of the Zionists. This is not an iron law of politics. We can say it would be difficult to achieve without communists in Israel armed with a minimum, republican programme. Who else can plant the seeds in the minds of workers that can result in huge oak trees of freedom?

At the end of this section Jack says:

The only realistic, progressive and humane programme must be based on a mutual recognition by both Palestinians and Israeli Jews of each other's national rights. Needless to say, it would be an excellent thing if both nations chose to happily live side by side or, even better, to slowly merge together into a single nation. No rational human being would want to oppose either such outcome.

In this statement Jack is in effect

endorsing our democratic case for one state with two nations living "side by side": a democratic, federal, secular republic, which might over time eventually merge into one nation. What we add to this is that this can only become possible if the Israeli-Palestinian working class begin to unite with a common, democratic-republican aim.

Our proposal for a democratic peace settlement and federal constitutional agreement ('One republic for two nations') is the most democratic proposal made by anybody on the left. This does not require capitalism to be abolished as a precondition. There is a responsibility to be honest about this and tell it how it is, warts and all. We are not sticking socialist lipstick on a pig.

Both Moshé and Jack recognise that our democratic republican demand is the only one that could work, because it ticks all the boxes so that "no rational human being would want to oppose either such outcome" (ie, two nations which may then eventually become one nation or not). Moshé recognises that 'One republic for two nations' is democratically valid, even if unachievable, and Jack's position is more or less the same. Mike's attempt to reject the republican programme on the grounds of "achievable reforms" is not valid.

I will end by saying that I have not commented on Jack's section on the Arab nation. That requires further consideration ●

Notes

1. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1493/not-a-zero-sum-game.
2. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1492/minimal-symmetrical-errors.
3. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1494/breaking-the-grip-of-zionism.
4. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1483/thinking-beyond-ceasefires.
5. www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/2024-06-07/ty-article-opinion/israel-brutalization-is-underway-if-we-do-not-act-collapse-is-only-a-matter-of-time/000018f-ef07-dbc-a99f-ef78ad70000.
6. www.palestinechronicle.com/israel-is-destined-to-fail-top-israeli-historian-writes-in-palestine-chronicle.
7. See 'Thinking beyond ceasefires' *Weekly Worker* March 21 (see note 4).
8. 'Not a zero-sum game' *Weekly Worker* May 30 (see note 1).
9. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1494/breaking-the-grip-of-zionism.

Online Communist Forum



Sunday June 23 5pm

George Galloway's manifesto: a critique. Political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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For further information, email Stan Keable at Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk

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

FRANCE

New old popular frontism

Marine Le Pen's RN is predicted to make big gains, the centre is not holding and what passes for the left has cobbled together an electoral front. **Bariş Graham** looks at the possibilities of a cohabitation regime

Marx, in his seminal work on modern French history *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), included this famous passage: "Hegel remarks that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce".

Marx continued: "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living." If the vector of French political space at the time looked this dreadful to Marx, then today's situation could be regarded as mortifying.

Indeed, 'farcical' perfectly encapsulates French politics after president Emmanuel Macron, having seen far-right electoral gains in the European elections, announced a snap legislative election (first round: June 30). An outside observer would be guessing whether Macron has any 'tricks up his sleeve', so to speak, or strategies - at least for preventing the decimation of his governing Ensemble coalition.

The answer to such a question, at least currently, would be 'no'. There are in fact quaint theories pertaining to what Macron thinks he would gain by calling the election, from discrediting Marine Le Pen and her National Rally in a cohabitation agreement (a risky deal, if ever there was one) to narrowly winning the 'anti-fascist' vote in the second round (July 7).

She, of course, has her eye on the main prize: the presidential election of April 2027, where she will face, not Macron - he has to stand down after two consecutive terms - but an unnamed someone from his Renaissance party. Macron has of yet not announced a successor ... and there are already stories circulating about him considering a 2032 run and a third term. Playing a leading role in French politics will not finish with the end of his second term, that is for sure. Unlike Tony Blair he appears uninterested in making pot loads of money or fancy international job titles.

However, to say that this July's election, combined with the European parliamentary elections, represents a crisis of neoliberalism in an age of war, climate crisis and mass migration would not be wrong. It would be as if Nigel Farage and his Reform UK were expected to be the biggest party in the House of Commons on July 5 (not a minnow with five or six MPs, as some psephologists are predicting).

Of course, the unpopularity of the French government, at the moment headed by prime minister, Gabriel Attal, is nothing new. French presidents, including Charles de Gaulle, normally go through one prime minister after another. The fifth republic, established in October 1958, has a crowned monarch at its top - a perfect fit for de Gaulle. A constitutional arrangement which goes hand-in-hand with a weak parliament. The prime minister is, of course, appointed and unappointed by the president. So an RN victory in the second round - ie, RN emerging as the dominant, if not the majority, party in the National Assembly - could easily see him opt for the nicely-wrapped Jordan Bardella as his prime minister. A real prospect that has already spooked the markets. The valuation of the Paris stock exchange dropping behind the City of London as a result.

It is worth noting, therefore, that French big business has been seeking



Jordan Bardella: nicely packaged, but ideologically empty

avenues through which to influence - and moderate - RN's leadership. Bardella has, presumably as a result, recently backtracked on the idea of taking France out of Nato. With the centre not holding, corporate France will not hesitate to go with the far right - if the choice is between it and the left. The hope is of RN taking its cue from Giorgia Meloni in Italy and steering a Euro-Atlanticist course.¹

Poujadist

Politically, Bardella is widely regarded as Le Pen's creature. His biographer, Pierre-Stephane Fort, says there is little substance behind the carefully-crafted personable image. "He is a chameleon. He adapts perfectly to the environment around him," he said. "And he is a chronic opportunist. There is no ideology there. He's pure strategy. He senses where the wind is blowing, and gets in there early."

So, as well as suiting Le Pen, Bardella, may well suit Macron as prime minister in the run-up to the really important election in 2027. However, a Le Pen presidency would rock the whole post-1958 political order in France. It would certainly put the final nail in the coffin of the project of 'ever closer union' dreamt of by de Gaulle, which would, supposedly, see Europe emerge as the world's third superpower (alongside the US and the USSR).

The closest historical analogy to Le Pen's and thus RN's rise is Pierre Poujade's UDCA (Defence Union of Shopkeepers and Craftsmen)

in the 1950s - a xenophobic, anti-centralist and petty bourgeois reaction against the highly unstable fourth republic.² Indeed, while in terms of origins, RN has a distinct 'fascist' strand to it, in reality nowadays it has more in common with the Poujadist movement, which can really be said to be its *avant la lettre*.

What is particularly worrying, though, is the broad appeal of RN today, not least to the traditional working class.³ Poujade's movement, while attaining a certain popularity, was mainly composed of anti-tax, petty bourgeois and small independent farmers - the French Communist Party having at that time the support of the core sections of the working class. Meanwhile today the situation is much more dire for the left, with working class preferences split between the New Popular Front and RN, with the latter enjoying, when it comes to votes, majority support.

As discussed frequently in the *Weekly Worker*, the causes of leftwing decline are multileveled: from failing to offer any realistic alternatives to 'end of history' liberalism to repeatedly capitulating to bourgeois demands for austerity and 'fiscal restraint' (France's one-time 'socialist' president, François Hollande, being a particularly striking example). But what lies beneath this is, of course, the issue of working class independence, which, if it is to mean anything, must be based on a strong, disciplined,

programmatically coherent Communist Party. Without that the left is destined to continue to stumble and repeatedly fail.

That in turn results in much of the working class being trapped by rightwing 'false consciousness' and xenophobia (a crude reaction to competition in the labour market from migrants which is, unfortunately, an all-too-common pattern).

Nouveau front

Thankfully, the French left, despite its popular frontism, has not fallen quite as low as in some other countries, and in this election it has been unified after a fashion, mainly thanks to the popularity and charisma of Jean-Luc Mélenchon of La France Insoumise. That and, of course, fear of Le Pen and RN.

Indeed, when looking at past left, broad-frontist coalitions, the survival of the French left bloc since 2022 (then constituted as Nupes) seems like a miracle presented by a socialist god himself. When speaking of 'fronts', however, what immediately comes to mind then is France's experience with the first popular front government. The present New Popular Front (whose formation was announced on June 10) is straight from the Dimitrovite popular front song book of the mid-1930s - while on paper the main groups within it commit themselves to 'socialism' of some kind, when it comes to its programme, the right always has the trump card. In this case

Les Écologistes, Génération's, the Socialist Party ... and the PCF (the latter two organisations were toying with the idea of an anti-fascist alliance with Macron and Renaissance).

However, none of the parties in the NFP can really be described as socialist: at best they are left social democratic, with, inevitably, a strong nationalistic element. A description which just about sums up the 'official communist' PCF.

Unlike 1936 the NPF is not on course for forming a government - a government, which, of course, would have to cohabit with Macron. If, on the other hand, NPF does well but falls short of an absolute majority, we can be pretty sure that Macron would go for RN (with the full backing of corporate France).

Regardless of the outcome of the July elections, the task of communists in France is clear: a thorough-going criticism of past failures, fighting for theoretical and programmatic clarity and organising themselves in a party that is neither a confessional sect nor dominated by a proletarian Bonaparte. That means having no illusions in the NPF whatsoever ●

Notes

1. See www.ft.com/content/e28f9753-1770-4c8c-91d8-e7bb7ed44feb.
2. www.britannica.com/biography/Pierre-Poujade.
3. ukandeu.ac.uk/french-politics-and-new-divides-in-european-politics; www.politico.eu/article/macrons-france-vs-le-pens-france-in-charts.

LEFT

No time to waste

How to react to the upcoming election of the most rightwing Labour government ever? Recreating Corbynism is no solution, argues **Max Shanly**. We need something more

Asksed recently if he thought “he would win Labour the general election on the third time of trying if he were in Starmer’s position - coming off the back of 14 years of Conservative government that included three prime ministers in two years”, Jeremy Corbyn replied, “Absolutely.”

Is this yet another example of the Labour left’s chronic naivety, or a potential reality of a road not taken? Both are likely true - you can walk and chew gum at the same time. The Tory collapse was, after all, an inevitability. History does indeed repeat itself and, based on the fracturing of the Conservative Party’s internal coalition in the past few years, it was going to happen at some point - it was just a matter of when. Hypothetically, though, what would the prospects of a Labour government under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn be if it were to have been gifted the size of a parliamentary majority that Starmer and his acolytes are presently destined to achieve? And, more to the point, what would some of the obstacles be to its success?

Imagine

Consider this: on Friday July 5 2024 Labour has secured an overall supermajority in the House of Commons and King Charles III reluctantly calls upon Jeremy Corbyn to form a government. On the face of it, and from the Labour left’s own (incredibly weak) strategic point of view, the carrying out of the party’s manifesto - now the programme of government - should go fairly smoothly. How could it not with such a great majority in the Commons? So the thinking goes ...

I could spend the rest of this article spelling out the kind of external opposition such a Labour government would face from the unholy alliance of international capital, the British state, the House of Lords, the capitalist press and so on, but I am sure readers of the *Weekly Worker* can work that out for themselves. The greatest threat to such a government, however, always has come from within rather than without. This article is aimed at those who either believed otherwise, or - as my personal experiences tend to suggest - were simply unwilling to accept it.

The Labour left’s complete failure to transform the Labour Party from a tepid electoral project into a gigantic and dynamic lever for popular political mobilisation, backing all sectors of the exploited and oppressed, and providing a socialist perspective for real change - ie, a socialist party - has created a conundrum. Firstly, despite manoeuvres on high to change the overall makeup of the Parliamentary Labour Party, the commitment to unity with the party’s right at all costs has meant there remains a substantial number of MPs from the conservative wing of the party completely hostile to the government’s programme - including a majority of cabinet ministers. They will spend the rest of the next five years doing their best to make sure it is not carried out.

The rest, hand-picked by the leader’s office and Momentum, are supporters of the leadership and its policies, but ideologically weak and lacking the strategic nous required to navigate the coming storm from both within and without. With the entire



That was then ... but it could have been different

Socialist Campaign Group now on the government front benches, there is a complete absence of backbench organisation. The PLP majority is rudderless.

Secondly, the failure to develop a comprehensive programme of political education amongst the party’s newly found mass membership in favour of unconditional loyalty to the leadership has left them incapable of independent action beyond that instructed from on high. When - as is inevitable, based on the balance of forces - the Corbyn government is forced to compromise, how would the Corbyn-supporting MPs and extra-parliamentary party respond? What would Momentum do? Would it fight in defence of the original policy, or simply accept the leadership’s excuses for the retreat and actively defend it? Based on the experiences of the years 2015-19, the latter seems likely.

Thirdly, the Labour left’s abject failure to transform constituency parties from electoral machines into vehicles for socialist change has meant the party’s roots amongst the working class are superficial, to say the least. The rank and file can (at best!) be mobilised for one purpose and one purpose alone - to vote for Labour candidates in local and general elections. This is a government *for* the working class, rather than *of* the working class.

Fourthly, the trade union bureaucracy remains, for a time,

generally supportive of the Labour government. The bureaucratic nature of Labour’s links to the unions, and the Labour left’s lack of attempt to (as a bare minimum) build a democratic parallel to this, means there can be no mass, coordinated mobilisation of the rank and file without the support of trade union officialdom. In fact, the Corbyn government may very well find itself in a situation where they are mobilised against them - maybe for reactionary reasons, maybe for progressive ones, we will never know - and elements of the government’s programme, especially around action on climate change, make the unions feel queasy. The question is, however, how would the party members respond?

Trade unions

They have, after all, been taught that certain trade union bureaucrats are worth their undying and uncritical loyalty in return for their support of Corbyn’s leadership, so what to do now that they have turned on it? It is not as if the Labour left can rely on the direct support and organisation of the union rank and file themselves: it has not even bothered to build a relationship with them (that is not part of its *modus operandi*). As I have said, this is a government *for* the working class, rather than *of* the working class.

I could go on, but I do not want to bore the reader to death. These are but a few questions, issues and

potential pitfalls that the Labour left would have had to answer and deal with, had Corbyn chosen not to step down on election night in 2019, and (by some miracle) found himself and his parliamentary allies on the cusp of forming a government.

It is my view, based on years of active participation in the Labour left, that they would have been incapable of doing so. You only need to look at their response (or rather lack of it) to Starmer’s counterrevolution to see they do not have the capacity to be effective agents of socialist change or resistance. Bereft of a theoretical underpinning (and in fact an active hostility towards it) and effective organisation, their strategy amounted (and still amounts) to a weak form of social democratic and parliamentary Blanquism, with Corbyn (or some other poor sod) as a reluctant and no doubt incapable Blanqui.

The Labour left’s complete failure to make socialists of the 400,000 or so people that joined in support of Corbyn’s leadership is what has led to its current situation. Its inability to conceive of a party beyond the confines of Labourism is what ultimately led it to defeat, and would have driven any government led by the Labour left into the sea. Its historic role has played out - it is time to throw them head-first into the dustbin of history!

What about the movement behind Corbyn’s leadership though? The great mass of people that have left Labour in response to the right’s triumphant return to office are, on the whole, completely and utterly without direction, as seen by the creation (and then recreation) of various ‘new left parties’ over the past few years. All of these have been attempts to do Corbynism (really left-Labourism) better, and all are, for the same reasons Corbynism did, bound to fail.

Left ideas

That is not to say, in this contributors’ opinion at least, that there is no room for hope. It is clear from the result in 2017 that there are millions of people in Britain open to leftwing ideas. This is at present limited to ideas of a social democratic variety, but with the inability of even the best of Britain’s social democrats (the Labour left, if we are to be so kind) to build the necessary organisation of the working class capable of bringing them about, creates fertile ground for something to the left of social democracy (ie, Marxism) to step in, take the lead, and advocate a socialist perspective of real change.

The rudderless nature of the post-Corbynite left, its overall lack of political development, but general openness to socialist ideas - that too creates fertile ground for principled Marxist leadership of what is at present a wandering tribe of leftwing proto-social democrats marching through the political desert, and the transformation thereof into an effective and mass socialist fighting force free of the shackles of Labourism and its paternalistic concerns, capable of aiding and abetting the working class in its historic task: the revolutionary transformation of capitalist society into something quite different - socialism.

It is my hope that readers of the *Weekly Worker* and supporters of organisations like the CPGB will play a role in achieving that. With the incoming election of the most rightwing Labour government in history and the attacks on the working class that will no doubt follow, we have no time to waste ●

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REVIEW

Neither money nor personality

Alexei Sayle (narrator), Chris Reeves (director), Norman Thomas (writer) **The big lie II - Starmer and the genocide** Platform Films, 2024



**Sir Keir Starmer:
not his evil personality,
stupid**

Platform Films has produced this follow-up to its documentary *Oh Jeremy Corbyn - the big lie* about the rise and fall of Corbynism, which has been banned by a large number of venues, festivals and even the Unite union. Unlike that film, however, which we reviewed positively in the *Weekly Worker* almost exactly 12 months ago,¹ we cannot recommend the new film in its current state.²

Yes, it contains moving footage from the various pro-Palestine demonstrations, which makes it interesting as an historic document of sorts. It also features plenty of evidence of rather nasty pro-Israel provocateurs blowing whistles and horns into protestors' ears to try and get a reaction.

Before its "world premiere" on June 16 (*Not the Andrew Marr show* on Zoom), producer Norman Thomas explained that the calling of the July 4 general election had led to the understandable decision to try to "rush out the film with a few rough edges, when it comes to editing". And, sure enough, the six chapters do feel a bit cobbled together. Also, the film spends a considerable amount of time concentrating on Keir Starmer's (initial) opposition to a ceasefire - without explaining that this is now out of date, with Joe

Biden having given the green light on that front some time ago.

We would argue, however, that it is not the editing, but the *politics* that are the key problem with the film - or, more to the point, the lack thereof. The advert, with the subtitle, 'Starmer and the genocide', asks, "Why has the leader of the Labour Party backed a genocide?"³ In trying to answer that question, the film strays into rather dumb, if not outright dangerous, conspiracy theories.

As an aside, depending on the success of this film, we might very well see rightwingers and centrist 'commentators' like Owen Jones and Paul Mason being wheeled out again to condemn the film's 'anti-Semitism', just as they did with the first one. They would be wrong again. It is interesting that these useful idiots are currently shedding crocodile tears over the mass killings of tens of thousands of Palestinians. We can see all over social media, for example, a video of our Owen, wailing about how "Gaza has been such a clarifying moment for me, that has changed me forever".⁴ Ruffling his own hair, his eyes closed in horror, he laments: "I cannot believe how the world does not shout about Gaza from the top of its lungs." He goes on: "I cannot believe how

people render themselves *complicit*. They have crossed a red line over Gaza and I cannot forgive them." Presumably by "them" he means the Labour Party, seeing as he resigned his membership a few months ago to set up the dodgy campaign, *We Deserve Better*.⁵

He could of course also be referring to his slightly younger self, who was more than complicit in the anti-Corbyn witch-hunt. Just a few days before the 2017 general election, for example, he complained in his column in *The Guardian* about Labour's anti-Semitism problem, that Jeremy Corbyn should resign and that Ken Livingstone, Chris Williamson and Jackie Walker should be kicked out of the party over their alleged anti-Semitism. Perhaps he is finally apologising for his own "complicity" in spreading the big lie that criticism of Israel equals anti-Semitism? Does he finally understand that the smear campaign in the Labour Party was designed exactly for a situation like the current massacre in Gaza, to silence all critics and allow Israel to act with impunity? Alas, no such self-recognition from Mr Jones: He has just had another go at Jackie Walker for "engaging in anti-Semitic tropes".⁶ Some people never learn.

Back to the film. While it does not stray into anti-Semitism, the film tries very hard - and fails spectacularly - to explain Starmer's silence when it comes to Israel's genocidal campaign in Palestine. It starts in a rather self-contradictory way: "Why does Labour love Israel?" a headline asks and the film goes on to show how all Labour governments and leaders (bar Corbyn) supported the expulsion of the Palestinians in order to set up Israel and, later, the ongoing systematic discrimination against them by the Zionist state. So there is really nothing new about Starmer doing the same thing.

Much worse

But no, the film argues, there are things that make Starmer much worse than any other Labour leader. We are presented with two main reasons: there is Starmer's "anti-democratic personality" (more on that below), but chiefly money. Put bluntly, the film very much peddles the popular 'follow the money' line, which rarely works to explain, well, anything.

The most problematic segment shows an article with the title, "23,000 members have left the Labour Party", while Alexei Sayle reads: "Important in how Starmer

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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acts, many believe, is where his new Labour Party gets its money". Cut to Mary Evans, a councillor from Hastings, who explains: "Because the party has expelled so many members, they are in a really tight spot when it comes to delivering leaflets and such things. So they have become like the Conservative Party, relying on big donors, so that they can pay for mailshots and adverts." Asa Winstanley then says that Labour is "relying on the same financial donors ... the corporate donors, the Lord Sainsburys, the pro-Israel lobbyists as well." After which Greg Hadfield from Brighton says: "He's in their thrall, he's being taken captive by the machine, and this is a very dark machine indeed."

While none of what the three comrades say is particularly wrong as such, their comments have been edited in a way to give the impression that the pro-Israel lobby basically paid Starmer (and continues to pay him) just so that he would adopt his out-and-out pro-Israel line. This is certainly an easy and popular 'analysis' - and also entirely wrong.

Firstly, the witch-hunt against the left in the party clearly started under Corbyn himself. His general secretary, Jennie Formby, proudly boasted in the famous 'leaked report' how seriously she and Corbyn took the many (almost exclusively false) charges of anti-Semitism and how keen she was to hound Chris Williamson, Tony Greenstein, Jackie Walker and Marc Wadsworth, etc out of the party. The big millionaire donors came back to the Labour Party after Starmer expanded the witch-hunt. They did not have to pay him for that service - he was very keen to do it, in order to show the ruling class that he was making the party fit to be a safe second eleven once again; that he could run capitalism on their behalf more competently than the bumbling shower of Tory nincompoops. Of course, he willingly accepts their donations and why wouldn't he?

Later in the film, there is an even dodgier section which tries to explain that capitalism is after the fossil fuels in Gaza and the West Bank and that this is one of the key reasons why Labour keeps quiet about Palestine. "There is genocide and there is ecocide. And Israel is committing both", Alexei Sayle declares.

Yes, there is oil in Palestine -

according to some sources, it is "billions of barrels worth" of oil. Middle Eastern oil was indeed one of the reasons why the British empire originally decided to sponsor its 'Jewish Ulster' and, no doubt, somewhere down the line Israel envisages significant production. But to claim that "this genocide is about oil" or even *mainly* about oil is bizarre.

Imperialism

The film makes no sense, precisely because the makers do not understand why Israel is *actually* so important to US and UK imperialism. It is *not* because Zionists pay big donations and it is not because of oil.

Israel is of immense strategic political importance in the Middle East and became a US asset, after its stunning success in the 1967 Six Day war, when it attacked, defeated and "basically destroyed Nasserite Egypt", as Moshé Machover has put it.⁸ Israel became an important bulwark against pan-Arab nationalism, together with Iran. And after the 1979 revolution there, Israel was left as the *only* reliable ally of the US in the region - and remains so to this day. This relationship is especially important, considering the USA's wish to police a region which has around 40% of the world's readily accessible reserves of oil and gas (vital for countries such as China, Japan, Germany and France). Through Israel the US could help protect allies, turn off the taps or strike at any rogue state. This is why the US finances Israel to the hilt.

This is, however, not a relationship that could be characterised by the 'tail wagging the dog', as many on the left do. The US and Israel have a mutually beneficial relationship. Of course, the current genocidal campaign in Gaza has tested the relationship and Joe Biden has clearly come under internal pressure to at least *speak out* against it - especially with the presidential election coming up in November. His 'peace plan' is, however, not serious, but if it gets him over the line against Donald Trump, it will do! Starmer has been loyally following suit, as have most other G7 politicians. Starmer's announcement to "recognise a Palestinian state" is, just like Biden's 'peace plan', designed chiefly for internal electoral consumption.

But Starmer is somehow worse than any other politician, the film claims, because there is something really quite wrong with him as a human being. He is a liar and cannot be trusted. "Starmer is simply a pro-Nato warmonger," one interviewee explains, while another says that Starmer ignores the Palestinians' plight because "they have a different skin colour, live in a different part of the world and are worth nothing" to him.

Starmer supports genocide because he is a racist? This is, to put it simply, absurd. No less absurd was the discussion on the *Not the Andrew Marr show* that followed the premiere, when Andrew Feinstein, who is standing against Starmer, explained: "His political instincts are deeply anti-democratic. This is a human rights lawyer who has lost his humanity. Julian Assange would not be in prison, would not face many, many lifetimes in an American jail if it wasn't for Keir Starmer."

It is, of course, true that the head of the crown prosecution service at the time was a certain Keir Starmer. But it is ridiculous to claim that Assange would not be in prison today if there had been a different prosecutor. Or to believe that - even if there *had been* a prosecutor brave enough to stand up to the US government - that there would not have been a different avenue to get Assange behind bars.

Auto-Labourism

This film is an expression of the auto-Labourism of much of the pro-Corbyn left, which, frankly, seems to be going a bit mad politically, turning into its opposite: auto-anti-Labourism. Some seem to believe that July 4 will herald the rise of a 'left bloc' of independent MPs - when in reality, Jeremy Corbyn and George Galloway are barely talking to each other. It is highly unlikely that they will be joined in parliament by any other left independents (and there is a big question mark over Galloway retaining his seat in Rochdale in any case - after all, he was running virtually unopposed in the by-election, because the Labour Party disowned its own candidate).

The usually shrewd Andrew Feinstein admits that, yes, "it is going to be incredibly difficult to defeat Starmer". But not because this would require having to overturn his whopping majority of almost 30,000 votes in 2019 (64.5% of the vote)⁹. No, it is "because all we are allowed to spend is £17,000 for all staff, leaflets, everything - the Labour Party can spend tens of millions of pounds". Yes, there is no great enthusiasm for a prime minister Starmer, but Feinstein and others seriously underestimate how keen many working class people are to get rid of the Tory government. Another 50,000 leaflets supporting Feinstein would not change that.

Anyway, should Feinstein be elected - a scenario he has clearly thought about at length! - he believes that:

... they could quickly precipitate a by-election to get Starmer a seat, but that is unlikely. It is more likely that the Labour Party would be forced to elect a new leader and one would hope that if Starmer was defeated in his own backyard it would send a really clear message to the Labour Party. It would mean they would be very unlikely to put another Starmerite in - they'd be forced to put in somebody who more reflects the views of the vast majority of the people in this country.

It seems to me that there is currently more chance of hell freezing over

than any of that happening. Simply wishing for things does not make them so. And yet that seems to be the political 'strategy' employed by many on the Corbynite left. Further confusion and demoralisation are rife.

Take the aforementioned Jennie Formby, who has just announced that she will be "voting Green", because the Greens have a "not perfect, but much more transformative, agenda". She continues:

And people can't just keep voting Labour 'because we've got to get the Tories out'. They're out anyway, so we should vote for parties that genuinely represent what we believe in - which may well be independents.¹⁰

We do not know if Formby has resigned from Labour or if she has just given Keir Starmer the *carte blanche* to 'auto-exclude' her. In any case, this is a typically unserious way for her to flounce out - reflecting unfortunately the shallow moralism of many of her fellow Corbynites.

Like Formby, *The big lie II* is making a virtue out of necessity and thereby presenting the independents somehow as the answer. In reality, of course, they are a sign of the left's profound political and organisational *weakness*.

Feinstein seems to at least recognise this fact. His semi-launched organisation, Collective - which is currently registered as a limited company, exactly like Reform UK (!) - wants to "form a party", somewhere down the road. Which begs the questions, what kind of party? Will it have democratic structures? Branches? Allow members to organise around political platforms?

And what about its programme? There are currently dozens of grouplets and 'parties' in Britain which campaign on almost indistinguishable platforms for sub-minimal reforms. Collective's current programme is, if anything, even worse: it is centred on the call for an "immediate and permanent ceasefire", with the tame demands of Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project tacked on:

- A real pay rise for all
- Green New Deal
- Housing for the many
- Tax the rich to save the NHS, and
- Welcome refugees and a world free from war.¹¹

Feinstein promised on Zoom: "Regardless of what happens on July 4, we are going to hold these people to account. We are going to build a movement to challenge the structure, functioning and nature of our politics in this country."

That is certainly what is needed today. But with a programme like Collective's, that is very unlikely to happen ●

Carla Roberts

Notes

1. 'Putting the record straight' *Weekly Worker* June 29 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1449/putting-the-record-straight.
2. www.platformfilms.co.uk.
3. www.tickettailor.com/events/ntams/1289575.
4. www.instagram.com/p/C5Q_oCENxEO.
5. See 'We deserve better' *Weekly Worker* March 28: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1484/we-deserve-better.
6. skwawkbbox.org/2024/06/11/exclusive-left-wing-jews-fury-over-jones-renewed-attack-on-black-jew-jackie-walker.
7. atmos.earth/this-genocide-is-about-oil.
8. 'Imperialism, Palestine and Israel' *Weekly Worker* September 5 2007: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/687/imperialism-palestine-and-israel.
9. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electoral_history_of_Keir_Starmer.
10. x.com/jennieformby1/status/1802398061286547802.
11. See 'Where next for left?' *Weekly Worker* March 7: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1481/where-next-for-left.

Fighting fund

Let's make sure

With £404 coming our way over the last week, we are edging closer to the *Weekly Worker's* £2,250 fighting fund target for June.

A word of warning though - while our running total for the month stands at £1,230, there are now only 11 days remaining to raise the £1,020 still needed. In other words, we now need an average of just under £100 *per day* if we're going to get there.

But we can do it. The dedication and consistent support from our readers assures me of that. Take some of the excellent donations we received over the last seven days. First of all, comrade KB contributed a brilliant £170 - despite being seriously ill for months. Best wishes and many thanks, comrade! Then there was MM with his monthly £75, while other standing orders/bank transfers were from GB (£50), TR (£40), OG (£24), GS (£20) and SS (£15). Finally Italian-based comrade MZ came up

with his usual monthly £10 via PayPal.

Meanwhile, comrade GF, who has just taken out a standing order for his subscription, has included an extra £20 towards the fund. He writes: "How could I have missed the *Weekly Worker* for all these years? You're easily the most interesting and democratic of all the left papers!" Thanks, comrade - we look forward to receiving your first contribution next month.

But now we need to focus on making that £2,250 target for June. Please send us a cheque, make a transfer or use PayPal. You can visit our website via the link below to play your part. Let's make sure we do it! ●

Robbie Rix

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

Losing battle of ideas

Not surprisingly people in the Arab world have deep sympathy for the Palestinians. They also view the US, Germany, France and Britain negatively - a cause of deep concern for US-aligned rulers. Then there are the Palestinians themselves. **Yassamine Mather** reports on some recent surveys

Let me start by expressing concerns about polls conducted during war or conflict situations. Such polls can be problematic, as the results may be influenced by fear, misinformation and the chaotic environment, potentially leading to skewed or unreliable data.

Having said that, there is some consistency about polls conducted in Gaza and the West Bank before October 7 - both in terms of what the Arab Barometer organisation reports and studies by Princeton University researchers, who conducted face-to-face interviews in both regions.

One point we can make with absolute confidence is a repudiation of claims by the Israeli Defence Force commanders and Zionist ministers that the entire population of Gaza were supporters of Hamas and therefore mass murder of such citizens is somehow justified.

First of all, in October 2023, more than half of the population in Gaza who were born after 2006 had no vote in the elections won by Hamas - 74% of the population participated in those elections and 44% voted for Hamas, as opposed to 41% for Fatah. Of course, genocide of an entire population is abhorrent under any circumstances, but to justify this by claiming that all Gazans supported Hamas and therefore should be treated as 'terrorists' is a big lie that ought to be exposed.

Barometer

I will start by dealing with polls taken before October 7 in both Gaza and the West Bank. They are based on The Arab Barometer's eighth and most recent survey of Palestinians, conducted in person, which encompassed 1,189 people aged 18 and over.

Corruption: a significant portion of those polled expressed a lack of trust in their political institutions, including both the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas. Only 23% indicated having a great deal or quite a lot of trust in Hamas, while a majority (52%) had no trust at all in the group. This widespread distrust extended to the PA.

Economic situation: nearly 80% of respondents rated economic conditions as bad or very bad. Not surprisingly, 75% of Gaza's residents reported 'food insecurity' - a significant increase from 2022. Moreover, only 44% of Gazans stated they have enough food and water for even just a day or two, highlighting the severity of their plight. Their outlook on the future was equally pessimistic, with 56% believing that the economic situation will worsen in the coming years.

Political situation: the political landscape is marked by dissatisfaction and a sense of instability. A substantial majority of Palestinians view the political environment as problematic, with



Biden and Netanyahu: US backing for Zionist Israel is deeply resented

many citing it as one of the top challenges alongside economic woes. The legitimacy of both Hamas and the PA was questioned, with many Palestinians not feeling represented by their leaders.

At the time, a majority of Palestinians (51%) supported a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, with slightly more support seen among residents of Gaza than on the West Bank. A quarter of respondents also said they supported "armed resistance" as a preferred solution to Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

In summary, these polls show deep-seated issues regarding economic hardship and political legitimacy within Palestinian society, reflecting a population grappling with significant day-to-day problems and scepticism about the future.

Of course, all indications are that Hamas's popularity in Gaza and especially in the West Bank has risen considerably. Far from blaming the organisation for the war and the current devastation, both in Gaza and the West Bank there is a hardening of political positions and increased support for Hamas. In other words, the Zionist state has managed to achieve the reverse of its stated aim: eliminating Hamas. Instead it has created a more solid base of support, from which the group can surely recruit new fighters.

Outside Gaza

Let me now concentrate on data reported by the Arab Center Washington DC, in cooperation with

the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. It has done a survey of public opinion in 16 Arab countries, asking questions about the Israeli war on Gaza, and Arab perceptions of the US role and policies toward the war.

The survey included a set of questions regarding the factors that contributed to the continuation of the Israeli war on Gaza. Focusing on the Hamas attack on October 7, respondents were asked to identify the most and second most important reasons motivating Hamas. The results revealed a variety of perceptions. Specifically, 35% of respondents identified the continued Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories as the most important reason, while 24% cited Israel's targeting of Al-Aqsa Mosque. Additionally, 8% pointed to the ongoing siege on the Gaza Strip, and 6% attributed it to the continuation of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories.

Concerning the factors that enable Israel to continue its war on Gaza, 50% of the Arab public indicated that US military and political support is the most important factor. Meanwhile, 14% pointed to the failure of Arab governments to take decisive measures against Israel to stop the war. Additionally, 11% of respondents cited the recent normalisation agreements between Israel and some Arab regimes, and 10% attributed it to the support of western governments for Israel.

Regarding prospects for peace

following the war on Gaza, 59% expressed certainty that there is no possibility for peace with Israel. Additionally, 14% reported having serious doubts, while 9% stated that they never believed in the possibility of peace with Israel to begin with. Only 13% of respondents still believe in the possibility of peace.

79% said they followed the news of the war closely, while only 7% did not follow it at all. Respondents were surveyed to ascertain their perceptions of the US media's portrayal of the conflict in Gaza. A significant majority (82%) indicated a belief that US media exhibited a bias in favour of Israel. In contrast, a mere 7% perceived the coverage as neutral or unbiased, and only 4% felt it demonstrated a bias in favour of Palestine.

When queried about the reactions of regional and international powers to the conflict, the survey revealed significant dissatisfaction with the US stance. An overwhelming 94% deemed the US position as unfavourable, with 82% categorising it as very unfavourable. In Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, over 50% viewed the US as unreliable. However, in Jordan and Egypt, a majority still saw maintaining relations with the US as important. Not that they have any liking for US policy towards Israel and Palestine.

Similarly, negative perceptions were prevalent regarding European powers. The French position was viewed as bad or very bad by

79%, contrasted with only 10% who considered it good or very good. Likewise, 75% assessed Germany's position as bad or very bad, compared to 9% who saw it in a positive light. The British position was also criticised, with 78% rating it as bad or very bad, while a mere 8% perceived it positively.

Opinions were more divided concerning the positions of Russia and China, but there was a notable desire among younger respondents (18-29) for stronger economic ties with China. In contrast, the Iranian and Turkish positions received relatively more favourable assessments. The Iranian stance was viewed positively by 48% of respondents, though 37% held a negative view. The Turkish position was evaluated positively by 47% of respondents, compared to 40% who evaluated it negatively.

Russian influence was perceived with a degree of ambivalence. Perceptions varied widely, with some expressing scepticism about its reliability and intentions. In Jordan and Egypt, for instance, Russia was viewed as equally important as the US, but still faced scrutiny regarding its geopolitical manoeuvres and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Summary

In summary, while there are nuanced and varied perceptions of these global powers across the surveyed Arab countries, significant trends include a general scepticism towards the US and China, increased favourability towards Iran post-October 7, stable and positive views of Turkey, and mixed feelings about Russia's role in the region. These insights reflect the complex dynamics of global influence and local priorities in the Middle East.

When asked about the countries that most threaten the security and stability of the Arab world, 51% identified US policies as the most threatening, followed by Israel at 26%. Additionally, 7% of respondents pointed to Iranian policies, and 4% cited those of Russia. The perception of the US as the greatest threat has certainly increased following Israel's war on Gaza.

All this is proof that in the Arab world the US, the EU and Israel lost the battle of ideas long ago and that the war on Gaza has further alienated public opinion. This very much matters to rulers in Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, who are closely aligned to the US. They face not only hostility from the majority of their populations who are unmistakably, often militantly, pro-Palestine: there is also the distinct possibility of plots, plans and conspiracies leading to palace coups - conditions which could allow the open expression of popular anger and the beginning of a concerted fight for democracy, regional unity and socialism ●