

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



**Galloway's manifesto: an eclectic mix of World War II nostalgia, radical populism and 'socialism in one country' Stalinism**

- Letters and debate
- Farage and Ukraine
- Betgate scandal
- Minimum debate

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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# FREE!

## LETTERS



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

## War criminals

If Keir Starmer becomes prime minister, he will have a “dangerous militaristic tendency” and may be “a danger to world peace”. This is the message of a series of shocking new videos, in which Starmer appears dressed as a soldier marching through the death and devastation of Gaza.

The videos have been produced by award-winning Platform Films, makers of the documentary *Oh Jeremy Corbyn - the big lie*, which was controversially axed by Glastonbury Festival last year. The aim of these videos is to get people to see Starmer in a new light, as he really is. He’s not the boring figure he often appears in the mainstream media. He’s a ruthless, dangerous warmonger, all too keen to take Britain into military adventures. And people need to think about this very carefully before they vote for him.

The picture of Starmer’s character is based on the many months of research that Platform has carried out in the course of making our latest documentary film, *The big lie II - Starmer and the genocide*. Our research revealed Starmer has a dangerous militaristic tendency. He has been pushing a nationalist line in the Labour Party ever since he became leader. His declarations in recent weeks that he would be ready to use nuclear weapons if he was prime minister and his support for increased military spending are only the logical results of this line. He has close links with the US establishment too. He is like Tony Blair - but on steroids!

The strongest evidence for the way Keir Starmer will behave if he becomes prime minister is his attitude to the continuing humanitarian disaster in Palestine. His extraordinary refusal to accept that Israel is committing a genocide in Gaza or to condemn Israel in any way shows him in his true colours. He is signalling his determination to march shoulder to shoulder with the US into whatever military conflict might come - and that could have very dangerous consequences for hopes of world peace.

Norman Thomas  
Platform Films

## No Israel

Steve Freeman’s ‘Another Israel is possible’ is the height of unreality starting with the headline itself (June 20). It isn’t helped by Steve’s determination to view the situation through the lens of his favourite obsession, a bourgeois-democratic republic.

Another Israel is certainly not possible. It has to go. The aim has to be a democratic, secular Palestine, not a recreation of a failed ethno-nationalist Jewish supremacist state. As Ilan Pappé says in his new essay for the *New Left Review*, ‘The collapse of Zionism’, what we are witnessing is the collapse of the Zionist project in Palestine. What possible purpose is there in trying to revive it in another form?

What we are seeing is the beginning of the end of Zionism, not the end of the beginning. It is likely to be extremely bloody, as the genocide in Gaza demonstrates. It is as well to be clear about what it is that makes

the Zionist project inherently unstable and to proceed from there.

Pappé talks about the cleavage in Israeli society between the state of Judea and the state of Israel. Both are agreed on the fact that Palestinians have no place in their ethnically pure Jewish state, but they are fundamentally opposed on all other matters. A bourgeois, liberal Jewish state versus a theocratic ethno-nationalist state ruled not by secular law, but by *halacha* - Jewish law derived from the *Talmud* and *Old Testament*.

I would frame the cleavage in slightly different terms. The main divide in Israel is between those who see themselves as Jewish first (46%) and those who see themselves as Israeli (35%). See the Pew Research Center’s *Israel’s religiously divided society*.

One should add that this survey, taken eight years ago, probably underestimates the proportion of Israelis who see themselves as Israeli first. The wealth-creating, western-oriented section of Israel’s population is growing weaker, not stronger, as a settler regime has come to power. Indeed it is one of the ironies of the situation in Israel, that but for the common Palestinian enemy, the two Zionist camps would already have fallen upon each other.

Zionism was the adopted policy of British imperialism, and before that French imperialism under Napoleon, long before the British Jewish bourgeoisie adopted it. As people will be aware, the only vote against the Balfour Declaration in Lloyd George’s war cabinet was that of its only Jewish member, Sir Edwin Montague.

When British imperialism temporarily fell out with the Zionist settlers, US imperialism and for a time the Soviet Union under Stalin took up the mantle. Today it is crystal-clear that the existence of the Israeli state is fundamental to the imperialist project of imposing hegemony on the Arab east. This was what the Abraham Accords and ‘normalisation’ meant until October 7 disrupted the process.

Whether they realise it or not, the Palestinian struggle for national liberation stands diametrically opposed to the imperialists’ plans for integration between Israel and the Arab regimes, especially the oil-producing Gulf regimes.

However, the Zionist desire to impose its will on the Middle East has produced resistance, from Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and across the region in what is termed the ‘Axis of Resistance’. The Iranian regime, not through choice, has been forced to support a wide variety of actors, including the Houthis.

What October 7 and the ongoing Israeli attack on Gaza has proved is that Israel is not the dynamic superpower that can defeat all who oppose it. It is bogged down in Gaza in its war against Hamas. Despite being massively outnumbered and outgunned, Hamas has fought a clever and tenacious guerrilla struggle.

Hezbollah has been drawn into this struggle, not least because it realised that if Israel was successful in Gaza then it was next. Indeed it was only heavy American pressure that prevented Israel from launching a preemptive attack on Lebanon after October 7.

The actions of the Houthis have demonstrated Israel’s

vulnerabilities. It is only because of unstinting American support that Israel has been able to fight the war with Hamas. Not surprisingly America has promised full support for any war with Hezbollah. If a war with Hezbollah materialises, it is likely to set off a wider conflagration in the Middle East and the viability of some of the Arab regimes, such as in Bahrain, must be in question.

When Biden said, as a young Senator, that if Israel didn’t exist it would have had to be invented, he was speaking of the reality of the US-Israel relationship. That is the answer to those who believe the Israel lobby has a stranglehold over US foreign policy.

The Israeli army, which has imposed a regime of terror and control in the West Bank, which the apartheid regime in South Africa would have envied, has proved itself to be incompetent and out of its depth in fighting a counter-insurgency war in Gaza. Sharon’s decision to unilaterally withdraw from Gaza in 2005 must rank as one of Israel’s most serious strategic mistakes.

What the eventual outcome of the present crisis is and how long it takes the Zionist project to collapse is an unknown. However it may be sooner than expected. What is clear though is that the mechanical Marxism which sees the working class as the agents of revolutionary change does *not* apply to Israel - nor indeed to any settler working class. We can see in the west how difficult it is for the working class to achieve the revolutionary consciousness of its own potential power to overthrow capitalism. In a settler-colonial context this is impossible and this is where Moshé Machover and I diverge.

However, in a region where the deliberate creation by the imperialists of ‘political Islam’ has distorted and weakened the struggle of the Arab people for liberation, I am very clear that a democratic, secular state of Palestine must be the goal to strive for. Israeli Jews have no national rights for the simple reason that they are not an oppressed nation. Of course, they will have language rights, freedom of worship and the right to their own culture, but political rights? No.

Whether a section of the Israeli population is capable or able to break from Zionism and the idea of a Jewish state remains to be seen, but if there is such a section it won’t come from the Israeli working class.

Tony Greenstein  
Brighton

## Only SPGB

Mike Macnair asks whether Adam Buick or myself stand for the “immediate forced collectivisation of small businesses and family farms” and, if we do, whether we (in the Socialist Party of Great Britain) are “proposing to repeat the disastrous policies of the USSR in 1929-40, and of the People’s Republic of China in the ‘Great Leap Forward’ of 1958-62 and the ‘Cultural Revolution’ of 1966-76” (Letters, June 13).

It is frankly astonishing that Mike should even ask such questions. It demonstrates little, if any, familiarity with the case put forward by the SPGB or, more importantly, the dynamics of a communist-socialist revolution itself.

The SPGB are in the mould of orthodox Marxists. We hold that there are two main preconditions for a post-capitalist society to come about. The first is that the technological infrastructure should be sufficiently developed to enable a situation of material plenty to emerge. You cannot really institute a society based on free access to goods and services provided by the voluntary (unremunerated) labour of the populace without this productive capacity in place to produce enough. This capacity has long existed - in fact, for more than a century. Poverty and want exist not because the productive forces are still ‘insufficiently developed’, but only because the continued existence of capitalism (with the support of the left in the guise of state capitalism) prevents this potential from being realised.

Secondly, for a post-capitalist society to come about, a significant majority of workers have to want it and understand the implications of what they want. You cannot possibly impose a moneyless, wageless, classless and stateless alternative to capitalism from above - by some Leninist vanguard, perhaps. It has to come ‘from below’ - and not just in one part of the world (there can be no such thing as ‘socialism in one country’), but everywhere. The movement for genuine socialism is pitifully small at present, but, if and when it achieves a certain critical mass and starts to take off, its growth is likely to take an exponential

form and spread everywhere, given the nature of modern telecommunications.

Looked at from this standpoint, you can see how absurdly inappropriate are Mike’s comments. “Forced collectivisation” implies the underlying socio-economic relationship remains intact with the continuation of production for the market and wage labour - but with the state taking over the means of production. “Forced collectivisation” also implies you have something to lose - your farm or small business, perhaps. But this has got nothing to do with communism, which, in a sense, is the transcendence of the very concept of property itself by making ownership universal. You will still live on your little farm, but will no longer be hampered by the need to ‘make a living’ from it. You will have free access to what you need and voluntarily contribute to the production of those things that satisfy human needs. Most work (which is utterly useless today and tied in with administering the capitalist money economy) will disappear, leaving ample time for leisure.

You won’t be losing anything, come a communist revolution: you will be gaining an entire world. Even the ex-capitalists might, in a sense, be said to benefit from common ownership of the means of production. There is nothing to prevent the more or less immediate implementation of full communism today apart from the fact that, sadly, the vast

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday June 30 5pm

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

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

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

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

majority still have no inkling of what it is about - let alone want it. They think socialism or communism means bread queues and political dictatorship (thanks in part to the left calling these capitalist regimes 'socialist').

Mike argues: "If you don't stand for forced collectivisation, you are not proposing the immediate implementation of the maximum programme, but taking political power in order to begin a period of transition." But with respect, Mike, this is nonsense. We are in the transition now. Nothing more is required to institute full communism once a significant majority of workers come to want and understand it. It seems to me that those who bang on endlessly about the alleged need for some mythical transitional period are really only looking for an excuse to hang onto capitalism in the hopeful pretence that this might make them seem more pragmatic and plausible in the rough and tumble of capitalist politics. It doesn't. It simply demonstrates a completely muddleheaded approach to what is required to effect a communist revolution.

Sooner or later you are going to have to let go of your attachment to basic capitalism and the idea of tinkering around with the system in the vain hope of opportunistically snapping up the odd floating voter here and there with this or that attractive packaged reform - that is, if you sincerely want a socialist or communist alternative to capitalism. The SPGB, for all your criticisms of it, has at least grasped the nettle. You can't have an alternative to capitalism unless the idea of such an alternative becomes widely circulated - unless you throw yourself into the whole business of "making socialists", as William Morris put it. That is what the SPGB almost singlehandedly is doing (among political parties), but which the left is conspicuously not doing.

**Robin Cox**  
SPGB

## Not top-down

In his article, 'Programme makers', Jack Conrad wrote: "Socialism cannot be delivered from on high ... Socialism is an act of self-liberation by the great mass of the working class for the sake of the great mass

of humanity ... Though it may appear paradoxical to some, that party is built top-down" (June 13).

The latter claim is simply untrue, and contradicts the truth of the former two. A working class party aiming to build communism can only do so by democratic means, so that it is "an act of self-liberation by the great mass". Neither "self-liberation" nor democracy can be "built top-down". A revolutionary 'working class party' can only be built bottom-up, by "the great mass of the working class" themselves. That was Marx's political and philosophical position - "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves ..."

As I and generations of workers previously have found out, joining any party that isn't built on the principle that workers tell their elected leaders what they must do (not the other way round, 'top-down'), simply leads to those workers leaving those parties. Put simply, workers 'know better' their own interests, than do 'party members'.

I, like many others, joined a supposed 'workers' party' to tell them what to do. When it failed to listen, we left the party. It's the history of the Bolsheviks, CPGB, RCP, SWP, Militant, WP, WRP, etc. Until this simple political and philosophical lesson is learned by 'communists', then all 'party-building' will fail.

**L Bird**  
Liverpool

## Vote WPB

Nigel Farage has probably burned his bridges with the BBC by being right about Ukraine, and thus at least implicitly about Nato, although being so will do him no end of good among the voters at whom he is aiming.

Some people are paid an absolute fortune to talk about politics when they know nothing at all about it. Yet Farage is still wrong about Gaza among much else, and the leader of the opposition in 2029 - or for many practical purposes from next month - should not be anyone who had ever been auntie's favourite uncle.

Farage may very well win Clacton, but the re-election of George Galloway at Rochdale

is a racing certainty. Wherever you can, including here at North Durham, vote for the Workers Party of Britain.

**David Lindsay**  
Lancaster

## Eat my hat!

From my cursory reading of Marxian economics and John Smith's *Imperialism in the 21st century*, economically we are going to expect much of the same from the Labour Party as we had from the Tories.

How do I know this?

If I read Marx right, the rate of profit is divided by total capital and, even with the tendential fall in that rate, it's still going to be gargantuan profits for the rich and a wage freeze plus worse terms and conditions for workers - not to mention unemployment, a flourishing black-market economy, more drug and crime problems, and more proxy wars!

Capitalism may provide novelty and distraction for a while, but the cold, hard truth can't be avoided - that of decline! Steve Collins has a theory of out-of-date means of production and Arthur Bough has one of fixed capital saved so as to be invested, but, as Thomas Piketty states in his book *Capital in the 21st century*, inequality is still going to continue.

John Smith's book is well worth studying, as he tackles everything from an advancement of Marx's questions he failed to answer, to the displacement theory of Samir Amin, the confusion of the Euro-Marxists and his own theory of global arbitrage of super-exploitation as a third form of surplus value in production.

If I'm wrong, I'll eat my hat!

**Frank Kavanagh**  
Glamorgan

## Legalise drugs

I would like to comment on a recent article by Tom Phillips in *The Guardian* titled: 'The cocaine superhighway: how death and destruction mark drug's path from South America to Europe' (June 12).

The article explains that Ecuador is the most violent country in South America, with more than 8,000 involved in the cocaine trade being murdered between 2022 and 2023. Ecuador does not produce cocaine - it is produced in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. However, its busy ports have become what is known as the "cocaine superhighway", as containers carrying cocaine head for Europe and the US.

Soaring demand in Europe is making places like Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city, one of the most violent places on earth, as rival drug gangs fight for control of the cocaine trade. In Europe, rising cocaine consumption has brought violence amongst drug gangs to ports in the Netherlands, Germany and Spain. The article concludes with police officers in both Europe and Central America calling on cocaine users in Europe to "wake up to the pain they are causing on the other side of the world".

What can Marxists do to end the violence associated with the international drug trade? First, we need the EU and UK governments to legally regulate all drugs, just like alcohol. Second, cocaine needs to be made available to users via specially licensed pharmacies. Third, EU and UK governments should buy cocaine directly from small farmers in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia.

It's time to legalise all drugs.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

# ACTION

## Stop arming Israel - boycott Barclays Bank

**Saturday June 29:** Nationwide day of action. Demand the British government stops arming Israel. Demand Barclays stops bankrolling Israel's attacks on Palestinians. Join your local action.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign:  
palestinecampaign.org/events.

## Barrage against Farage

**Saturday June 29, 12 noon to 3pm:** Protest. Assemble outside McDonald's, Pier Avenue, Clacton CO15. Defeat Farage and Reform UK's politics of racism and hate.

Organised by Stand Up To Racism:  
x.com/AntiRacismDay/status/1805351317377847382.

## Unions east community festival

**Sunday June 30, 1pm to 5pm:** Free festival, Abbots Park, Leyton, London E10. Celebrating solidarity in our community and our workplaces with music, debates and stalls. Organised by trade union branches in Hackney, Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest:  
www.facebook.com/events/7285726774798206.

## Palestine, militarism and the race to war

**Sunday June 30, 2pm:** Election public meeting, Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1. While Labour and the Tories support Israel, many pro-Palestine candidates are standing. Discuss the election and how solidarity with Gaza can defeat US and UK militarism. Speakers from CND, Stop the War and Manchester Friends of Palestine. Registration free.

Organised by Greater Manchester Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament:  
www.facebook.com/events/823677663017334.

## 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.

## Elections in France and fighting the far right

**Tuesday July 2, 7pm:** Online meeting. Insights on the latest developments in the French elections from socialist activist in Paris John Mullen and author/activist Katherine Connelly.

Organised by Counterfire:  
www.facebook.com/events/322705757446259.

## General election: what would Marx do?

**Thursday July 4, 7pm:** Online briefing: 'After the election - where now?'. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?:  
www.whymarx.com/sessions.

## 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.

## Support Barnet social worker strikers

**Tuesday July 9, 6pm:** Lobby of Barnet council, Hendon Town Hall, London NW4. This Labour-controlled council is using strike-breaking agency staff against mental health social workers who have been on all-out strike for two months for better pay and conditions.

Organised by Barnet Unison:  
www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=752133953802231.

## The racket

**Tuesday July 9, 6.45pm:** Book event, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Declassified UK journalist Matt Kennard introduces the second edition of his book, *The racket: a rogue reporter vs the American empire*. Followed by Q and A. Tickets £3 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop:  
housmans.com/event/book-launch-the-racket-by-matt-kennard.

## 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.

## Disabled people against cuts

**Thursday July 18, 12 noon:** Protest, music, art, theatre and more. Parliament Square, London SW1. Disabled people demand a future. Organised by Disabled People Against Cuts: dpac.uk.net/blog.

## 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.

## Fighting fund

# Four days left

**A**s we near the end of June, once again we have that monthly £2,250 fighting fund target in our sights. As I write, we have received a total of £1,880, which means the *Weekly Worker* still needs another £370 in just four days.

But that is far from impossible. It just means we could do with a few more readers and supporters helping us out by this weekend (Sunday June 30). Take the last seven days - there were two *three-figure* donations (thanks very much, comrades SK and PM), plus standing orders/bank transfers from JC (£70), GT and SO (£35 each), DR, DG and MM (£20), IS (£10) and TT (£6).

On top of that, comrades JN, JS and SS each contributed £7 by PayPal, while our favourite cash donor, comrade Hassan, handed a tenner to one of our team. All that came to £650! - not bad at all

for just seven days.

I can't stress enough how much the *Weekly Worker* relies on these brilliant readers and supporters to keep publishing our paper - which is unique, in that it alone campaigns tirelessly for the one thing the working class needs above everything else: a principled, united, democratic Marxist party.

So please help us raise that extra £370 in just four days. Make a bank transfer or click on our PayPal button - for all the details you need, go to the web address below.

We need you like you need the *Weekly Worker*! ●

**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

**ASSANGE**

# Free at last!

He exposed US war crimes, dissed the global hegemon and faced life imprisonment. Sir Keir Starmer did nothing to help him. On the contrary, there was complicity with the Obama administration. **Marcus Strom** welcomes the release, but worries about the continued threat to free speech

Julian Assange's release on June 24 is cause for celebration. For more than five years he has languished in a maximum-security cell in Belmarsh prison, as the US sought to extradite him to face a possible 175 years in jail - effectively a death sentence - for exposing its war crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay.

If he were a US citizen he could have pleaded the first amendment. That option might have been open to him after the May 20 2024 high court judgement in London - however, he is Australian. And that would have meant many more years of appeals and, of course, he faced multiple charges.

Assange's five years in Belmarsh came after he spent seven years in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, to avoid extradition to Sweden for questioning over long-since-dropped allegations of sexual misconduct. Assange jumped bail, fearful he would be sent for trial in the US, and sought safety in the embassy in June 2012, where he was granted political asylum.

Assange was always prepared to be questioned in London on the matter, but the UK crown prosecution service - then headed by Sir Keir Starmer - was one of many blocks preventing this routine procedure from happening. Sir Keir certainly played his part in supporting the long intelligence arm of the US empire, trying to ensure Assange would face the music.

## Records destroyed

It is something strange indeed that, while Sir Keir oversaw that part of Assange's legal ordeal, he visited the US to meet with US attorney-general Eric Holder four times. But the CPS has destroyed all records of his four trips to Washington.<sup>1</sup> Conspiracy or cock-up? Who knows?

At the time many sage voices in the mainstream media said Sweden would *not* allow him to be extradited to the US. Among them, of course, one Owen Jones, the *Guardian* columnist and former darling of the Labour left. The fact that after his forced removal from the Ecuadorian embassy in 2019 he was immediately slapped with the extradition request surely put a lie to that argument. Revelations that, while in the embassy, Trump's man at Langley, then in the State Department, Mike Pompeo, asked the CIA for 'options' for the abduction or assassination of Assange shows how the US views the norms of law when it comes dealing with someone who has dissed the global hegemon.<sup>2</sup>

Assange flew out of Britain on Monday and presented himself to a judge in a remote US federal court in the North Mariana Islands - he was sensibly not prepared to land on the US mainland. He has pleaded guilty to a single charge (out of 18 in total) of revealing defence secrets, and received a 62-month sentence, already considered served. He has now flown home to Australia, a free man.

No doubt, Julian Assange is a hero for our times - a modern-day 'man in the iron mask'. His release is a victory for all who fought against the US empire, the wars in



Speaking on the steps of St Paul's during the heyday of Occupy

Iraq and Afghanistan and a snub to the quislings in the mainstream media who ummed and ahed about whether or not they thought Assange was a journalist.

Assange and Wikileaks revolutionised information gathering for journalism and the fourth estate. The innovation of safe and secure electronic drops for classified or leaked information are now commonplace in newsrooms the world over. In 2011, Wikileaks received the Walkley Award for Outstanding Contribution to Journalism - Australia's top media award.

## Celebrate

While we celebrate his release, advocates of a free press must still feel a chill that Assange has had to plead guilty to one count of breaching the Espionage Act. What sort of precedent that sets for reporting on US military secrets in the future is unclear. Reporting on national security issues is - or should be - bread and butter for honest journalism.

Assange has been a proud member of Australia's journalists' union, the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, and its global umbrella, the International Federation of Journalists since 2007. The MEAA has put out a statement that notes:

The work of Wikileaks at the centre of this case - which exposed war crimes and other wrongdoing by the US in Iraq and Afghanistan - was strong, public-interest journalism.

MEAA fears the deal will embolden the US and other governments around the world to continue to pursue and prosecute journalists who disclose to the public information they would rather keep suppressed.

While Assange is now free, it is clear that journalism is not

Of course, no-one in their right mind will blame Assange for accepting the deal. He was dying in prison.

Campaigners for Assange and a free press will now continue to press the US for a full pardon for Assange, who has committed no crime other than telling the truth to the world.

Those at the core of Wikileaks and their supporters worldwide have shown extraordinary courage and determination in the fight for Assange's freedom. The MEAA and other media unions, including the European Federation of Journalists and the International Federation of Journalists, have shown consistent support too. The US media union, NewsGuild CWA, after having dragged its feet on the issue, eventually called for his release.

His former collaborators at *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and elsewhere have been less consistent (and that is being generous). While many individual journalists have stood up throughout Assange's ordeal, some betrayed him and the big news houses in London, New York and Sydney have squirmed throughout. Some condemned him outright. Assange does not play by their rules of *quid pro quo* with the powers that be, and for that many

resent him.

In Australia, the then Labor prime minister, Julia Gillard, acted as judge and jury as far back as 2010, saying Assange was "guilty of illegality", saying she had sought "advice about potential criminal conduct of the individual involved" from the Australian Federal Police.

The current Labor government has pursued backroom talks with the US, which no doubt framed part of the final release of Assange. But much of its public commentary was to only say 'it's gone on too long', afraid of embarrassing its Aukus partners. Most in the ALP leadership were reluctant convert to the cause, forced by public campaigning to shift position. After years of civil society campaigning, a cross-party block formed in the Australian parliament calling for Assange's release - including Liberal and National Party conservatives, independents, Greens and the ALP.

Despite publicly playing the quiet diplomacy game, on the inside prime minister Anthony Albanese was forthright in his support for Assange's release. This helped shift the ALP.

In his flight to freedom, Assange was accompanied by Australian high commissioner to the UK, Stephen Smith - a former ALP defence minister - and met in the Marianas by US ambassador and former PM Kevin Rudd, showing that the Albanese government left nothing to chance at the last hurdle.

Nonetheless, for years Australian governments of all stripes have claimed it was nothing to do with

them - a legal case involving the US and the UK. It will be interesting to see how much credit prime minister Albanese now claims for his backroom negotiations, which definitely had an impact.

The motivation for the Biden administration to cut such a deal with Assange at this time is electoral. Biden was previously known as an Assange hawk - but with the possible trial of a free speech campaigner looming over an election, he didn't want to hand that axe to Trump to grind

## Anti-imperialism?

Assange's broader supporters have been a mixed bag. Many have been excellent. But the campaign has also attracted its share of crazy conspiracists - not surprising, given the terrain and the revelations of some *actual* conspiracies against him. However, many 'Assangistas' maintain more than a residual of conspiracy 'anti-imperialist' politics - an anti-imperialism of fools.

The touchstone for many of these people is support for a 'multi-polar world', where the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Calling out the crimes of the US is one thing, but identifying *any of its strategic enemies* as a needed counterbalance is quite another. For some, this is mundane support for the Brics bloc and a shift from a global reliance on the US dollar. For others, it means effective support for regimes in Damascus, Moscow, Tehran, Beijing: all criminals themselves.

Missing from this dead-end and dangerous politics is the democratic agency of our camp: the global working class - which brings us to the limits of Assange's political mission. Who knows where he has landed after his ordeal? He deserves time to recuperate with family, friends and his comrades. But the Wikileaks project, while audacious, was a project that could be called 'techno-anarchism'. Assange came out of the hacker community - no doubt sincere in his belief that the truth shall set you free.

Assange thought that the public could fight to change the world if we didn't know how it all worked.

The mission of Wikileaks was that tearing down the veil of the secret state would make it possible for people to organise, forcing institutionalised power to crumble, once the scales fell from our eyes.

While the glare of publicity is essential for democratic change, Assange has learnt to his own cost that this is not quite how power works. It will take the organised, democratic force of the working class on a global scale to tear down the power of imperialism. That is a task of audacious hope and imagination, which is now ours to take up ●

**Marcus Strom is a member of the Australian Labor Party, a former Labor press secretary and immediate past president of MEAA Media, the journalists' union in Australia**

## Notes

1. [www.declassifieduk.org/cps-has-destroyed-all-records-of-keir-starmer-four-trips-to-washington](http://www.declassifieduk.org/cps-has-destroyed-all-records-of-keir-starmer-four-trips-to-washington).
2. See [www.theguardian.com/media/2021/sep/27/senior-cia-officials-trump-discussed-assassinating-julian-assange](http://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/sep/27/senior-cia-officials-trump-discussed-assassinating-julian-assange).

RIGHT

# Fissures and fusions

Mainstream parties feign outrage over Nigel Farage's Trumpite comments about the west provoking Russia's invasion of Ukraine - even though he is essentially correct, writes **Eddie Ford**

With Reform UK still competing strongly against the Tories in the polls, one of the big stories from last week was Nigel Farage's comments about the Ukraine war. He repeated his warnings from 2014, at the time of the Russian annexation of Crimea, that the ever-eastward expansion of Nato and the European Union, which he visibly hates, was going to cause a negative reaction from Moscow that would go against the interests of the UK.

Hence Farage said to the BBC's *Panorama* that the west "provoked this war" and, while the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine over two years ago was "of course" the fault of Vladimir Putin, he has "used what we've done as an excuse". He went on the next day to write an article for *The Daily Telegraph* entitled "The west's errors in Ukraine have been catastrophic: I won't apologise for telling the truth", saying that "the west has played into Putin's hands", and described himself as "one of the few political figures who has been consistently right and honest about Russia's Ukraine war".<sup>1</sup> Farage added that he never has been "an apologist or supporter of Putin" and, as "a champion of national sovereignty", he found the Russian leader's invasion of Ukraine "immoral, outrageous and indefensible".

The reaction from the mainstream parties and political establishment was totally predictable - best summed up by the dishonest headline in *The Guardian*: "Senior Tories line up to denounce Nigel Farage's defence of Putin's war" (June 23). Farage said nothing of the sort, of course! Rather, he said there was a *reason* for this war. Yes, that does not chime in with the notion that Putin is just mad or bad, as we are constantly told - or the daft idea that he is a new Hitler, who really wants to conquer all of Europe. No, there is a rationality to Putin's war, even if it is taboo to say such a thing.

What exactly his war aims were is still not entirely clear - was it initially to roll towards Kyiv and overthrow the Zelensky government? Hold down the entire country? What about his declared goal to "demilitarise and deNazify" the country? But what you can say with reasonable confidence is that it was about preventing Ukraine from joining Nato and doing some sort of deal over the areas where there is a large ethnic Russian presence - in the south, crucially Crimea, and Donbass to the east. Maybe Vladimir Putin will be successful in achieving some or all of these aims, especially with regards to Crimea, or perhaps the war will take an unexpected twist and he ends up with more or less nothing. The potential for miscalculation on all sides is huge.

## Hypocrisy

But it goes without saying that the establishment politicians had no interest in engaging with the actual issues, preferring to auto-condemn any deviation from the consensus. James Cleverly, the home secretary, said Farage's comments were "echoing Putin's vile justification for the brutal invasion of Ukraine" - even though that was obviously not the case - while shadow defence secretary John Healey pompously declared that Farage has "shown that he would rather lick Vladimir Putin's boot than stand up for the people of Ukraine" - something that makes him "unfit for any political office in our country,



Would make the perfect fit with a second-term Donald Trump

let alone leading a serious party in parliament" (complete subservience to the Biden administration is obviously an essential qualification - well, till November anyway).

You will not be surprised to hear that Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey does not "share any values" with Nigel Farage, while Boris Johnson - of all people - called the Reform leader "morally repugnant", spouting "nauseating ahistorical drivel and more Kremlin propaganda". Naturally Sir Keir Starmer was keen to display his Atlanticist credentials, as we enter the closing stages of the general election campaign - informing us that Labour was "unshakeable in our commitment to Nato, because this is about defending Ukraine, but it is also about defending our hard-won democracy and freedom, and anybody standing for public office ought to understand that".

Maybe he will change his tune, if, and it's a big if, Donald Trump becomes president again in January 2025. Farage is, of course, a Trumpite. A deeply reactionary rebel against the liberal post-World War II social order, crucially its neo-liberal rush to globalisation, he would surely be top of Trump's list of foreign satraps coming to pay him court in the White House.

However, perhaps the most disingenuous response came from the former defence secretary, Ben Wallace. He described Nigel Farage as a "pub bore" who did not understand the "real world" of politics, and presented "very simplistic answers" to what are "complex problems". Talk about the pot calling the kettle black! It is clearly Wallace and those

like him who give us the supremely simplistic answer that Putin's actions can be explained by the notion that he is a crazy, "totalitarian" leader, which means that questioning this narrative, as Farage does, means "voicing sympathy for a dictator who deployed nerve agents on the streets of Britain". Very sophisticated, Ben.

It is also rewriting the past too, as Nigel Farage had fun pointing out at the beginning of the week from the top of his campaign bus in Maidstone - brandishing a copy of the *i* newspaper from May 2016 with the headline, "Boris blames EU for war in Ukraine".<sup>2</sup> The original article, which saw the former London mayor branded as a "Putin apologist" by the Labour Party, quotes Johnson as saying that, if you want an example of EU "foreign policy making on the hoof" and its "pretensions to running a defence policy that have caused real trouble", then look at what has happened in Ukraine - which risks "undermining Nato". Johnson also cited events in the Balkans as other examples of EU blundering. In fact, he attacked the EU as a "force for instability and alienation" and compared it to the Italian Mafia - not a bad Nigel Farage impersonation. Not without reason, the Reform leader told his supporters that "perhaps it's Boris Johnson that's morally repugnant and not me", adding: "But can you see the sheer level of hypocrisy? Can you see the nonsense of all of this?"

While in Kent, he could not resist the jibe that Johnson would go down as the "worst prime minister of modern times", who betrayed an "80-seat majority" and those who voted for Brexit.

Given the dire state of the polls for the Tories, they have seized upon Nigel Farage's comments in a desperate attempt to halt the rise of Reform UK, which seems to be splitting their party in two. Some scenarios see them reduced to below 100 MPs in the next parliament, which would be a catastrophic result. For example, the latest Opinium poll still has Labour with a 20-point lead over the Tories, and shows Reform only four points behind the Conservatives on 16% of the vote.

## Two wings

Farage's pronouncements on Ukraine were also seized upon by the even more desperate liberal or one-nation wing of the Conservative Party - worried that figures on the right of the party like Suella Braverman and Jacob Rees-Mogg will encourage him to join the Tories after their election defeat. They will now argue that someone who has shown "sympathy for a murderous tyrant" should not be allowed into the party, as he is too far away from what should be the position of a normal mainstream politician. But they could be batting on a losing wicket. One former cabinet minister said he fears "a fissure" after the election, with the leadership candidates feeling compelled to argue for Farage's admittance in order to appease the party membership - scuppering any chance of trying to keep the party in the centre ground.

Adding to the toxic mix has been the row over the reallocation of resources at Conservative campaign headquarters to defend 'safer seats' - apparently now considered marginal, according to the latest polling - which

has led to concerns about effectively giving up on the so-called 'red wall' captured by Boris Johnson in 2019. Another issue is money - not something the Tories normally have to be too worried about - but some Tory candidates have complained about not having enough resources. Hinting at the problems, a fundraising event last week at London's exclusive Hurlingham Club took place without Rishi Sunak, who instead sent a video message - he was obviously too busy trying to handle the betting scandal. This meant that the star turn of the evening went to none other than business secretary Kemi Badenoch - seen as a frontrunner for the leadership, if not "the future" of the party (at least according to the *Telegraph*).

## Merger hopes

A future that looks increasingly grim, if you are a Tory liberal. A poll by BMG Research finds that Tory and Reform voters are nearly twice as likely to back a merger between the two parties than not.<sup>3</sup> Thus 45% of Tory voters and 48% of Reform voters want the two parties to join together - a possibility heavily touted by Farage over the past weeks - while only around a quarter of each group oppose such a fusion. Unsurprisingly, the two sides may struggle to agree on a leader, with Nigel Farage proving the most popular of a range of potential candidates among 2019 Tory voters - with 63% support, as opposed to the mere 17% for Rishi Sunak. However, the prime minister is loyally backed by 95% of current Tory voters, with just 43% of those likely to vote for the party if it were led by Farage.

In yet more bad news for the Tories, according to an Ipsos survey for the *Financial Times* (June 23), the Tories have lost up to a third of voters who planned to back the party just four months ago. However, the BBC's poll tracker showed little change in the overall support for each of the main parties - with the Tories on 20% and Labour way ahead with 41%. While the Conservatives lost voters to Labour and Reform, they also gained backers among those who had previously said they were undecided - a group that has commonly turned out for the Tories in recent elections.

It is not all unvarnished good news for Starmer, as Labour has also experienced high levels of turnover, losing a quarter of the people who previously said they were planning to vote for the party. The party lost 4% of its voters to the Lib Dems (most likely to be tactical switchers trying to oust Tory candidates), but Labour gained 16% of those who had previously been planning to vote Lib Dem - the Ipsos survey demonstrating that beneath the surface stability there is a lot of churn.

But the overall direction of travel is quite clear: a handsome Labour victory - possibly an historic one - that could trigger a Tory civil war and a large lurch to the right under the gravitational pull of Nigel Farage and Reform UK ●

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## Notes

1. telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/06/22/wests-errors-in-ukraine-been-catastrophic-i-wont-apologise.
2. news.sky.com/story/nigel-farage-hits-back-at-hypocrisy-of-boris-johnson-over-ukraine-comments-13158013.
3. inews.co.uk/news/politics/half-tory-reform-voters-merger-few-opposed-3125211.

**TORIES**

# Bookies, mugs and pollsters

As Sunak's campaign stumbles from bad to worse, Paul Demarty looks at the latest turn in the betting scandal and, in the absence of any differences of substance, the media obsession with the polls

It is clearly beyond the Conservative Party to actually compete in this election. But surely they can make it three days without some fresh gaffe or scandal.

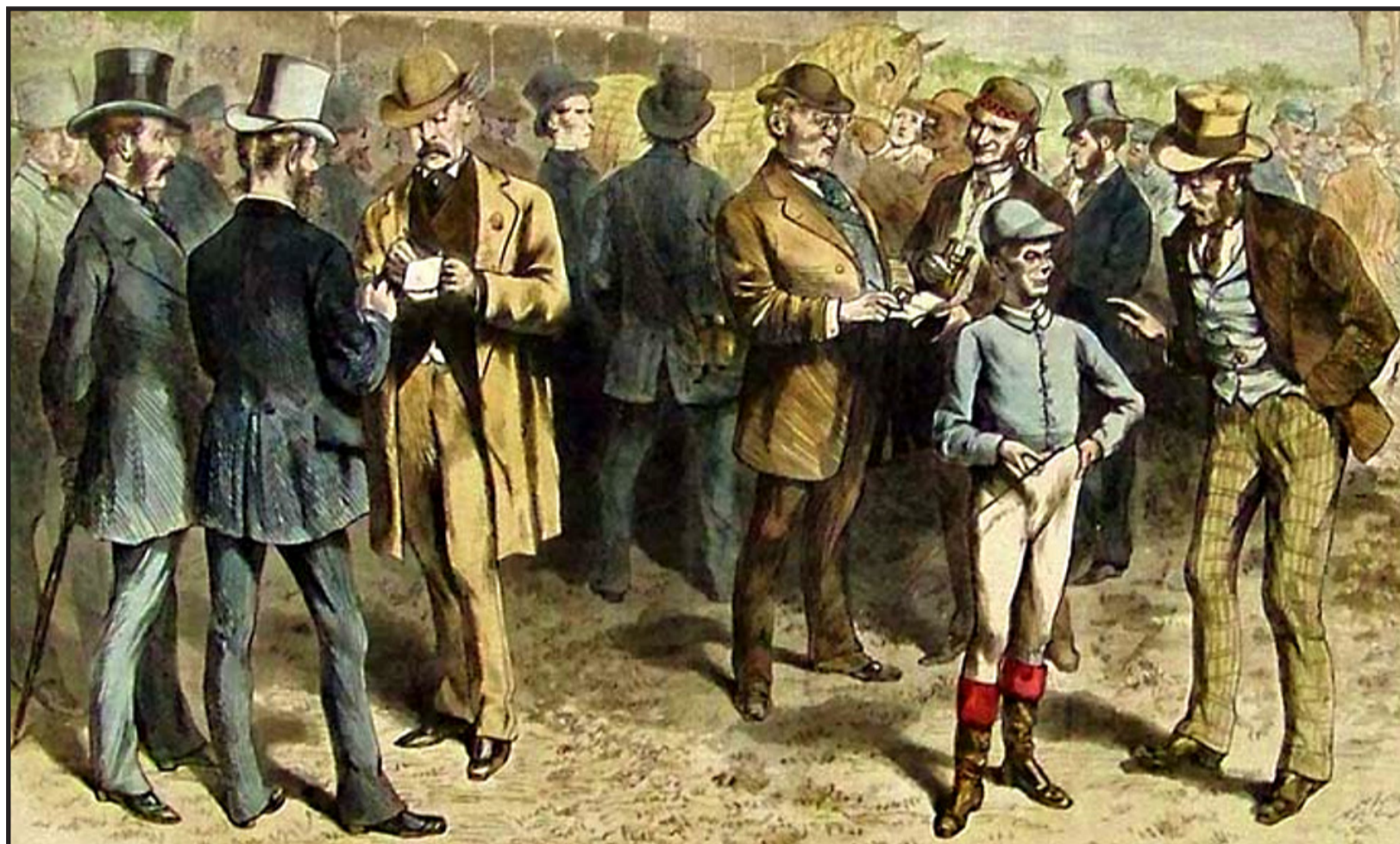
The tediously named 'Betgate' affair began as a mere scratch two weeks ago, when *The Guardian* discovered that Rishi Sunak's parliamentary private secretary, Craig Williams, had bet on the date of the general election, and was being investigated by the Gambling Commission. That one Tory could be found stupid enough to think these things are not monitored was embarrassing, but hardly apocalyptic (at least compared to the catalogue of disasters that has characterised this campaign as a whole).

But then Tory candidate Laura Saunders was revealed to be in the same kind of trouble with the commission - and it turned out that so was her husband, Tony Lee, who had been suspended from his job at Conservative HQ (small world, eh?). Three became four, four became five; the Metropolitan Police hinted at related inquiries into its own officers (at least six are now known to be under investigation by the Gambling Commission). As usual wrong-footed, it took Sunak until June 25 to suspend the parliamentary candidacies of Williams and Saunders. (One Labour candidate was also suspended for similar reasons - Kevin Craig bet that he would never win the Central Suffolk and North Ipswich constituency, in which the Tories had a 23,000 majority in 2019.)

It is not a good look, to put it mildly. The average person in the street knows very well why the gambling activities of sportsmen and women are kept under close watch. (Readers may remember the extremely long ban meted out to the footballer Ivan Toney of Brentford and England, last year.) Politics is a rather different sort of endeavour, but it is nevertheless a series of contests, with an interesting landscape of probabilities to explore. It is, therefore, something on which the bookmakers will take bets. Someone who bet on a July election in the spring would have gotten a good price, given how obviously stupid calling such an election would be (and so it has turned out). If the allegations are true, this is patent, obvious and vulgar corruption.

Worst of all, perhaps, is that it is so petty. This is not corruption on the grand, Watergate, *al-Yamamah* scale. It is a Del-Boy wheeze - the small pursuit of small sums by ever so small people. For once it is hard to disagree with Keir Starmer, at his most high-minded, when he told a Northampton rally:

It goes to the heart of what the Tories have become when their first instinct in relation to a general election is not how to



'Betting on the favourite': 1870 engraving

serve the country - 'How do I get the message out?' - it's 'How quickly can I get to the bookies and make some money?'

## Unflattering

It is thus quite an unflattering portrait of the present caste of career politicians - to which, of course, Sir Keir belongs. There is a certain anti-political cynicism taking root among many people, both here and elsewhere and, given the prevailing balance of forces, it is most commonly taken hold of by the right. Politicians pretend to care; but they only, at the end of the day, care about themselves. They would rather make a few hundred quid than rebuild a country that is (without much exaggeration) disintegrating before our eyes, be it NHS waiting lists, rotting infrastructure or (lest we forget) entirely dysfunctional government.

On the left, this is usually explained by the collapse of the social democratic post-war order, and the associated deindustrialisation and hypertrophy of finance capital. It is possible to see gambling as a minor branch of finance capital in itself even. Both brokers and gamblers put money at risk to bet that some more or less unlikely outcome will take place. The relationship in each case between the bet and actually useful economic activity is, at best, obscure. There is a proportional relationship

between risk and reward. Indeed, after the 2008 crash, there were many denunciations of 'casino capitalism', which brings to mind one other similarity: both in 'casino capitalism' and the casino itself, the house always wins.

Political betting has grown in prominence in these years. It has become a hobby of people in politics-adjacent jobs, or who merely fancy themselves as savvy. Exactly where the ethical line lies is somewhat obscure. You could take the case of Sean McElwee - the co-founder of a think-tank aligned with the Democratic Party in the United States, focused on polling analysis and suchlike - who had to resign from his post in 2022, when questions were raised over political bets he had made. Was his Data for Progress outfit - which badly misjudged that year's mid-term elections - influential enough to make this an ethical problem? (In any case, later and more serious allegations that McElwee had set people up as straw donors for the disgraced cryptocurrency billionaire Sam Bankman-Fried would have done for him, we assume.)

This raises wider questions about the increasing dominance of opinion polling in the overall reporting of elections. On the face of it, there is nothing very alarming about it - we all want to know how things are going, roughly, and get some hint of the result. The trouble is that the causation goes both ways. Opinion polls change the behaviour of parties and candidates - both as regards minor tactical questions on the campaign trail, but also in the round. Authority in the campaign shifts towards pollsters and numbers people; politics becomes ever less about the substantive issues it is, on paper, supposed to decide, but on salami-slicing the electorate with specially crafted 'messaging'.

Of course, most people know very well that this is going on, not least because it is going on *in public* - 'What are you going to do to turn

around these poll numbers?' every trailing candidate is asked. And so on. The result is even more severe cynicism, which tends in different ways to invalidate the models of the opinion pollsters.

Underlying this dynamic is precisely the history we previously outlined: the advent of neoliberalism meant aggressively curtailing the range of available political options, and with it the relevance of voting. It also tended to disintegrate and/or bureaucratise those institutions, like parties and trade unions, that could offer any meaningful countervailing force. Neoliberalism produces the atomised electorate, their anxieties imperfectly massaged and exploited by technocratic pollsters and policy wonks.

## History

Even this history, indeed, does not mention the fundamental dynamic: that capitalism and democracy do *not* go together, except insofar as capitalism creates the proletariat, which has the potential power and the incentive to fight for democracy. Neoliberalism is a tale of the defeat of the political and economic organs of the working class, and thus in a sense a return to 'normal service' after the scare of the USSR's brief existence. Severe decay of what democratic functioning existed was to be expected. The flipside of the 'individual freedom' promised by the politicians of the 1980s, 90s and 2000s is impenetrable managerialism at the level of politics - just as the anarchy of the market is inseparable from the tyranny of the factory floor.

That is the real scandal of 'Betgate'. After all, the sums of money involved here are likely to be trivial, compared to the various 'fast lane' sweetheart deals Tories gave out to their mates for pandemic supplies. To a population which is, in aggregate, increasingly cynical about electoral politics, it says, 'You're right: this is all a game to them.' Hence, equally, the ferocity of

the bourgeois *press* in going after the story, since they are part of the whole machinery here. Their jeremiads about an imminent woke-socialist one-party state (or else the danger of a fully Faragised Tory government) are rather hard to take seriously, when it begins to look like the politicians are not dangerous fanatics at all, but merely opportunistic and grasping careerists.

As we mentioned, the chief beneficiaries of all this - given the weakness of the working class left that has brought it about - has been the right. This has been exacerbated by the tendency for those leftwing formations that break through at all to be rapidly coopted, whether that be the participation of the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista in the Romano Prodi governments of the 2000s, the similar absorption into coalition politics of Podemos in Spain, or - most spectacularly - the Syriza government in Greece, utterly unable to resist the onslaught of the international financial system.

The right cannot readily find a way out either, however. The present post-fascist Fratelli d'Italia government in Rome has caused no serious change in the functioning of the political system - merely slathering it in ugly rhetoric. The French Rassemblement National, which is likely to emerge the largest party in the National Assembly next month, has already drifted far from its old Euroscepticism and promises to be a responsible manager of the French economy. The cycle begins again - this time even further to the right.

It is up to the left to build something that can stand as a real alternative, which means in the end offering a real alternative to the fake democracy of the existing liberal constitutions. That would allow everyone to start talking about the substantive matters, rather than just talking about (and betting on!) the numbers ●

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## IRAN

# Not about to be overthrown

What will the presidential election mean when it comes to sanctions, corruption and the economic woes of the mass of the population? Yasmine Mather looks at the candidates and their rival factions

One of the advantages of presidential election debates in Iran's Islamic Republic is that the 'selected' candidates (those who have managed to be approved as acceptable by the Council of Guardians) spare no details when it comes to exposing their opponent's factional affiliations - and the current elections are no exception.

The best aspect is that the four conservative candidates on June 28 have used six live debates to tear into each other's policies, with some criticising the administration of Ebrahim Raisi (Iran's former president killed in an air accident in May), others damning the policies of previous conservative administrations, and all the conservatives tearing into the era of Hassan Rouhani (the president preceding Raisi). This was, they say, a period of unrealised hope for economic prosperity and relying on a nuclear deal that did not come.

At least four candidates from the more hard-line conservative factions align more closely with the anti-western rhetoric of those like the leader of the Revolutionary Guards, Hossein Salami, who claims their 'looking east' strategy is the primary focus of their foreign policy. Of course, the 'east' was and is never their first choice: they all 'look west' when it comes to their own finances, their children's main residency and their second homes. It is just that, as far as state-to-state relations are concerned, the west has committed itself to unconditional support for Israel and therefore does not deal with them, at least openly.

### Supreme

The leading conservative candidate is Saeed Jalili, who has served on the Supreme National Security Council since 2007 as the supreme leader's representative. This council is viewed by supreme leader Ali Khamenei as a key institution, playing a crucial role in shaping overall policies. Jalili stepped aside in the last elections to support Raisi, but now it appears he does not think his government was sufficiently anti-western.

When this group talk of 'looking east', the problem is that they are trying to convince themselves of their own and the supreme leader's propaganda: 'The United States is in decline and China will soon become the new hegemon power'. As we have often said, this view of the world ignores the fact that decline can take decades, or even centuries. China remains the second global economic power, but despite its aspirations it has a long way to go in terms of diplomatic, military and financial power before becoming the world hegemon. Clearly it is not in a position to save Iran's economy. Its banking system is not even risking being victimised for breaking US sanctions - the proposed 25-year deal with Iran is conditional on the removal of western sanctions.

Unlike the conservative candidates, who are full of empty slogans, the supreme leader clearly does not believe his own rhetoric and is well aware of the current geopolitical order. One assumes that is why he has allowed not so secret talks with the United States in Oman. In fact Ali Khamenei never puts all his eggs in one basket. He might talk of US decline, warn about not trusting western powers, but, when it comes to his own influence on day-to-day politics, including the presidential elections, he is rather pragmatic.

The 'reformists' are spreading



Voter casts his ballot in Sarakhs

a rumour that their candidate, Massoud Pezeshkian, together with one conservative (some say Jalili, others claim it is Baqer Qalibaf) are the supreme leader's favourites. The rumours might be fiction, but if the polls are correct it could be true. For Khamenei it is very important that there is large participation in the election, and the fact that there is just one 'reformist' candidate, who has a chance of being elected, should increase participation, at least in the first round. In this respect there is relative success for the supreme leader. The younger generation have been almost completely absent from election meetings, but, with the daily support and help of former foreign secretary Mohammad Javad Zarif, support from former president Mohammad Khatami and the endorsement of the secular, semi-religious *Nehzat-E Azadi* (Freedom Movement), reformists have managed to hold large election meetings in Shiraz, Tabriz and Tehran, and it looks like participation will be slightly higher than in the last parliamentary elections.

### Differences

If negotiations with the US over Gaza, Hezbollah and the nuclear deal continue, the supreme leader wants a more presentable head of government - or at least someone who has not been presented as a major player in the mass murder of political prisoners, as was the case with Raisi.

In fact, as some journalists have pointed out, by choosing four hard-line conservatives and only one 'reformist', the Council of Guardians has produced something positive for the reformists: at least they have been spared the kind of squabble currently heating up among the conservative and ultra-conservative factions about which candidate should withdraw to reduce Pezeshkian's chances. Of course, the difference

between these warring factions of the ultra-conservative side of the Islamic Republic government is so severe that it is very difficult for any candidate to withdraw.

During a debate on June 24, the differences between the candidates regarding their preferred foreign policy became clearer.

Mostafa Pourmohammadi has become one of the mysteries of this election. He is a fundamentalist, but he has expressed serious criticism of the policies of the government over the last three years, accusing it of radicalisation and limiting the freedoms of citizens. On foreign policy, Pourmohammadi disagreed with Jalili and emphasised the need to solve the problem of international isolation and negotiate with western countries.

Pourmohammadi's problem is that he was a judge during the mass execution of political prisoners in 1988 and, contrary to his claims, all those executed were not "members of Mojahedin-e-Khalq, an armed group". Many of the leftwingers executed in this period were actually against the armed struggle strategy.

Pezeshkian, who faced sharp criticisms from four conservative candidates, spoke against Iran's anti-western and aggressive foreign policy and said that, if he gets elected, he will try to renegotiate a nuclear deal, end sanctions and remove Iran from the Financial Action Task Force blacklist.

Regarding sanctions, Pezeshkian's main ally, former foreign secretary Zarif, gave a fiery talk on June 24, accusing Iranians who support sanctions of being members of two groups, one being exiles abroad who are paid to do that. On this he is right - both the 'left' and right opposition get paid every time they speak in favour of sanctions. This applies to a large section of exiled 'human rights' and feminist activists, who favour regime change from above - many are paid

by Zionist, or pro-US, think tanks and foundations. Zarif presented several graphs demonstrating that the nuclear deal of 2016 and the lifting of sanctions significantly boosted Iran's economic growth in 2016-17. He further claimed that the hardliners' boasts about increased oil sales since 2021 were solely a result of Joe Biden easing sanctions.

Inside Iran Zarif identifies the second group of beneficiaries from sanctions. The promoters of isolationism amongst the conservative factions of the regime, who make billions from the resulting black market. Of course, what should be added is that all factions of the Islamic Republic have benefited financially from sanctions, including many relatives and associates of the former 'reformist' president, Rouhani - not to mention associates of Mr Zarif himself. It is the poor who have paid the price of the crippling sanctions.

The debate does highlight the broader discourse within these elite circles about the best approach to handle international sanctions - whether through diplomatic engagement and reciprocal actions, as Qalibaf suggests, or through a focus on self-sufficiency and internal resilience, as advocated by Zakani, or by accepting the conditions proposed by the US and its allies, as Pezeshkian wants. These perspectives reflect underlying strategies that could shape Iran's future policies in dealing with international pressures and sanctions. Yet throughout the debate, no one spoke about the limitations on the presidency in determining and implementing foreign policy. Irrespective of the differences between various factions, at the end of the day it will be the supreme leader who will make the final decision on rapprochement with the west or isolationism.

All six candidates claim to be

pro-women, against use of force when it comes to demonstrations and protests, and speak adamantly against corruption. Given that the Islamic Republican Party and the numerous factions these gentlemen represent have been in power since 1979, one has to ask: who killed the protestors in 2009, 2019 and 2023? Who executed political prisoners? Who ordered the arrest of young women who did not adhere to wearing a full hijab? And how come there is so much corruption? According to Pezeshkian, Iran ranks 15th from the bottom on the UN's least-to-worst list of global corruption.

There are personality differences between the candidates too. Qalibaf is clearly presenting himself as a 'strong man', Orbán style, while Pezeshkian is trying to be everyone's best friend, but still remaining faithful to the supreme leader. Pourmohammadi is openly criticising state attempts to enforce the wearing of the hijab.

June 26 was the last day of campaigning, and the latest poll, by one of the more reliable organisations associated with the Research Centre of the Islamic Majles (parliament), shows 45.7% of those eligible confirming they will vote. According to the polls, the 'reformist', Pezeshkian, is in the lead with 23.5% of the vote. Followed by Qalibaf (16.9%) and Jalili (16.3%).

But 28.5% of respondents are undecided, and 3% say that they will vote blank or void in this election.

### Regime change?

Almost every week since February 1979, leaders and cadres of the political organisations of the Iranian left have predicted the imminent overthrow of the Islamic Republic and in the last couple of weeks, during campaigning for the presidential election, we have seen the same predictions. Comrades on the British left joke that some exiled Iranian Marxists have already got their suitcases packed, so convinced are they that will be able to return to Iran in a very short time.

There are good reasons for the left to maintain an optimistic view during difficult times and, of course, the Islamic Republic has created terrible conditions for its political opponents. However, it is really difficult to take the repetition of such predictions seriously after 44 years.

No doubt, the Islamic regime is hated by the majority of people inside Iran - even those who might vote 'reformist' on June 28 will do so out of desperation: choosing a bad candidate against worse options. However, given the current war in Gaza and Israeli genocide, Iran's Islamic Republic has managed to fool enough people, enough of the time with its rhetoric of 'resistance'. The regime has also gained allies on the Arab street, making the supreme leader and his close associates much more confident than a year ago.

That is why I doubt very much that the regime will collapse in the next few weeks. Mediocre presidents come and go, one faction rises and another falls, but through controlling the state machine, not least the Revolutionary Guards and the basij, through oil revenues, through patronage and corruption it sustains a significant social base. Overthrow by the working class requires a strategy, a programme ... and mass organisation. That will not happen through wishful thinking ●

## DEBATE

# Minimum programme again

To achieve the global transition to communism the working class must first conquer state power - that requires the minimum programme of economic - but crucially political - demands. **Mike Macnair** responds to Andrew Northall, Gerry Downing and Steve Freeman

Last week's *Weekly Worker* (June 20) contained a variety of criticisms of what Jack Conrad and I have in different articles said about the question of the communist programme - and in particular the minimum programme and its relation to the maximum programme. Our critics are coming from a variety of different places, so it is most convenient to take them one by one; but hopefully real issues of general principle will emerge.

To begin with, there is Andrew Northall, our letters column's resident *Morning Star* supporter. To begin, in turn, with the most important issues of principle he poses, comrade Northall says:

... 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?

It is entirely possible that comrade Conrad and I use different theories of the minimum programme. We probably have differing interpretations of the USSR, as Lawrence Parker remarked last year (though my opinion is that this does not at present pose distinct political tasks);<sup>1</sup> and I have openly criticised the CPGB's positions on the national question in a series back in 2015.<sup>2</sup>

These disagreements - not the only ones in the CPGB; merely ones that come immediately to my mind - are entirely consistent with our political purpose. That is, we are a *pro-party group* founded on acceptance of a *political platform* - our *Draft programme*. We are not a *sect* founded on agreement to a body of theory (Owenism, Lassalleism, Marxism-Leninism, Cliffism, and so on).

Comrade Northall's criticism of the supposed divergence between comrade Conrad and myself precisely supposes that the *Morning Star* group is such a sect. This was, of course, already apparent in the *Morning Star* group's inability to assimilate even the ex-Trotskyist, but now fully 'official communist', *Socialist Action* group.

That said, I am not at present persuaded that comrade Northall has identified a theoretical difference, as opposed to merely imposing his own muddle. In my letter of June 13, I wrote:

Andrew Northall says: "Certainly, I could never see how some elements of the [*Weekly Worker* group's] 'minimum programme' - such as the abolition of the standing army (and police and other state forces) and its replacement by a people's or workers' militia, and the general self-arming and self-organisation of the working class in their workplaces and communities - could possibly be achieved this side of a socialist revolution."

This is a startling claim, given that the militia system is the foundation of the current Swiss armed forces, and the general right to keep and bear arms is a



Lev Kamenev arriving at Brest-Litovsk

(controversial) element of the US constitution. It is true that the United Kingdom is unlikely to break with the model that in 1991 David Edgerton called "liberal militarism" in *New Left Review*, without the overthrow of the UK political regime; but that is not the same thing as being inconsistent with the continuation of money and markets.

My position is that all of the individual demands of the minimum programme are consistent with the continued existence of money and markets, and therefore of at least small and medium-sized enterprises. A good many of them - like a Swiss-style militia system or the general right to keep and bear arms under the second amendment to the US constitution - could in principle be achieved under continued capitalist rule.

In practice, of course, what we would get as concessions under continued capitalist rule would be counterbalanced by something taken away: just as the working class's achievement of extended suffrage has been accompanied everywhere by the reduction of the powers of parliaments and local authorities in favour of increased power in the executive and the judiciary.

But, if the *whole* of the minimum programme was implemented, the result would be that *political power passed from the capitalist class to the working class*.

"Surely we agree," says comrade Northall, "that working class rule can only come about as a result of a socialist proletarian revolution ..." Here comrade Northall has added the word 'socialist' and by doing so made his argument slippery.

In the first place, the CPGB in our *Draft programme* use 'socialist' as shorthand for the dictatorship of the proletariat:

Socialism is communism which emerges from capitalist society. It begins as capitalism with a workers' state. Socialism therefore bears the moral, economic and intellectual imprint of capitalism.

In general, socialism is defined as the rule of the working class.<sup>3</sup>

Comrade Northall, on the other hand, argues in his letter for a transitional phase of socialism *beyond* the phase of working class rule, but before communism, and which is (along with communism) the subject of the maximum programme: "the 'maximum programme' ... 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*" (emphasis added). The 'third position' in this discussion is that of the Trotskyists, for whom "full socialism" is a synonym for "full communism".

But, on the basis of either comrade Northall's or the Trotskyists' approach, what makes a revolution that brings in working class political power a "socialist" revolution in any sense other than as inscribing on its long-term banner the socialist (communist) goal - that is, the aspirations stated in the maximum programme? The answer is that comrade Northall's argument, and that of the Trotskyists, *slide in* the great anarchist theorist Mikhail Bakunin's 1869 critique of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany's Eisenach programme:

All the German socialists believe that the political revolution must precede the social revolution. This is a fatal error. For any revolution made before a social revolution will necessarily be a bourgeois revolution ...<sup>4</sup>

Bakuninism, precisely by virtue of this commitment that the revolution must be 'social', rather than in the first instance primarily political, produced in the first place useless ultra-left adventures in France and Spain - and then the 'Possibilism' (capital P) of former Bakuninist Paul Brousse, who argued for dumping the democratic content of the "minimum programme" of 1880 in favour of "achievable" reforms. This is what has become of 'immediate demands' in comrade Northall's hands.<sup>5</sup> In my June 13 letter I wrote:

Comrade Northall counterposes to the CPGB's minimum programme - which is founded on constitutional

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

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

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

Comrade Northall's latest letter jumps sideways onto his allegation of a conflict between Jack Conrad's views and mine, rather than addressing these objections.

## Downing

Comrade Downing's 'anti-Pabloite Trotskyism' is like 19th century French Bourbon-monarchist 'Legitimism' (capital L), which "learned nothing and forgot nothing". I flag comrade Downing's 'anti-Pabloite' both because he does so himself and because his account of why the Fourth International of 1938 failed rests - implicitly, if not openly - on the 'anti-Pabloite' mantra that 'Stalinism is counterrevolutionary through and through'. Oppositionists in the United States Socialist Workers Party in the 1950s, where this mantra originated, challenged the SWP leadership to produce evidence for it in

Trotsky's writings. They could not do so: and, indeed, the 1938 *Transitional programme* claimed:

The public utterances of former foreign representatives of the Kremlin, who refused to return to Moscow, irrefutably confirm in their own way that all shades of political thought are to be found among the bureaucracy: from genuine Bolshevism (Ignace Reiss) to complete fascism (F Butenko). The revolutionary elements within the bureaucracy - only a small minority - reflect, passively it is true, the socialist interests of the proletariat. The fascist, counterrevolutionary elements, growing uninterruptedly, express with even greater consistency the interests of world imperialism.<sup>6</sup>

Anti-Pabloism's belief in 'Stalinism counterrevolutionary through and through' was, thus, a *revisionist* break with this programme in the direction of Shachtman's third-campism. The fact that the 1938 programme clearly overstated the extent of 'genuine Bolshevism' in the Soviet bureaucracy, reflecting the extent to which Trotsky's (believed) correspondence with Russia was actually controlled by Soviet secret service agents, does not alter this point.

How this bears on the present question is that comrade Downing explains the failure of the Trotskyists in 1939-48 *merely* "because the Stalinists and the imperialists had formed their popular fronts to defeat the revolution and assassinate the revolutionaries".

Let us imagine, however, the counter-factual that the Stalinists and imperialists had assassinated *no* Trotskyists. The Trotskyists went into the war with less than 10,000 organised members worldwide. They were immediately split in 1939 over Soviet-defencism and the Hitler-Stalin pact (Shachtman's tendency took *half* the international executive committee elected in 1938) and during the war were again split between supporters of dual defeatism, on the one side, and of the 'proletarian military policy', on the other - at least in China, Vietnam, France and Britain, and probably elsewhere. In the unusually





# MANIFESTO



## Right questions, wrong answers

George Galloway launched his Workers Party of Britain manifesto before the assembled media. It is characterised by an eclectic mix of World War II nostalgia, radical populism and ‘socialism in one country’ Stalinism, says **Carla Roberts**

**S**ay what you will about George Galloway, but there is no denying that the man has the gift of the gab. I burst out laughing a number of times while watching the press launch of the election manifesto of his Workers Party of Britain on June 19.<sup>1</sup>

He revelled in showing zero respect for the slightly snooty representatives of the assembled bourgeois press. For example, a woman from *The Daily Telegraph* asked him (clipped accent and all) if it was not “inappropriate” for the Workers Party to “talk about a possible end of the monarchy at a time when the King and the Princess of Wales are so gravely ill with cancer”. You could literally see Galloway counting his lucky stars, before he replied with full vigour:

How quaint. How very quaint. The *Telegraph* does not give a toss about the millions of people who suffer from cancer and don’t get the one-to-one care that those two get. There is nothing personal about this. We oppose the unelected monarchy, because it is deeply undemocratic. It’s an absurdity that the first born of whoever happens to be monarch automatically becomes the head of state. Only an infantilised people accept that and think that’s a good idea.

So far, so excellent. Unlike the many Trotskyist groups out there who tell us that fighting for the abolition of the monarchy and other such democratic questions has “no mileage”, the Workers Party does at least *take up* this important question.

When it comes to mass opinion, the manifesto shows, as Jack Conrad has put it, that “Galloway and the Workers Party are certainly more attuned to the lived experiences of working class people than the Socialist Workers Party or the Socialist Party and its electoral front, Tusc [Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition]”.<sup>2</sup>

The manifesto does indeed go way beyond the ‘save the NHS’ platitudes advanced by much of the left and tackles some of the more controversial issues faced by the working class - including immigration, London’s Ulez, climate change, the police, soldiers’ rights, football club ownership and even K-Pop. They deserve some credit for that. However, when it comes to the detailed *answers* to those questions, the WPB almost always tacks right - nationalist or ‘populist’.

The origins of the WPB as a pro-Stalinist organisation are easy to spot. It was, after all, the family of Harpal Brar (who set up the Stalin Society) which helped Galloway to found the organisation in 2019. Daughter Joti acted as vice-leader for a number of years. They only departed last year under a bit of a cloud, and briefly state in an “editor’s note” on their website: “... the WPB has failed in its stated aim of becoming a truly broad movement within which communists could work openly, transforming itself into a left social democratic vehicle for bourgeois parliamentarism and anti-communism”.<sup>3</sup>

But politically, Galloway and the Brars still have much in common, including their hatred of identity politics and ‘wokery’, their love for

**Swearing his oath of allegiance to King Charles III and his heirs and successors ... that while calling for an abolition referendum**

the Soviet Union (in his autobiography *I’m not the only one*, Galloway described the collapse of the USSR as “the worst day of my life”) and their shared illusion that there could (or should) be a national road to socialism.

The phrase “one nation”, appears six times in the WPB manifesto - reminiscent of the kind of ‘socialism’ seen during World War II. It wants to end the “war between workers and managers” and “one of our aims is to help workers become managers” - not in order to overthrow capitalism and learn how to run things in a socialist society, but to manage capitalist enterprises, because we are ‘all in it together’: “We are one class, but also one nation”. Pretty much everybody in Britain seems to be in that “one class”, apart perhaps from greedy shareholders - and the Labour Party (more on that below).

He wants to make “Britain great again”, Galloway said at the press conference, with thinly-veiled reference to Donald Trump. He railed against the “subservience to the EU and now the US”, and how “the Tories have made us the 51st state of America”. Racism too is the fault of the US, apparently, because it “was imported by American troops in the Second World War”. Nothing to do with the ‘great’ British empire and the need to justify slavery.

Instead of trading with the US and EU, the manifesto is arguing for “friendly relations with the Brics” and presumably ‘prime minister Galloway’ would trade with the theocracy in Iran, Vladimir Putin and MBS in Saudi Arabia (who is seen as a key Arab ally of, yes, the US).

In that spirit of “global Britain”, the WPB also wants to “ban foreign ownership of the means of communication” - perhaps by looking for British companies to reinvent local versions of Zoom, Google and Meta? Of course not. This ridiculous point underlines the futility of a national socialism in a globalised world.

Even on the question of Palestine, the WPB programme turns out to be rather less convincing than expected. It advances the conventional ‘one-state solution’, but coupled with the “call for a single state in which *all those born in Palestine-Israel* can live in peace with equal rights”. So, some young Jewish people who were born in Israel can stay, but not their parents, born in Russia or Germany? Or are second-generation Jews to be excluded, too? Are they supposed to return to the country of their birth? This is clearly not a democratic solution at all - there is no plan to win over the Israeli Hebrew population. Which means this ‘solution’ could only be enforced by some kind of war waged against Israel. That is not a socialist answer.

### Democracy?

Back to the monarchy: The WPB manifesto states that there should be “a referendum” on the future of the monarchy. In his press conference, Galloway said that there are many different alternatives, “including a directly or indirectly elected head of state. I really would have liked to see Princess Anne as head of state or president, I have met her.” So, presumably, his preferred referendum question would have been: ‘Would

# 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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you like to see King Charles replaced with his sister as head of state?' Dear God.

The WPB also wants to keep hold of the House of Lords, but "exclude professional politicians who have made a career in the Commons, and we will introduce more regional, trades union and technical expert voices able to scrutinise legislation swiftly and knowledgeably". So this second chamber with appointed 'experts' would do nothing to minimise the democratic deficit in today's Britain - quite the opposite. Marxists call for the *abolition* of the House of Lords, all second chambers and any other 'checks and balances' designed to thwart the will of the majority of the population.

There is a lot of talk in the manifesto about referendums and 'consultations' on this or that question. Sounds democratic, but is it really? For example, the WPB wants "a net-zero referendum as soon as possible to create a national debate on who profits from these targets and on what terms" and adds: "We oppose Ulez initiatives because of the costs they impose on working households and small businesses."

That is all quite true, of course, but we detect a distinct 'denialism', when it comes to climate catastrophe:

Climate change is constantly taking place. It has done so for thousands of years. We follow the science when it is clear, but we understand just how much science can be socially constructed in a society dominated by the interests of profit and not people.

Scientists *are* very clear on the issue. Unless there are serious, radical changes to how production is organised - internationally - the planet is destined to heat up to the point where human habitation becomes impossible. The climate catastrophe certainly cannot be 'solved' with a binary yes/no referendum - especially not a national one. As with any referendum, the phrasing of the question(s) would hugely influence the outcome - we can guess which way it would go if the WPB had any say on that.

That is why communists are for *representative democracy* - in parliament, workers' councils or similar bodies, where delegates can discuss issues properly, in front of the working class, and trash out the details of possible compensation and how our targets could be reached. By contrast, referenda are deeply undemocratic.

Another democratic question in the manifesto - the commitment to "free speech" - also has the devil in the detail: "We will undertake a review of all legislation and regulation to define only what is strictly harmful speech (intimidation and bullying rather than robust opinion)." Considering that in 2001 Galloway famously voted *in favour* of the 'religious hatred offences' in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill<sup>4</sup>, it is clear that this is not a commitment to *genuine* free speech.

In parts, it also rather smacks of the *Daily Mail's* anti-woke campaign to stop protestors from interrupting rightwing and transphobic speakers: "We will make it a criminal offence to deny a political organisation or individual a platform." While Marxists in general argue against no-platforming, calling on the *state* to stop such protests really is a non-starter.

## Main enemy

The section on the Labour Party and the trade unions is perhaps the most

bizarre one: "We do not hide our belief that the greatest block to working class aspirations is not the Conservative Party, but the Labour party itself." Not capitalism, not wage slavery - no, the Labour Party is now the biggest enemy of the working class.

This has more than a touch of Stalin's third-period about it. There is no understanding that, with the continued link with the trade unions, the Labour Party might still be a bourgeois workers party. No, Labour is now a fully "integrated part of the imperialist state machinery". Well, yes, but that has been the case since 1916 when Labour's Arthur Henderson joined the war cabinet. What's changed since then? Perhaps, it was George Galloway getting expelled? Brarite finger prints are all over the formulation.

The WPB wants the unions to disaffiliate from Labour and says that it is "first in line to back lawful strike action". Hold on, what's that? *Lawful* strike action? What about the deeply 'unlawful' aspects of the Great Miners' Strike in 1984-85? What about the Pentonville Five, who were imprisoned in July 1972 for refusing to obey a court order to stop picketing? Even the Trades Union Congress could not stand by and called a general strike in support of them. They were released after just a week inside. Socialists should surely argue for *more* unlawful strikes - for example, crucial strikes in solidarity with other sectors, which would have a much better chance of actually being successful than most of today's timid and short-term strikes.

In general, the manifesto is characterised by attempts to focus on the *redistribution of wealth* - which Marx, of course, famously argued *against* - instead calling for the need to fight to overcome capitalism and wage slavery itself. Galloway believes in the tired, social democratic illusion of trickle-down economics, which purport to lift working class people out of poverty. Rather than overcoming capitalism, this form of Keynesianism ultimately *relies* on capital - either in its current private form or the nationalised version preferred by the Workers Party.

But, you see, it goes hand in hand with calls for more "workers' control", so that's good, right? Wrong. The manifesto does not want the kind of democratic control (briefly) exercised by the Russian working class after the 1917 revolution. No, it wants to emulate the example of today's Germany: "Germany has a version of workers' control where workers sit on the board of big firms, have voting rights and compose half of the supervisory boards of large companies."

It is laughable to call the system of the *Betriebsräte* a form of workers' control. Those delegates might have to be *consulted* about this or that issue, but have almost no real power. It is chiefly a way to keep the workforce in line. There have been numerous scandals when *Betriebsräte* have been bought off by management - most famously at Volkswagen and Siemens, where they were caught not just getting bribes, but going on paid holidays with the bosses (and the 'managers') - including a few joint visits to luxury brothels.<sup>5</sup>

In a similar vein, the manifesto calls for "working class representation throughout the governance of the Bank of England". Again, this is purely consultative and thereby an utterly pointless demand. The Bank of England should not be "independent" of the government, as pushed through by Gordon Brown - it should be fully and democratically controlled.

Yes, the WPB wants Britain to withdraw from Nato - but keep the army fully intact. Instead of US weapons, the army should use British-made ones! The programme does not even entertain the idea of the

possibility of a workers' militia - a bog-standard demand put forward by the affiliates of the Second International (including the Labour Party in its 1900 manifesto).

## Nuclear button

True, when it comes to nuclear weapons the WPB calls for "disarmament". However this is "multilateral disarmament". Every permanent UN security council state is signed up to that. And at the height of the CND movement *rightwing* Labour leaders would counterpose "multilateral nuclear disarmament" (sensible) to the (crazy) call for "unilateral nuclear disarmament" coming from the likes of Michael Foot, Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn. So, it is good to know that the WPB is taking its cue from rightwing Labour on this issue and that, presumably, prime minister George Galloway would be prepared to press the nuclear button.

On the question of the future of the police too, the WPB manifesto displays some serious rightwing illusions: "Our approach will remain centred absolutely on Peel's principles of policing, as codified by Charles Reith in 1948." Sir Robert Peel, that is - father of the 'modern' Metropolitan Police, which was set up in the early 19th century, principally to make the fight against the rising threat from the organised working class more efficient. No wonder the Chartists opposed them. The WPB manifesto, however, thinks the police is "tasked with protecting the poor and the vulnerable, and they deserve our support if they prove they do indeed deserve it".

The British state needs a strong police force, you see, because, yes, crime is caused by "deprivation", but not "everyone is capable of redemption. Most people are with the right change of conditions, but we have to face the fact that society has a proportion of antisocial sociopaths within it and that sociopaths create networks of organised crime".

Presumably "redemption" in prison would not work for these "sociopaths" either, so best to throw away the key, right? Who would be making this type of judgement, we wonder?

The WPB wants to focus on "increased police capacity in high-crime areas and increased funding and capacity for ... targeting increased crime" - but does not even mention that it is the seriously misguided 'war on drugs' that leads to many of today's crimes. Legalise drugs and the majority of crime and gang warfare would simply disappear. But the WPB offers populism and, worse, an entirely irrational way to look at crime. More police on the streets will not lead to less crime.

## Mass migration

We have previously looked at the WPB's opposition to mass migration, but it is worth mentioning again - mainly because George Galloway is so keen to talk about the issue that he was even asked at his press conference if he wants to "steal votes mainly from Nigel Farage and Reform and is that why you mention him so often?"

He did indeed mention Farage a number of times, stating, for example:

I am with Farage to this extent: Why do we have to bring in so many from the Philippines or Nigeria to work in the health and care sector? Why can't our own people do it? Because they earn more at Aldi. We are not in favour of mass migration. We are a workers' party and the arrival of a large reserve army of labour is not in the interest of the working class.

The WPB is correct in stating that it is the working of capitalism, IMF structural adjustment programmes,

imperialist intervention, etc, that create the conditions which lead to millions of people leaving their homes. There is indeed a tendency for migration to depress wages and many working class people are worried by that - fuelled by a hysteric, rightwing press. Slogans like the SWP's famous 'Refugees are welcome here' are as pointless as they are wrong. Clearly, in many places, refugees are *not* welcome.

The problem is that Galloway's answers here are also entirely negative. Yes, we would join him in calling for an end to sanctions and war. But that still leaves us with the current reality, in the here and now, of millions of people around the globe taking the decision to flee poverty, hunger and war - a situation that will get worse with catastrophic climate change.

The WPB answer is deeply reactionary: it wants to "get a grip on numbers" by undertaking a "major diversion of resources towards domestic defence and security structures", an "investment in border security, including heightened sea-going and coastal patrols" and "discouraging economic migrants except in areas of demonstrable labour shortage".

Or, as Galloway put it at the press conference, "Yesterday, 822 people in small boats were stopped in the channel. However, there were no ships from the Royal Navy around: they were threatening other people rather than defending our own country!"

Surely, for socialists the key answer does not lie in higher fences and more ships and border controls - but in the *organisation of the working class internationally*. Why indeed should health and care workers earn so little, often being worked to the bone? How about some serious (probably unlawful!) strike action to force through better working conditions and wages? How about organising the working class across borders to stop wages being undercut by workers from and in different countries?

And indeed, at an election hustings organised by *Why Marx?*, Chris Williamson, one of the three deputy leaders of the WPB, found it difficult to defend the WPB programme on migration<sup>6</sup> - or indeed, Galloway's famous tweet condemning the hundreds of Scottish activists who in 2011 stopped the deportation of two asylum-seekers in Glasgow. "I was very proud to support that action", he said. As an aside, credit to Chris Williamson for showing up at the hustings - we hear that Tusc and Collective did not even bother to send the organisers a reply, while half a dozen other 'independents' claimed they were "too busy". More likely, they did not want to be associated with the organisers or, worse, did not fancy being asked some critical questions.

It is perhaps only a matter of time before the WPB goes the way of Respect and implodes due to its own inherent contradictions. In the July 4 general election, it makes sense to vote for some WPB candidates, like Chris Williamson, especially if there is no more principled candidate standing locally. Socialists should certainly vote for George Galloway in Rochdale - keeping him in parliament, despite the reactionary views of the WPB, would again be a victory for the Palestine solidarity movement ●

## Notes

1. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJO29wQzjfc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJO29wQzjfc).
2. Online Communist Forum of June 23 2024: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=bw3XmPt6YjM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bw3XmPt6YjM).
3. [thecommunists.org/2020/04/23/tv/project-corbyn-has-failed-what-next](https://thecommunists.org/2020/04/23/tv/project-corbyn-has-failed-what-next).
4. [www.publicwhip.org.uk/mp.php?mpn=George\\_Galloway](https://www.publicwhip.org.uk/mp.php?mpn=George_Galloway).
5. [www.diepresse.com/111422/deutschland-hat-auch-siemens-seinen-betriebsrat-geschmiert](https://www.diepresse.com/111422/deutschland-hat-auch-siemens-seinen-betriebsrat-geschmiert).
6. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hT9JQRipeM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hT9JQRipeM).

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## Upping the fight

Neither the Tories nor Labour will commit to full pay restoration, writes **Richard Galen** - that despite the huge popular support for doctors



### No loss of mass support

Just seven days following Rishi Sunak's announcement that the much-anticipated general election had been called, the Junior Doctors Committee of the British Medical Association for England made a bold move. It announced a five-day walkout (June 27-July 2). That means we finish our latest strike action just 48 hours before polling stations open. Despite the latest round of negotiations running for three months and employing the services of an external mediator, no credible offer had been made by the government.

The decision for further industrial action so close to the general election did initially draw some criticism from doctors on social media. There are those who felt a strike while parliament was dissolved would be pointless, especially given it is likely that the Tory government, with whom we have been negotiating for more than 18 months, will be booted from office. However, others saw it as a positive, correctly predicting huge amounts of scrutiny over healthcare policy during the election campaign and the chance for parties to make a manifesto commitment to resolve the dispute.

The response from the political establishment was predictable, with Sunak calling the strike "politically

motivated" and insinuating the timing was planned to benefit Labour. Tory health secretary Victoria Atkins called on Labour to "finally condemn junior doctor strikes" and called the decision a "highly cynical tactic". The ongoing industrial action - 39 days in total over the last 17 months - has become a significant thorn in the side of the government, with Sunak repeatedly trying to lay the blame for soaring waiting lists (currently at 7.57 million cases, a near-record level) at the feet of striking workers. This claim is cast into significant doubt (to put it mildly) by the fact that waiting lists have continued to rise even when no strikes have been taking place!

At this point, the financial cost to the NHS of industrial action has been estimated to be as high as £3 billion, dwarfing the likely £1 billion net cost of meeting the BMA's demands for full pay restoration (FPR) to 2008 levels (in practice a 35% pay rise). The union has repeatedly stated that all that is needed to avert more walkouts is a credible path towards FPR, which does not have to be achieved in a single pay uplift. Why on earth should we doctors accept such greatly decreased pay in real terms?

Interestingly, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer refrained from directly

condemning the strike, but did take the opportunity to criticise the "shocking" lack of resolution from the Tory government. Shadow health secretary Wes Streeting has indicated that finding a solution to the dispute would be a priority if a Labour government is elected, stating that he would be "phoning [the BMA] on day one" to restart negotiations. However, he has refused to back down from his longstanding stance that the BMA's FPR demand is "unaffordable"!

In fact, out of all of the major political parties standing in England, only the Greens have made a commitment in their manifesto to support the call for pay restoration, with the Liberal Democrats making passing references to an independent pay review system and Reform UK's "contract" not mentioning the dispute at all.

Of course, the dispute rumbles on in the other devolved health services as well, albeit not as well covered in the media. Junior doctors in Northern Ireland recently staged a third 48-hour strike at the beginning of June, and their consultant colleagues are also set to walk out (though providing a 'Christmas Day' service) on June 26, following a successful ballot, with no less than 92% in favour of industrial action. This is

aimed at putting pressure on the new health minister, Mike Nesbitt (Ulster Unionist Party), who has yet to put forward a pay offer.

After a series of strikes, BMA Cymru/Wales has secured new pay offers for both junior doctors and consultants working in the country, with members being balloted on whether to accept this month. The new deal offers junior doctors a 12.4% rise backdated to 2023 - a marked improvement from the original offer of just 5%. The union has advised its members to accept, stating that "this offer puts us well on the path to pay restoration".

Although GPs in England, on separate contracts to their hospital-based colleagues, have not yet begun any form of industrial action, the recent ballot on the government's proposed 2024-25 contract changes resulted in over 99% of members rejecting the plan. There is currently a ballot running for so-called "collective action" - not a true strike, but a commitment amongst members to push back against NHS management targets and strategies and consider "work to rule" approaches to the current contract - but understandably this has resulted in a backlash from members, who feel that this does not go nearly far enough.

Ultimately though, it does seem like lessons have been learned from the disastrous days of the 2016 contract disputes, where the BMA leadership of the time capitulated to government demands, and utterly failed to capitalise on member support. The current underlying strategy of full walkouts with consultant cover, gradually ramping up in terms of length, still manages to retain support from both the membership and the wider public, as evidenced by Sunak's recent appearance on the Sky News leadership debate, where loud boos from the audience came when he blamed the waiting list figures on the strikes.

Detractors from within the BMA have consistently not seen their fears play out, whether that be the loss of public support from repeated walkouts, patients coming to harm as a result of strikes, or apathy from the wider media, given the length of the dispute. Most members are confident that this will remain the case with the current action.

The decision to call a strike so close to the election will force the issue back into the public eye, and set a challenge to any incoming government - get back around the negotiating table and thrash out an improved pay deal for doctors ●