

weekly worker



Benjamin Netanyahu denounces ICJ judgement, claiming biblical myth trumps international law

- Letters and debate
- German locusts
- Malayan communism
- Israel's horror stories

No 1501 July 25 2024

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

BLUE SCREEN OF DEATH



LETTERS



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

Israeli nation

In the recent *Weekly Worker* debate over various 'solutions' to the civil war in Israel-Palestine I made the case for a democratic, secular, federal republic - or "one state, two nations": 'Marching towards what solution?' (May 16). This drew criticism from Moshé Machover, Mike Macnair and Jack Conrad. A follow-up article, 'Another Israel is possible' (June 20), focused on one pillar of the federal republic in a "democratic Israel" (shorthand for a democratic, secular republic). This drew a sharp response from Tony Greenstein (Letters, June 27).

Tony declares: "Another Israel is certainly not possible" - it would be the "height of unreality". At face value, this is a most ridiculous and dogmatic assertion. Israel is already changing. Yet he suggests, keeping a straight face, that change, contradiction and evolution cannot apply in Israel. This is surely flat-earth communism. But there is more to this than meets the eye. Tony says, "It has to go" - meaning Israel has to be abolished. At best this is ambiguous and at worst dangerously reactionary.

In relation to Tony's own observation that "It is as well to be clear about what it is that makes the Zionist project inherently unstable and to proceed from there", there are three important points to be considered. The first is the existence of an Israeli nation. Second are differences over the Israeli working class and its potential to bring change. Third are divisions within Israeli society that mean class struggle is already reshaping it.

The Israeli nation (but not the Zionist state) is here to stay. Jack Conrad explains that since 1948 "millions of Jews have migrated to Israel, learnt Hebrew, intermarried, had children, assimilated, and made and remade the Israeli-Jewish nation. Today some 75% are sabras - Israeli born - and mostly second or third generation. Hence, the Israeli-Jewish nation not only inhabits a common territory and shares a common language: it is historically constituted" ('Searching for solutions', July 4)

A nation is not born simply because some ideology declares it to be so. When the state of Israel was proclaimed in 1948, no Israeli nation existed. It takes time and struggle on many levels, as Jack suggests, before a new nation becomes a fact of life. Even if Zionism and its state gave birth to the Israeli nation, it does not mean that the nation cannot grow up and free itself from the legacy of its illegitimate birth.

There is thus ambiguity in the use of the term 'Israel' to cover the Zionist state and constitution, on one side, and the Israeli nation, on the other. Tony wants to abolish both sides, whereas the democratic republican case is to abolish the Zionist state and its constitution and liberate the Israeli nation from it. The apartheid constitution was abolished, but the South African nation continued as a different kind of liberal democratic republic. It is the failure to make the distinction between the state and the people that leads Tony to support a reactionary policy of liquidating the Israeli nation.

There is one major and significant difference to how republicans view the Israeli nation and Israeli working class. We include the 20% of Arab Israelis as part of the Israel nation.

Zionism ignores them or treats them as if they are not really Israelis and excludes them from political consideration.

Tony implicitly accepts the Zionist definition of the Israeli working class as equivalent to the Hebrew (Jewish) majority. This impacts on how he sees its revolutionary potential. He thinks they are all bought off by Zionist privileges, when at least 20% of them are discriminated against and treated as second-class citizens. So we are talking about two very different ideas - the Zionist conception of a Jewish working class and the democratic idea of uniting the Hebrew and Arab-Israeli working class around their common economic and political interests. Tony's Zionist conception of the Israeli working class leads him to reactionary conclusions.

Israel was founded as a 'Jewish democratic state' in a compromise between religious and secular Jews. Ben-Gurion found a form of words about "the rock of Israel" in the declaration of independence, so that representatives of both sides could sign up to it. Drawing a veil over this contradiction is one reason why Israel has no written constitution. The contradiction was highlighted in 1984 by rabbi Meir Kahane of the ultra-nationalist Kach party. Kahane "preached that Israel could either be a Jewish state or a democratic state". As Tony explained, "He was stating a truth that generations of 'left' Zionists have preferred to ignore. Labour Zionism spoke of a 'Jewish democratic state', which was always an oxymoron" ('In alliance with neo-Nazis', February 25 2019).

Israel is a deeply divided nation. Writing in *Ha'aretz*, Alon Pinkas says: "More and more Israelis on both sides of the divide see their country as essentially split into two distinct entities: Judea and Israel." He adds: "... the divide is real, widening and becoming unbridgeable. Israel and Judea do not share a common perception or idea of a Jewish state" (May 13).

Tony cites Ilan Pappé describing the cleavage "between the state of Judea and the state of Israel". Tony frames this cleavage in 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%)." He adds that this "probably underestimates the proportion of Israelis who see themselves as Israeli first".

Tony goes deeper into this division. "The wealth-creating, western-oriented section of Israel's population is growing weaker, not stronger, as a settler regime has come to power". He adds, "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."

Under the present Zionist constitution, the modern capitalist section of Israeli society located around Tel Aviv cannot win unless it overthrows or reconstitutes the political laws of Israel. The advanced part of Israel is losing its battle with the Judeans. Tony thinks it serves them right. He is enjoying his *Schadenfreude*. Netanyahu has understood the same dynamic. He reconstituted the political laws to make Zionism mandatory. Now he cannot stop the war in Gaza for fear of a confrontation within Israel society.

The battleground over what kind of Israel is already mass politics. A struggle between reactionary Judeans and liberal Zionist Israelis is a political expression of class struggle, but Tony denies the Israeli

working class has any interest in this. It is an assumption that flows from the ideas of economism, leading to political abstention. Tony believes the working class cannot or should not take sides. Indeed he thinks the Israeli working class is irredeemably reactionary and can therefore only support the state of Judea.

If you view the class struggle as merely economic, you cannot recognise that the fight between "the state of Judea and the state of Israel" is the political form of struggle between the reactionary and progressive class forces. Such a mass struggle cannot take place without the Israeli working class taking sides and the politically conscious Israeli workers formulating their own independent politics.

Lenin was clear that it is not possible to intervene in mass politics in bourgeois society without taking sides - or marching side by side *in a certain sense* with the liberals against the reactionaries. There was one vital condition - that the working class must have its own independent, democratic programme.

If we want to see the kind of programme, we should look to Moshé Machover's minimum conditions. Jack Conrad says something very similar: "... while fully taking into account history, any consistently democratic programme must be squarely based on contemporary realities - crucially human facts on the ground. Abolition of *Zionist* Israel, legal equality for all, secularism, halting expansionism and withdrawing from the occupied territories are basic (minimal) programmatic demands" ('Breaking the grip of Zionism', June 6).

A laser focus on the 'crisis of democracy' in Israel is not to reject or downplay the importance of the international working class. Another Israel does not mean a narrow, 'little Israel' perspective that ignores the rest of the world. There is a futile chicken-and-egg argument over whether a democratic and social revolution in Iran, Egypt, Jordan or Saudi Arabia will come first or vice versa. This is unknowable and unpredictable. But we do know where the sharp end of the conflict is right now.

Of course, a working class programme must include the demand for a democratic, secular republic against a Zionist Jewish republic. This is so obvious that it is embarrassing to have to remind anybody claiming to be a socialist. The republic is not simply one democratic demand among many, but the cement that holds them all together and unites the many demands put forward by Moshé and Jack as one. Yet Tony claims the case for a democratic programme "isn't helped by Steve's determination to view the situation through the lens of his favourite obsession, a bourgeois-democratic republic".

There are two things to be said here. First Tony opposes a 'democratic, secular *republic*' for Israel and carefully avoids it for Palestine, which he calls a democratic, secular *state*. Avoiding or opposing a republic may be to keep open the option of constitutional monarchy, for example, in the Hashemite dynasty in Jordan or not to alienate the Saudi monarchy. It may simply reflect a cultural preference of anti-monarchists to steer clear of the 'R word'.

He shows his opposition to a democratic, secular republic in Israel by adding the word 'bourgeois' to the Israeli republic - but not to the Palestinian democratic *state*. Adding 'bourgeois' to describe something that *exists* is uncontentious. But not

every future democratic republic will necessarily be 'bourgeois', as shown by the Paris Commune or the Russian workers and peasants republic of 1917. So this is deliberately limiting the idea of a future democracy to the benefit of Zionism.

Israel needs to be reconstituted as a democratic, secular republic if the Israeli nation is to escape the deadly trap that Zionism has created for the Jewish and Palestinian people. This much is common sense - easy to understand and revolutionary in its implications. A programme of radical democratic change is in the interests the Israeli working class, the Palestinian people and indeed the working class throughout the region and rest of the world. This means the kind of democratic programme proposed by Moshé Machover and Jack Conrad - but not forgetting its best version as a federal republic of 'one state for two nations'.

There is a 'crisis of democracy' in Israel and a deep divide in Israeli politics between those who support Judea and those who want a secular republic of Israel. At present, the 'Kingdom of Judea' is winning under the beneficent rule of King Benjamin I. No doubt some Israel workers would prefer godly rule to secular democracy, but not the many liberally minded Hebrew and Arab-Israeli workers. Of course 'another Israel' is possible - an Israeli nation without a Zionist state and constitution.

Nobody can doubt the commitment of Tony Greenstein to opposing Zionism and supporting the Palestinian people. It is with full respect for his long struggle that I make these comments. Zionism and the Jewish republic are anti-democratic and must be confronted by the struggle of the Israeli people for its opposite - a democratic, secular republic. Economism - an inconsistent, half-hearted, unscientific, sneering at democracy - always helps Zionism to keep the working class weak and divided.

Steve Freeman
London

Soviet muddle

Mike Macnair had some interesting things to say in last week's article about France's New Popular Front, but his discussion of the Soviet question was a muddle ('Fragile unpopular front', July 18).

"I am personally of the opinion that the USSR after the effective implementation of the ban on factions in the double police coup against the party in 1927-29 cannot be characterised as a dictatorship of the proletariat, or, therefore, as socialist," the article states. Leaving aside the fact that the ban on factions occurred in 1921, this statement is still difficult to parse, to say the least.

If the situation after 1927-29 cannot be characterised as a proletarian dictatorship, then what was it? It can't be state capitalism or bureaucratic collectivism, since Macnair says that "both theories were disproved". So what's left - Hillel Ticktin's enigmatic concept of a "form of no form"?

Macnair's statement that the USSR "cannot be characterised ... as socialist" is equally puzzling. The suggestion seems to be that if the proletarian dictatorship *were* in place, then socialism would automatically follow. But this is not how Trotsky saw it. On the contrary, he argued that the dictatorship continued to exist, because the bureaucracy correctly viewed it as the basis for its rule. But, rather than socialism, the result was the opposite - which is to say, a vicious caricature that turned the idea upside down. This

is why Trotsky called for a political rather than a social revolution. It was necessary to throw out a self-aggrandising party elite that was discrediting socialism at every turn. But it was necessary at the same time to defend the proletarian dictatorship against both the bureaucracy at home and imperialism, seeking to overthrow it from abroad.

Besides, if the dictatorship was not in place, then how does Macnair explain the "socialist camp" that he says expanded after World War II to include not just eastern Europe, but China, Vietnam and Cuba? Where did this socialist camp come from if the Soviet Union was no longer a workers' state of even the most tenuous sort? Trotsky's analysis still makes sense. Macnair's does not.

But I do agree with him that France's New Popular Front is every bit as unstable as the old one. Still, he misses the crucial point, which is that failure on the part of both Le Pen and the front to achieve a majority clears a path for Macron to assume a classic Bonapartist role as a strong man holding off equal and opposite forces from both sides. Indeed, the news that Macron is joining forces with centre-rightists in order to keep his grip on the National Assembly suggests that the process is already underway. The New Popular Front teamed up with Macron, and now it is reaping the rewards.

Daniel Lazare
New York

RCO points

As a member of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation in Australia, I agree strongly with many of the criticisms and statements made by Martin Greenfield in his article, 'Primary task set' (July 18).

I joined the RCO, as I agree with the core politics and the necessity of communist unity around a shared Marxist programme - which few, if any, of the groups on the left here support or even acknowledge. Martin makes great points that comrades in the RCO should take to heart if it is to carry out its aims and objectives: to reorganise the workers' movement, reorganise the communist movement, and through pursuing unity establish the basis for a mass socialist workers party.

The RCO's magazine (which I head) *Direct Action* is relaunching as *The Partisan* to reflect our stauncher commitment to a partyist orientation for this reason. In particular we must strengthen our publications and iron out bureaucratic quirks, which may be more of a nuisance than they are worth. They may leave us stuck in the mud and unable to carry out effective political work.

If only more on the left were willing to debate their platforms openly and transparently the way that the RCO aims and commits to!

Max Jacobi
New South Wales

RCO trans

Martin Greenfield's article on the second congress of the RCO, of which I am proudly a member, was one which I deeply enjoyed, and I send comradely greetings cross the main. Yet the reason I write to the *Weekly Worker* today is to discuss an arena in which I find the CPGB's *Draft programme* severely lacking (though personal bias may well influence how I write here!).

As a transgender communist, the fact that the *Draft programme* fundamentally fails to touch on the growing issues of trans liberation is a worrying concern. While I do not call for the party to fall into bourgeois identity politics, I raise the question of why trans liberation is not raised.

The demands currently outlined in section 3.16 cover the gay and lesbian community, yet these are entirely unrelated to the struggle for trans liberation. As important as my ability to marry the woman I love is, the more practical demands for trans workers are about breaking the reactionary, patriarchal approach required to get hormones. Great Britain in particular is notorious for its transphobic culture, both in day-to-day-level struggles, and the infamously gate-keeping nature of the NHS when it comes to these issues.

When comparing the *Draft programme* to the RCO's *Road to workers' power*, it is clear that the RCO has placed more thought into this arena, and perhaps could be argued to place a higher emphasis on the struggle. This is an organic development of the organisation itself.

In the (perhaps overly verbose) *Road to workers' power*, we have 11 demands raised in section 3.8.8. I quote the ones relevant to transgender issues:

■ Full provision of healthcare for trans people, paid by the state. For community control over gender clinics, easy provision of hormones and access to medical support and advice. Expansion of youth gender clinics.

■ For state protection of intersex individuals, and a prohibition on unnecessary 'corrective' surgeries on intersex children.

■ State funding for fertility treatment. Full rights to adoption for queer families.

■ Abolition of legal recognition of gender with regard to government documentation. The right to change name or identity to be made simple.

For those wondering about the third demand it is common for trans people to be pressured into entering fertility preservation treatment before they begin hormones.

Now let us look over the demands in regard to trans liberation, as outlined in the *Draft programme* of the CPGB:

... Ahem.

I do not want to lecture to the CPGB from the arse end of the world, yet, in the spirit of comradely polemic and unity, I call on you to develop your theoretical understanding of these issues. The importance of a programme is vital, and it is of crucial importance that the CPGB develop these issues, to be able to push forward the most consistent and revolutionary line for the working class.

In enduring solidarity and deepest respect,

Brunhilda O

email

Hardie, a liberal?

I am driven to raise a word in defence of Keir Hardie after Ian Spencer's rather dismissive description, characterising him as a mere liberal and member of the Parliamentary Labour Party, who dares to rub shoulders with Marx and Lenin on the Chopwell lodge banner ('A grand get-together', July 18). Well, he also appears on the Follonsby (Wardley) Lodge banner, where he shares the privilege with George Harvey

(founder member of the original Socialist Labour Party and CPGB), Lenin, and the bold James Connolly in his Irish Citizen Army uniform. He similarly appears on the banner of the Bewick Main Lodge.

The miners' lodge position always has been one of respect for different roads to socialism - in Follonsby's case not just the parliamentary road, but syndicalism and the armed struggle too. Although I would have disagreed with Hardie on industrial and political perspectives, it's rather a cheap shot to sell him as a mere liberal.

Before the birth of the Labour Party much of the working class, and especially the miners, centred round the Liberal Party. Two of the miners' area leaders were Liberals - who then ranged from anti-parliament radicals, to socialistic and actual liberal liberals. Hardie, of course, was distinctive, because he formed the first Independent Labour Party free from liberal ties and patronage. It was, he thought, a first British Communist Party in all but name and, of course, it took affiliations from all wings of the workers' movement, including the first actual members of the CPGB.

I was always proud of the influence of sections of the Irish community. It was Connolly's Irish Labour Party which formed along the Tyne, especially Gateshead, Hebburn, Jarrow, etc. But to describe him without his granite-hard socialist-pacifist war resistance is really to short-change him. What was it Lenin said about having more in common with the Zimmerwaldists than members of his own party and international who supported the war and were carried along by it? Hardie opposed the Boer war and World War I in the teeth of patriotic euphoria, when so-called socialists (even otherwise sensible anarchists) went along with it, even to the extent of finding it progressive.

So maybe Lenin wouldn't have objected to Hardie appearing on the same banner as him, as Spencer thinks. I don't think Marx would have found him in the least bit objectionable, though he may have thought his objections to the war were idealistic, since opposition to war as such wasn't a great hit on his agenda. He tended to believe in the survival of the fittest, when it came to inter-capitalist struggles - a sort of weeding out the weakest strains before the working class superseded them. Keir Hardie has as least as much right to take pride of place, along with the other trail blazers - rather I wonder what any of them would make of the current crowd of traitors and misleaders sharing today's leadership (thankfully they were not on any of our platforms, let alone banners).

Dave Douglass

Follonsby Miners Lodge

Mine's a pint

Again, Tony Clark makes some very good points (Letters, July 18). I agree with his analysis of the Revolutionary Communist Group, which publishes the bimonthly *Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism*, as having a sectarian position regarding

the work of communists within the Labour Party.

Regarding the legal regulation of all drugs by the state, Tony and I are not that far apart. Whilst I have only, briefly, had a puff of cannabis when I was a student in 1984, I do have to admit that I regularly take a drug - it's called alcohol. Each Tuesday lunchtime I meet with a group of friends at my local pub and have a pint of each of their two guest beers on offer that week. If I'm still around, like most people, I'll continue to drink alcohol under communism.

Tony is right to reserve judgement about the call for the 'legal regulation of drugs' - a better description than the phrase, 'Legalise all drugs', which is always destined to upset the editors of the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*. The term, 'legal regulation of all drugs by the state', was first used by the Law Enforcement Against Prohibition, which changed its name to Law Enforcement Action Partnership in 2017.

LEAP is a US-based non-profit organisation of current and former police, judges, prosecutors and other criminal justice professionals, who use their expertise to advance drug policy and criminal justice solutions that enhance public safety. They have more than 180 representatives around the world who speak on behalf of over 5,000 law enforcement members and 100,000 supporters.

One of the main speakers for LEAP in the UK is Neil Woods, who worked as an undercover anti-drugs agent for 14 years, putting many drug kingpins behind bars. After those long years, he concluded that the so-called 'war on drugs' was a waste of time and money. By putting drug kingpins in prison, it only allowed the competition to move in. Neil has written two books about his experiences: *Drug wars* and *Good cop, bad cop*, which I highly recommend to Tony and all other comrades.

I also recommend that Tony reads the numerous articles by Eddie Ford and Paul Demarty in the *Weekly Worker* about its call for the legalisation of drugs. I suggest he reads the excellent article, 'War on drugs', on Wikipedia, which explains how president Richard Nixon in 1971 launched that attack on drug use. The main reason for doing so was that 10%-15% of the soldiers in Vietnam were addicted to heroin. I also point Tony in the direction of the Transform Drug Policy Foundation website, which has some useful books based on research about drug policy worldwide.

John Smithee

Cambridgeshire

Spit on Pinochet

On Chile's 'National Day of the Payador' (July 30) I will laud the activist, Victor Jara, and spit on the memory of that butcher, Augusto Pinochet, who was protected by that abhorrent Tory premier, Margaret Thatcher, and released via the actions of Menshevik Jack Straw, so that he could die peacefully - unlike tens of thousands of his victims.

Today's Chilean president, Gabriel Boric, promises to bury neoliberalism - let us with our many actions destroy neoliberalism, its corporations and the vile regimes in the USA, UK and elsewhere, who insist on it.

On July 30, I will enjoy a bottle of fine red wine from Chile and sing along to *Manifiesto* and *Te recuerdo amanda*, as well as *A las barricadas*, the anarchist anthem. I will salute Victor, but also the women and men alive today who will sweep aside the geriatrics who rule Earth to the sad tombs where they belong.

Social revolution now!

K Sean Vincent

email

ACTION

Learn how to beat your landlord

Saturday July 27, 11am: Community training, St Paul's Church, 35 Celia Street, Kirkdale, Liverpool L20. Learn the skills you need to beat your landlord. Tenants are sick of rising rents, battling damp and mould, and getting evicted through no fault of their own. Family-friendly event with childcare provision. Registration free. Organised by Acorn the Union: acorntheunion.org.uk/liverpool_learn_how_to_beat_your_landlord.

Stop fascist Tommy Robinson in London

Saturday July 27, 12 noon: Counterdemonstration. Assemble Russell Square, London WC1. March to Trafalgar Square. Oppose actions of far-right groups led by Tommy Robinson. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: standuptoracism.org.uk.

Israelism

Sunday July 28, 5.30pm: Film screening, The Picturedrome, Barton Street, Gloucester, GL1. The film reveals a generational divide among US Jews, as more question the narratives their synagogues and teachers fed them as children. Tickets £6.13. Organised by Gloucester Palestine Solidarity Group: www.facebook.com/events/476913131628870.

Right to food under Labour

Monday July 29, 7.30pm: Public meeting, The Pavillion, University of Westminster, 115 New Cavendish Street, London W1. Calling on Labour to enshrine the right to food in law. Speakers include Ian Byrne MP and Sarah Woolley (BFAWU). Organised by Right to Food London: www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/right-to-food-london-41890554513.

Starmer's Labour - no more war!

Thursday August 1, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Community Base (South Wing), 113 Queens Road, Brighton BN1. Calling for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, an end to the war in Ukraine and the abolition of nuclear weapons. Speakers include Chris Nineham (Stop the War). Organised by Brighton and Hove Stop the War: www.facebook.com/stopthewarbrightonandhove.

Starmer: stop arming Israel, end the genocide!

Saturday August 3, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Park Lane, London W1. Israel is escalating its genocidal assault on Gaza. Meanwhile the new government continues UK complicity in Israel's violence. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/national-march-for-palestine-3.

Regional big rides for Palestine

Full-day rides supporting charities in Palestine. Registration £15 (£10). **Saturday August 3.** Book by Saturday July 27. Birmingham city centre, 8.30am, ends at Balsall Heath. Manchester city centre, 8.45am, urban route through parks. Newport city centre, 9am, cross the Severn Bridge to end in Bristol. **Saturday August 10.** Book by Saturday August 3. Three routes across London, starting from Kings Cross, Paddington and Croydon at 8.45am and converging on Mile End. Organised by The Big Ride for Palestine: www.thebigride4palestine.com/big-ride-2024.

Divest for Palestine conference

Saturday August 10, 10.15am to 4.30pm: Conference, Central Hall Westminster, Storey's Gate, London SW1. Discussing the need to escalate struggles for Palestinian freedom, by breaking links between British institutions and Israel's machine of murder and oppression. Tickets £12 (£6). Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/divest-for-palestine-conference.

Young Communist League summer camp

Friday August 16 to Sunday August 18: Camping for anyone aged 14 to 30 at West Leeds Activity Centre, Lenhurst Avenue, Leeds LS12. Featuring outdoor recreation and social activities plus political discussion and education sessions. All meals, classes and socials will be indoors. Bookings: £50 (£30) all-inclusive with full board. Organised by Young Communist League of Britain: ycl.org.uk/summer-camp-2024.

Potteries Chartist festival

Sunday August 18, 11am to 4pm: Family-friendly festival, Market Place, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent ST6. Remembering the 1842 attack on the Chartists, which saw Josiah Heapy killed and many injured, with 142 arrested and 54 transported to Australia. Includes stalls, music, poetry, speeches and food. Organised by People's History Association of North Staffordshire: www.tuc.org.uk/events/potteries-chartist-festival.

Remember Burston strike school

Sunday September 1, 10.30am to 4pm: Rally, Diss Road, Burston, Norfolk IP22. Commemorate the longest strike in history. Free entry. Organised by Unite the Union and the TUC: burstonstrikeschool.wordpress.com/2024-rally.

Wigan Diggers Festival

Saturday September 7, 11.30am to 9.30pm: Open-air free festival, The Wiend, Wigan WN1. Commemorating Gerrard Winstanley and the 17th century Diggers movement with music and political stalls. Organised by Wigan Diggers Festival: www.facebook.com/WiganDiggersFestival.

Join the fight for a workers' manifesto

Sunday September 8, 1pm: TUC rally, Old Ship Hotel, 32-38 Kings Road, Brighton BN1. Demand the new government enacts pro-worker policies. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/ShopStewardsNetwork.

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.

Communist University

Saturday August 3 to Saturday August 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

GERMANY

Locusts versus vampires

As a matter of basic principle, Maciej Zurowski opposes the ban on the anti-establishment news magazine *Compact*. However, it is clear that those advocating a bloc of two classes, workers and industrial capitalists, have momentum behind them. The forces of liberalism, including the liberal left, are in a panic

On July 16, 25 masked policemen stormed the residence of notorious anti-establishment figure Jürgen Elsässer in Werder an der Havel - a picturesque small town in Brandenburg. Printers, computers and other equipment were confiscated.

The following day, the ministry of the interior officially banned *Compact*, a news magazine edited by Elsässer, along with the associated video production company Conspect Film, and seized their assets. Launched in 2010, *Compact* was a publication of the so-called 'new right' with a circulation of 40,000 (and temporarily 80,000 during the 'corona dictatorship' four years ago).

Social Democratic interior minister Nancy Faeser justified the move by stating that it was "opposed to the constitutional order" and had recently called for the "fall of the regime". She also accused *Compact* of stirring up "unspeakable hatred against Jews, migrants and our constitutional democracy". Faeser stressed her intention to "take action against the intellectual arsonists who foster a climate of hatred and violence".

The action taken is legally questionable, relying on legislation that applies to "associations" (*Vereine*). A magazine not being an association, it could well turn out that the ban cannot be upheld - at the time of writing Elsässer has already filed criminal charges.

Thirteen years ago, I contributed an article to this paper arguing against state bans of far-right material.¹ Back then, the talk was about the legal suppression of neo-Nazi rock music in Germany. The *Weekly Worker's* stance on these issues remains unchanged: the left must oppose political bans, whether they target music, newspapers or political parties. Just as was the case then, some on the left foolishly support such bans - as long as they hit 'the baddies'. Specifically, there are those in Die Linke - a party which, especially after Sahra Wagenknecht's departure, is quickly moving towards left liberalism and now offers little beyond 'anti-fascism'. As if to reinforce the perception in some circles that the left is an extension of the establishment, Die Linke's deputy federal leader, Katina Schubert, is urging the government to also "consider a ban on the Alternative for Germany" - something the government has already been contemplating for some time.

Unlike in the past, however, the threat faced by those issuing the ban - namely the established parties and the forces they represent - appears to be more serious this time.

For these reasons, instead of rehashing my arguments against state bans from 13 years ago, I will simply quote the imminently sensible response from the Marxist daily, *Junge Welt*. I will then look at some key stages in Jürgen Elsässer's political career and try to understand the reasons why the government has decided to shut down his magazine. First off, here is the excerpt from *Junge Welt*:

It doesn't matter if you agree with them on every issue. It's a matter of principle. Time and again, the foreign ministry and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution deliberately



Banned 'far-right' magazine promoting former Die Linke leader

conflate the potential danger from the right with criticism of the system from the left ... To put it simply: bans against the right are of concern to the left, because the left could be the next target. As is well known, *Junge Welt* is under surveillance by the domestic intelligence service and has to operate under the threat of a possible ban. The authorities have inconspicuously, almost casually, crossed red lines ... The president of the domestic intelligence service, Thomas Haldenwang, stated in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on April 1: "Not only 'calls for violence' or concrete plans for violence are grounds for action, but also the 'delegitimisation' of the Federal Republic of Germany." In other words, it is enough to criticise the capitalist system ...²

Never again!

There was a time when Jürgen Elsässer - then a vocational school teacher in his mid-30s - would regularly frequent the Jugendhaus Mitte, a youth centre right in the heart of Stuttgart. Its regular clientele included mainly punks and anarchist groups, such as the Anarcho-Syndicalist Youth. The local branch of the Communist League, an 'undogmatic left' group that emerged from 1970s western Maoism, also held its meetings there.

Elsässer had been a member of the organisation since 1976 and part of its leading committee from 1989. With the top button of his shirt undone, revealing a golden necklace with a hammer-and-sickle pendant, Elsässer would approach disinterested mohawked youths from table to table, offering a friendly smile and asking, "Fancy a copy of *Worker's Struggle*, lads?"³

It was the early 90s - the time of German reunification - when freelance nationalist violence was rampant in the streets, including in Stuttgart. Using public transport alone, especially at night, could lead to unpleasant encounters if you looked like the type who might frequent said youth centre. In modern German parlance, the early 90s are now retrospectively called the 'baseball bat years', and that moniker is no exaggeration.

Against this backdrop of resurgent German nationalism and an emboldened far right, a slogan became prominent at leftwing demonstrations: *Nie wieder Deutschland!* - 'Never again, Germany!' For the radical left factions chanting it, the phrase was directed against German unification, indeed against the German nation-state as such - seen, on account of its historical *Sonderweg*, as playing a uniquely destructive role within Europe and bound to revert to militarism and aggressive expansionism.

These are generally seen today as the formative stages of the so-called 'anti-German' movement. However, they were preceded by intense soul-searching within the Communist League throughout the 80s, which saw a substantial faction of this slowly disintegrating organisation discover a supposed 'anti-Semitism of the left', particularly regarding the Israel-Palestine question.⁴ Additionally, there was much *Angst* about Germany's creeping 'fascistisation'. To counteract this threat, any attempts on the part of the German state to act independently of its American and European allies were to be opposed.

Elsässer was one of the founders of the 'anti-German' current, and his 1990 essay, 'Why the left must be anti-German', is regarded as its seminal text. His contributions from this period are symptomatic of the movement's obsession with anti-Semitism. In 1992, he published the book *Anti-Semitism - the old face of the new Germany*, and a talk titled 'Respectable anti-Semitism?' saw him generate typically 'anti-German' word salad ("What is secondary anti-Zionism? It is the respectable mask of secondary anti-Semitism"). Even then, Elsässer had a propensity to think in terms of undifferentiated national collectives, asserting that "Israel, as the collective Jew, is a painful reminder of the singular crime that the German nation has committed."⁵ In a 1995 article for *Konkret*, while commenting on the so-called 'historian's debate' about the singularity of the Nazi holocaust, Elsässer wrote that the only remedy for anti-Semitism was not essays, but baseball bats. He was the first of many 'anti-Germans' to lift this modest joke from Woody Allen's *Manhattan*.⁶

Some of the theses that Elsässer and his co-thinkers put forward in the early 90s were validated within a few years. For a period, pogroms against asylum-seekers spiralled out of control. German imperialism did get a boost, and by the late 90s Germany was involved in a foreign war for the first time since 1945 - namely when taking part in the Nato bombing of Yugoslavia. But, contrary to 'anti-German' forecasts, the Federal Republic of Germany did not evolve into a Fourth Reich, nor did it start rounding up Jews again.⁷ Instead, anti-fascism and the holocaust became - and remain - the German state's default justifications for any involvement in imperialist ventures, from Yugoslavia to Ukraine, and for maintaining its unconditional alliance with Israel. Nor did Germany ever break free from its subordination to the interests of the United States, despite occasional solo efforts, such as the government's opposition to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq (vociferously denounced by 'anti-Germans').

Elsässer noticed as much. In a 2005 interview, he argued that, in hindsight,

1995 was a turning point, because it became clear that German aggression was being thwarted by the Americans. For example, Croatia, whose violent secession was promoted by Germany, passed from the German to the American sphere of influence around 1994. From this point onwards, [the left] should have analysed that, instead of the predicted Fourth Reich, there was general western imperialist aggression by all capitalist states, but led by the US.⁸

In another interview, he commented on Germany's thwarted power ambitions:

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, it really seemed as if a Fourth Reich was emerging, so you had to be anti-German. But the nationalist dynamic was shattered by the globalist dynamic from the mid-1990s onwards. Germany had to subordinate itself to the US once again.

By the time of the Second Gulf War, Elsässer had definitively defected from the 'anti-German' camp. His new-found hostility to US imperialism had 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend' overtones, and he showed a propensity for what he called "criminalist-materialist analysis" (and others might call 'conspiracy theory'). Regarding the 9/11 attacks, for example, the question that seemed to interest him most was 'What did Mossad know?' - and a few years later, he speculated about a secret alliance between the US neocons and Islamism. In the following years, he wrote for *Neues Deutschland* and *Junge Welt*, closely associated with Die Linke and the German Communist Party respectively, but increasingly showed an interest in *Querfront* (cross-front) tactics: ie, the unity of elements from the left and the right against liberalism.⁹

Meanwhile, many of his 'anti-German' former comrades discovered that German capitalism had few objections to their critique - indeed some actively welcomed

it - with the red-green government absorbing countless 'radical anti-fascists' and employing them in worthy foundations against 'anti-Semitism, racism and intolerance'. To this day, these people continue to serve as particularly zealous defenders of Atlanticism, only ever becoming critical of the German state when it threatens to deviate from the US foreign policy line. Elsässer remained a nonconformist and went the opposite way.

Plague

A much-cited example of Elsässer's emerging 'anti-Semitism' around that time period is worth a look. In 2005, then-chair of the Social Democratic Party, Franz Müntefering, provoked a controversy - the so-called 'locust debate' - when comparing the economic behaviour of "anonymous investors" (private equity companies, hedge fund managers, etc) to locust plagues. In an interview, he said: "Some financial investors give no thought to the people whose jobs they destroy - they remain anonymous, have no face, attack companies like swarms of locusts, graze them and move on. We fight against this form of capitalism."¹⁰ Elsewhere, he argued that "We need to help those entrepreneurs, who have the future viability of their companies and the interests of their employees at heart, to stand up to the irresponsible swarms of locusts."¹¹

A broad front of critics - from employers' organisations and stock market traders to their 'anti-German' defenders - foamed at the mouth at these 'anti-American' and 'anti-Semitic' comments, arguing that they not only besmirched the honourable work of finance capitalists and corporate raiders, but also drew on Nazi propaganda in their use of a dehumanising animal metaphor. Elsässer, by contrast, took to Müntefering's defence. In fact, he liked his comments so much that he titled his next book, *Attack of the locusts: the destruction of nations and global war*, in which he explained how the world's only remaining superpower, the US, "like locusts, devastates even flourishing economies". A 'people's initiative against finance capital', which he helped launch after the 2008 stock-market crash and which aimed to unite elements "from Oskar Lafontaine [of Die Linke] to Peter Gauweiler [of the Christian-Social Union]", also used locust imagery.

Does that metaphor make Müntefering and Elsässer anti-Semites or Nazis? On its own, hardly. While it is likely that Hitler's and Goebbels' propaganda used the 'swarm of locusts' image at one point or another (though a search of *Mein Kampf* yields no results), Marx used terms such as "sharks" and "stock-exchange wolves" with reference to finance capitalists.¹² He spoke of "usurer's capital or merchant's capital" that feeds on artisans and peasants "like a parasite",¹³ while describing industrial capital as "vampire-like", something that "only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks".¹⁴ His and other classical Marxist writings, often by authors from Jewish backgrounds, are replete with such 'dehumanising' metaphors.

But what about Elsässer's focus on finance capital to the exclusion of its industrial counterpart? It is

true that the Nazis, at least in theory, differentiated between ‘productive’ (national, industrial) and ‘rapacious’ (financial, international) capital - see their ideologue Gottfried Feder’s seminal *Manifesto for the abolition of interest-slavery* (1919). But the dichotomy between ‘hard-working entrepreneurs’ and ‘parasitic finance’ - two interdependent sectors of capital coexisting in an uneasy and conflicted symbiosis - is not exclusive to Nazism, but a broader ideological hallmark of conservatism proper, which tends to champion industrial capital.¹⁵ What distinguished the Nazi version was its racialisation of this dichotomy as ‘Aryan’ versus ‘Jewish’ - a notion conditioned by historically specific factors and not an inevitable feature of radical conservatism or economic nationalism.

New right

While I cannot confirm that Elsässer became a staunch anti-Semite around that time, his anti-liberalism certainly began to take on more conservative hues. *Attack of the locusts* was not only a denunciation of global speculative capital, but also bore the first signs of an idealisation of “family fathers” and “struggling homeowners” with their traditional values, displaced by “constantly mobile singles”, LGBT and feminists, whose lifestyles align perfectly with the flexibility demands of neoliberalism.

As an antidote to neoliberal globalisation, he discovered the nation. Moreover, he began to romanticise the tranquil days of Fordism, supposedly characterised by an “alliance between big capital and core labour”, which had been broken by neoliberalism. Elsässer seemed to overlook that the good old days of the ‘social market economy’ had depended crucially on the existence of the Soviet Union and the potential threat it posed to western capitalism. He believed the clock could be turned back, even if the circumstances had changed.

As in Müntefering’s speech, German national capital - once Elsässer’s *bête noire* - was now composed of “entrepreneurs who have the future viability of their companies and the interests of their employees at heart”. They had to be defended against globalist “swarms of irresponsible locusts”. At this

stage, Elsässer had essentially prefigured the left-conservative programme of the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) that would emerge 17 years later.

The problem with Elsässer’s outlook was not his denunciation of the “locusts”, but the idealisation of equally parasitic industrial capital - the kind that “only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks”, and is always ready to discard you if that serves its profit-maximisation objectives. Elsässer had come to see the interests of the German working class and its national bourgeoisie as one and the same. From there, it was a relatively small ideological leap to the far right, evident in his involvement with Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West (Pegida), and later in his support for AfD, for which his *Compact* magazine served as an unofficial journal from 2016 onwards. He, who had once called for the “destruction of the German state and its replacement by a multi-ethnic state, as well as the liquidation of the German people into a multicultural society”,¹⁶ had become a straightforward German nationalist.

Browsing through various issues of *Compact* (which, despite the ban, are easily accessible via file-sharing websites), much of their content resembles that found in Britain’s *Spiked Online*. Both feature formulaic articles railing against ‘woke’ culture, the LGBT lobby, Islamism, ‘climate terrorists’ and antifa - usually in a manner that is condescending to the readers’ intelligence. Part of me was hoping to find the “unspeakable hatred of Jews” cited by the interior minister, if only because it would have been amusing to showcase Elsässer’s shift from philo-Semitism to anti-Semitism as evidence of the close psychological relationship between the two. But, while I have little desire to defend the man, what I found seemed to manifest at best at the level of so-called ‘structural’ anti-Semitism. Elsässer portrays George Soros as a sinister puppeteer with a hand in everything. But so does Benjamin Netanyahu, who is not an anti-Semite, but a Jewish chauvinist.¹⁷ Soros is a liberal billionaire who supports liberal causes - of course the far right detests him, Jewish or not!

It is a similar story with the ‘great replacement’ narrative, also frequently pushed in *Compact*. This conspiracy theory is sometimes cited by well-meaning leftists in an attempt to expose the right’s lingering anti-Semitism, despite the right’s claims to have reformed on this issue. But how many adherents of this theory believe that, or even care if, the globalist elites supposedly orchestrating mass migration are Jewish? Yes, anti-Semitic variations of the ‘great replacement’ theory do exist in the murkier corners of *4chan*. But the original, mainstream variant - coined by the virulently pro-Israel, anti-Islam, anti-immigration French former gay activist, Renaud Camus, in the 90s - happens to be particularly popular with rightwing Jewish websites such as *JssNews*, *Dreuz.info* and *Europe-Israël*. Some political scientists have suggested that its appeal lies precisely in its *lack* of an anti-Semitic narrative.¹⁸

German antifa websites point out that, in addition to so-called “Israel-related anti-Semitism”, conspiracy theories promoted in *Compact* often contain “anti-Semitic codes”, such as frequent references to Bill Gates and Rockefeller (neither of whom are Jewish), the Illuminati (a Bavarian Enlightenment-era society that explicitly excluded Jews), the Bilderberg meetings (originally convened by a Dutch aristocrat and currently by a devout French Catholic) and - okay - Rothschild. It seems that Elsässer is none to picky when it comes to conspiracy theories - anything will do.

However strong the temptation to look for ‘dog whistles’ is, it would be more productive to recognise that the socio-historical context has changed and that the ideological coordinates of the far right are not the same as they were 100 years ago.¹⁹ The core aspect of the ‘great replacement’ narrative is racist incitement against immigration from the global south, most of all the so-called Islamisation of the west - a theme that is more than just ‘structural’ or ‘secondary’ in *Compact*. In this respect, Elsässer, who has declared that “Christians and Jews are bound together in a common destiny in this historical epoch”, while facing a “common enemy in Islamo-fascism”, is in line with Giorgia Meloni, Marine Le Pen and other exponents of the modern European far right.²⁰

AfD and BSW

Either way, the idea that Nancy Faeser’s interior ministry saw fit to issue a legally dubious ban on his magazine on the grounds of inciting hatred against Jews, Muslims or immigrants is not very convincing. Nor does it seem likely that the government regards *Compact*’s occasional putsch fantasies or its sympathies for the nutter movement known as the *Reichsbürger* as a serious threat.

More importantly, *Compact* was closely aligned with the AfD and also showed strong support for the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW). These two parties have emerged as the two real winners of the recent EU elections in Germany. While the AfD did particularly well among blue-collar workers (33%) and those with a low standard of living (32%), Wagenknecht’s outfit, which won three times as many working class votes as Die Linke, explicitly targets the same ‘bloc of two classes’ - national capital and the working class - that Elsässer has identified as the national-revolutionary subject for the past 15 years.²¹ Both parties oppose German involvement in Nato’s proxy war in Ukraine, which, along with concerns about immigration and Germany’s economic development, have been identified in recent studies as the

main motivations for their voters.²²

Although the AfD’s and the BSW’s working class supporters hardly constitute a conscious, organised class ‘for itself’ (rather a mass of atomised, frustrated and anxious ‘left-behind’ voters), in a sense both parties do represent the immediate material interests of the (native) German working class: they want to end Germany’s involvement in Ukraine and lift its self-embargo on affordable Russian energy, which aids Nato’s eastward expansion and benefits US fracking companies, but impoverishes segments of the German population. The German working class shares this limited, short-term interest with national manufacturing capital.

Elsässer, no matter how far to the right he drifted, always retained his interest in building ‘cross-fronts’. Thus, the April 2023 issue of *Compact* featured a front-page photomontage of Wagenknecht alongside an AfD activist, titled “*Querfront* - How rightists and leftists can stop the warmongers”. The December 2022 issue showcased Wagenknecht with the caption, “The best chancellor - a candidate for left and right”.

For German capitalism, the rapid rise of the AfD from the right and the BSW from the left - of which Elsässer’s magazine, as an ‘organiser’ and ‘networking hub’, has become a symbol and bogeyman - is a matter of great concern. The governing coalition parties understand that German capitalism ultimately owes its position in the world to the US, its military apparatus, its protection of German investments in the southern part of the globe. Whether reluctantly (like Scholz) or fanatically (like the Greens), they sacrifice German sectional interests to those of the American ‘locusts’, even if it means the downfall of parts of the German *Mittelstand*. For the establishment, it is a dreadful prospect that a party representing a short-sighted faction of capitalists - one focused solely on its own immediate advantage and threatening to throw a serious geopolitical spanner in the works - might win the next general election.

In this sense, the war against the AfD and the BSW - through propaganda, but also legal attempts - is not just a war of the current political establishment against the competition. It is also a struggle of US and transnational capital against a wayward, subordinate faction of capitalists - one that will not accept that, under capitalism, there is no escape from the locusts.

Final days?

There is another dimension to consider. With the steady rise of the new right roughly since the Trump victory of 2016, one could be forgiven for thinking that we are living through the final stages of western liberalism as we know it. Here and there, a Donald Tusk or a Kamala Harris might still win an election - or a New Popular Front might somehow sneak the bankrupt ‘democrats’ into the next legislative period. But the general trend is clear: a new conservatism is on the rise, poised to supplant the ailing liberal hegemony. The next stage of capitalism’s efforts to overcome its crises can be delayed a little - but can it be stopped?

The liberals sense that they are losing the fight, which partly explains why they have become so authoritarian and indeed illiberal over the past decade. Hence the deplatforming and cancelling, hence the extreme conformity of thought demanded within the ‘bubble’, enforced under the threat of social and professional ostracism.

The world they have built in the

90s seems to be collapsing around them, and they are panicking. The banning of *Compact* magazine in Germany is symptomatic of this ●

Notes

1. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/847/jailbirds-extremists-and-white-power-rock.
2. www.jungewelt.de/artikel/479654.zur-kenntlichkeit.html.
3. The German name of the group was Kommunistischer Bund and the paper was *Arbeiterkampf*. Martin Veith’s book *Eine Revolution für die Anarchie*, which documents anarchism and anti-fascism in Stuttgart in the early 1990s, contains a few paragraphs about Elsässer’s time in Stuttgart in the early 1990s.
4. This was accompanied by the growing popularity of Moishe Postone’s theory of anti-Semitism, which was to assist in the complete political degeneration of the German left over the next decade. For more on this, see my translation of Michael Sommer’s *Anti-Postone*, available from Cosmonaut Books, and Paul Demarty’s review, ‘Abstraction and obfuscation’ (*Weekly Worker* February 10 2022: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1382/abstraction-and-obfuscation).
5. In a video from 1990, he can be heard saying these sentences at a conference of the magazine *Konkret* entitled ‘No, we don’t love this country and its people’: www.youtube.com/watch?v=3US3vk5rOas.
6. The relevant scene from *Manhattan* can be seen at www.youtube.com/watch?v=jf9d3cwVWBY&ab_channel=Movieclips.
7. This only happened in 2024, when most participants arrested in crackdowns on Palestine solidarity protests in Germany appeared to be Jews.
8. See the four-way discussion at jungle.world/artikel/2005/46/ausgedeuetscht.
9. See the interview at jungle.world/artikel/2007/03/wer-keine-antiamekanischen-reflexe-hat-ist-himtot. Historically and today, *Querfronts* - or red-brown alliances - are far rarer than domesticated anti-fascists would have you believe.
10. *Bild am Sonntag* April 17 2005.
11. *Tradition und Fortschritt* January 2005: web.archive.org/web/20050905185716/http://www.parlei.spd.de/servlet/PB/show/1043150/221204_programmheft_1.pdf.
12. K. Marx *Capital* Vol 3, part V, chapter 27: ‘The role of credit in capitalist production’: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch27.htm.
13. K. Marx *Capital* Vol 1, London 1990, p646.
14. *Ibid* p342.
15. In his article, ‘Liberal and illiberal delusions’, comrade Mike Macnair very helpfully explored how conservatism and liberalism each ideologise different spheres of capitalism (*Weekly Worker* August 2 2019: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1262/liberal-and-illiberal-delusions).
16. *Arbeiterkampf* No2, 1990.
17. For examples of Israeli denunciations of Soros, see www.reuters.com/article/world/israel-backs-hungary-says-financier-soros-is-a-threat-idUSKBN19V1IY; www.haaretz.com/us-news/2017-09-10/ty-article/why-netanyahu-hates-george-soros-so-much/0000017f-c3c9-df7c-a5ff-e3fdb59b0000; www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-george-soros-behind-bid-to-thwart-migrant-deportations.
18. “The success of that umpteenth incarnation of a theme launched immediately after World War II (Camus has personally declared his indebtedness to Enoch Powell) can be explained by the fact that he subtracted anti-Semitism from the argument” - J-Y Camus and N Lebourg *Far-right politics in Europe* London 2017, pp206-07.
19. For more on the links between Israel and far-right movements around the world, see also www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190401-the-great-replacement-why-far-right-nationalists-love-israel.
20. www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/compact-juergen-elsaesser-herausgeber-portraet-lux.KAAdrPLaxx7w5vHPaT2Sxm.
21. Wagenknecht made this approach quite explicit in a controversial speech in parliament in October 2022, when she was still a member of Die Linke. She expressed concern for national manufacturing capital (“German industry, with its robust medium-sized businesses”) and the working class (“millions ... afraid of the future, of escalating living costs, of overwhelming bills and, increasingly, of losing their jobs”). See zuriz.wordpress.com/2022/10/01/the-dumbest-government-in-europe-sahra-wagenknechts-speech-of-8-september-2022.
22. www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/ard-deutschlandtrend/2024. I do not wish to repeat the German establishment’s claims that the AfD and Sahra Wagenknecht’s party are “the same”. While they share some issues (Ukraine, Euroscepticism, immigration, opposition to cultural liberalism), they strongly differ on others. Wagenknecht’s nostalgia for Rhineland capitalism could be compared to the economic policies of the left wing of European Christian Democracy during the cold war era, while the AfD is economically libertarian and seeks quick fixes for the *Mittelstand* - for example, by abolishing the minimum wage.

ISRAEL

Promise myth as template

An ancient saga is harnessed in service of settler-colonisation. **Moshé Machover** looks at how modern Zionism not only forged a nation through religion, but finds justification for ethnic cleansing and genocide in the words of Yahweh

On April 29 2019, Danny Danon, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, addressed the Security Council. A video of his performance is available online and is well worth watching.¹ His aim was to provide incontestable proof of the Jewish people's right to possess the entire 'Land of Israel'.

But, before embarking on his main theme, he put his listeners in a sympathetic frame of mind by mentioning a recent anti-Semitic attack, a shooting in a synagogue in Poway, California, in which a woman was murdered and three persons, including the synagogue's rabbi, were injured.² He added that "it is unacceptable that we live in a time in which worshippers must be on guard or look behind their backs while praying, out of fear for being shot". With this remark we must indeed agree.

In this connection we may recall the massacre at the Ibrahimi Mosque, Hebron, on February 25 1994, during the holy month of Ramadan, when the mosque was packed. On that day, which was also the Jewish holiday of Purim, a religious Zionist settler, Baruch Goldstein, armed with an assault rifle, murdered 29 worshippers, including several children (some about 12 years old) and wounded 125, before being overpowered and beaten to death by the survivors.³ He and his mentor, Meir Kahane, are revered as martyred saints by many religious Zionists, including members of the present Israeli government.⁴

Danon next turned to his main theme:

The four pillars that prove the case for Jewish ownership of the Land of Israel. The first pillar is the Bible. The Jewish people's rightful ownership of Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel, is well documented throughout the Old Testament and beyond ... In the book of *Genesis*, the very first book of the Old Testament, god says to Abraham - and I will read that in Hebrew.

He thereupon donned a kippah, took up a copy of the Hebrew bible and read out verses 7 and 8 of *Genesis*, chapter 17, spoken by Yahweh, the almighty god. Suspecting that some of the Security Council members may not be conversant with biblical Hebrew, he treated them to an English translation. And then, with an unintentionally comic flourish, he held up the book in his right hand and declared: "This is the deed to our land!"

I watched the video of this speech many times, because I felt that there was something funny about it, in more ways than one. Finally I realised: Danon's English translation was not quite right. Here are the two verses, as rendered by the King James version:

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a god unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their god.



Jews praying at Western Wall, 1870s

In quoting the translation, Danon stressed the word "all" - "all the land of Canaan" - but omitted the phrase "the land wherein thou art a stranger".⁵ This is a crucial omission, because a key point of the biblical promised-land myth is that Abraham is an alien in that land, and so are his Israelite descendants, who eventually invade it under the leadership of Joshua, son of Nun, and displace its indigenous people.

Below I will present a very brief summary of the biblical promised-land narrative, starting with Abraham and ending with Joshua. From a political viewpoint, it does not matter what parts of the myth, if any, are factual. Of course, a great many people believe in its literal veracity, but this belief *in itself* has little practical significance; it only becomes a lethal ideology when taken as justification and prescription for militant action by messianic Zionists, such as the mass murderer, Baruch Goldstein, and his many admirers. They represent a radical departure from traditional rabbinical doctrine, which dominated Judaism for many centuries. While accepting the biblical narrative as literally true, it warned against instrumentalising it politically: Zionism was condemned as a heresy.⁶

Paradoxically, a great many seemingly secular Zionists also take the promised-land narrative as a valid warrant for political action -

hence the old quip, 'To be a Zionist, you don't have to believe that god exists, but you do have to believe that he gave Palestine to the Jews'. Far from being a mere joke, this is a description of a real cognitive dissonance, apparently free of the anxiety normally associated with this condition.

Danon is a case in point: he is not particularly religious, and I doubt very much that he takes the book of *Genesis* as a factual account of real events from the six days of creation to the death in Egypt of Jacob, Abraham's grandson. Yet he offers part of this narrative to the world as a "deed", granting the Jews, supposedly Abraham's present-day descendants, ownership of other people's land. Thus the almighty lord Yahweh is seen to have foreshadowed Lord Arthur Balfour, whose notorious letter was, of course, also mentioned by Danon.

This use of the Bible by a secular Zionist is by no means novel. A few days after Danon's performance, Brant Rosen, an anti-Zionist rabbi, published a scathing article about this bizarre speech, in which he recalls a famous story dating from 1937 about David Ben-Gurion using the Bible in exactly the same way.⁷ Ideology can evidently play an expedient role, even for those whose belief in it is merely symbolic.

Abram (later renamed Abraham⁸) son of Terah was a native of Ur, a

city in Lower Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq). From there Terah and his family migrated towards the land of Canaan, but stopped in Haran (a location in Upper Mesopotamia, believed to be in present-day southern Turkey or northern Syria) and settled there.⁹ At the age of 75, Abram left his family, his country and his native land behind and, obeying Yahweh's command, proceeded to the land of Canaan, accompanied by his wife, Sarai (later renamed Sarah¹⁰), his nephew, Lot, and their slaves.¹¹

Resident aliens

The indigenous people of Canaan were the Canaanites, along with several related ethnic groups: the Hittites, the Amorites, the Jebusites and others.¹² Abraham is referred to as a 'Hebrew' (*Ivri*), which (in the usage of the original text) has the connotation of being a foreigner, a person who has come *across*.¹³ He was and remained a stranger, a resident alien in Canaan. Indeed, this is how he described himself. The occasion was a land-purchase deal. Abraham, a nomadic herdsman, needed a piece of land to bury his wife, Sarah, who died in Hebron. He approached the local Canaanite sons of Heth, saying: "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."¹⁴ A purchase was made, and Sarah was duly buried in a local cave, where eventually Abraham himself and other members of his family would also be buried. (Over the putative location of this cave there now stands a sacred edifice, the Ibrahimi Mosque, site of the 1994 Purim massacre.)

Like Abraham, his son, Isaac, was also a resident alien in Canaan,¹⁵ and so were Isaac's twin sons, Esau and Jacob.¹⁶ The entire family line, down to Jacob's sons, were itinerant tent-dwelling herdsmen.¹⁷

Yahweh's covenant with Abraham is repeated several times in *Genesis* and is reiterated to Isaac and Jacob. It is also mentioned many times in other books of the Hebrew Bible. Its first occurrence is quite explicit as to the extent of the promised land - *all* the land of Canaan:

Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: [land of] the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.¹⁸

Disdaining intermarriage with the Canaanites "among whom I dwell", Abraham sent off his major-domo back to his family base back in Mesopotamia - "my country" - to fetch a wife for his son, Isaac. The man returned with Rebekah, Abraham's great-niece, who duly married Isaac.¹⁹ When she gave birth to the twins, Esau emerged first, so he had the birthright of primogeniture; he was also preferred by Isaac, though Rebekah preferred Jacob. Eventually, when they grew up, Esau became a skilful hunter, while Jacob was apparently a "simple man", but really quite canny. One day, Esau came back famished from the hunt, and Jacob got him to sell

his birthright for a pottage of lentils.²⁰ It remained to get Isaac to confirm Jacob's birthright. Following a cunning stratagem devised and managed by Rebekah, Jacob conned his blind old father into giving him a blessing of primogeniture.²¹

Hearing that Esau was incensed by this swindle and was plotting to kill Jacob in revenge, Rebekah devised a plan to get her favourite son out of harm's way: let him flee to the family's homeland and take refuge for "a few days" with her brother, Laban, in Haran. This would also work as a marriage arrangement - which is how she sold it to Isaac. She told him that she had a thing against local girls - the very idea that Jacob would marry one of them made her want to die.²² Isaac thereupon charged Jacob not to marry a Canaanite girl, but to go to Mesopotamia and marry one of Laban's daughters.²³

Rather than a few days, Jacob spent 20 years in Haran working for Laban, an exploitative trickster. Meantime he raised a family: besides his two wives, Laban's daughters, Leah and Rachel, he had two concubines, his wives' respective slave women. He fathered 11 sons and a daughter. Eventually, Jacob managed to outwit his uncle and ended up exceedingly rich, owning much livestock as well as female and male slaves.²⁴

On his way back to Canaan, Jacob was assaulted one night by a mysterious stranger, with whom he wrestled until daybreak. Jacob prevailed, although he suffered a dislocated hip. It transpired that the stranger was a god, who on parting blessed Jacob and renamed him 'Israel', which means 'He who contends with god'.²⁵ Henceforth his descendants are called 'children of Israel' or 'Israelites'.

Egypt, 400 years

Joseph, Jacob's 11th son and his favourite, aroused his elder brothers' envy. Visiting them in the field where they were looking after the family flock, he was seized by them and sold for 20 pieces of silver to passing Egypt-bound traders. As a cover-up story, the brothers led Jacob to believe that Joseph had been devoured by a wild beast.

The traders sold Joseph on to Pharaoh's captain of the guard. Following several changes of fortune, the 17-year-old Hebrew slave ended up at the age of 30 as Pharaoh's viceroy. He was eventually reunited with his father and brothers, who, driven by a famine in Canaan, went down to Egypt to obtain food.²⁶ Pharaoh welcomed them to stay and look after his cattle.²⁷

As foretold to Abraham,²⁸ the Israelites spent 400 years in Egypt, where they were referred to as 'Hebrews'. The initial welcome did not last long. A new king, alarmed by the rate at which they increased, and suspecting them of potential disloyalty, enslaved them and put them to work for the state. He further decreed that all newborn Hebrew males are to be killed - a decree that the Hebrew midwives contrived to evade.²⁹ One Hebrew baby boy, hidden by his mother in a basket among the reeds on the bank of the Nile, was found by Pharaoh's daughter who had come down to bathe in the river. She took

pity on the crying baby and decided to adopt him. The boy’s sister, who had hidden nearby, arranged for his real mother to be hired as his nurse. The princess named her adopted son ‘Moses’.³⁰

Eventually, Moses, an Egyptian royal by adoption, was appointed by Yahweh to bring forth the Israelites out of Egypt³¹ and lead them towards the Land of Canaan - the promised land where their forefathers had long, long since resided as foreigners.³²

Egypt to Canaan

We resume the narrative at the point when, following their miraculous escape from Egypt, the Israelites embark on their 40-year trek in the wilderness.³³ Yahweh, addressing them through Moses, makes it clear that redeeming the promise made to Abraham will involve major, albeit gradual, removal of the indigenous people:

My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. Do not bow down before their gods, worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces ...

I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run. I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way. But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.

I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the desert to the Euphrates River. I will give into your hands the people who live in the land, and you will drive them out before you. Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you.³⁴

In the passage just quoted, clearance of the natives appears as an act of god, with the Israelites as almost passive beneficiaries. Other passages call upon the latter actively to take matters into their own hands:

When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places. Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess ...

But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live. And then I will do to you what I plan to do to them.³⁵

An even more explicit exhortation:

When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labour and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. When Yahweh your God delivers it into your hand,

put to the sword all the men in it. As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder Yahweh your God gives you from your enemies. This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby.

However, in the cities of the nations Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them - the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites - as Yahweh your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshipping their gods, and you will sin against Yahweh your God.³⁶

According to the accounts in the books of *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*, the Israelites, still led by Moses, began to implement these measures before crossing the Jordan.³⁷ Subsequently, Moses, whom Yahweh denied access to the west side of the river, died in Moab, having passed the reins to his servant, Joshua, son of Nun.³⁸

In the *Torah* (Pentateuch), the theme of the divine promise to Abraham, the ordained displacement and extermination of the indigenous peoples of Canaan by his Israelite descendants is always in the background. However, explicit references to it occur only sporadically as brief passages, integrated in the narrative flow. But this theme is dominant in the book of *Joshua*: it is what its first 12 chapters are all about. The remaining 12 chapters deal with the allocation of the conquered land to the Israelite tribes.

The following are highlights of Joshua’s conquests.

■ Jericho: “[The Israelites] utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.”³⁹

■ Ai: “When Israel had finished killing all the men of Ai in the fields and in the wilderness where they had chased them, and when every one of them had been put to the sword, all the Israelites returned to Ai and killed those who were in it. Twelve thousand men and women fell that day - all the people of Ai. For Joshua did not draw back the hand that held out his javelin until he had destroyed all who lived in Ai.”⁴⁰

■ Makkedah: “Joshua took Makkedah. He put the city and its king to the sword and totally destroyed everyone in it. He left no survivors.”⁴¹

■ Libnah: “Yahweh also gave that city and its king into Israel’s hand. The city and everyone in it Joshua put to the sword. He left no survivors there.”⁴²

On and on it goes: Lachish, Eglon, Hebron, Debir, Hazor, Madon, Shimron, Akshaf ... all completely destroyed, not sparing anyone that breathed.⁴³

Converse presentism

What are we to make of this saga? It would be absurd to condemn and junk it on the grounds that it violates our present-day attitude of anti-colonialism, norms of human rights and conventions against war crimes and genocide. This would be a presentist, anti-historicist fallacy. To be consistent, along with big chunks of the Bible we would have to jettison other major ancient contributions of diverse cultures to our common human heritage. *The Iliad*, for one, would have to go. Fortunately, as far as I know, there is no serious advocacy of such presentism and little danger of it prevailing.

The real and actual menace is posed by a converse of presentism, its mirror image: taking the biblical myth as a template for today, and its norms as guides for present action. This menace has been potential in Zionist ideology from its very beginning. Here I would like to recapitulate part of an analysis I made in a review article written more than a decade ago:⁴⁴

Zionism modelled itself on 19th-century eastern- and central-European nationalisms: it regarded itself as the nationalism of the Jews. The ideological project of any nationalism is to invent, as it were, the nation for which it claims to speak: to provide it with a narrative of common origin, homeland and destiny. This is then used to claim possession of, and sovereignty over, the homeland.

In one crucial sense, Zionism had to be more inventive than any of its European models. Each of the latter had a ready-made objective raw material: a community inhabiting a roughly discernible contiguous territory, speaking a more-or-less distinct vernacular (in many cases also using a highbrow version of it as a secular literary language), and sharing a distinctive secular culture. The project of nationalism was to unify this inchoate nation-in-itself (*an sich*) and forge it into a nation-for-itself (*für sich*). This was, at least in principle, a secular project: a modern nation need not share a common religion. Since the American and French Revolutions, modernity regarded religion as a private matter, whereas the nation - and hence nationalism - are nothing if not public and collective.

But the *only* thing that all Jewish communities had in common was, precisely, their religion: Judaism. They were scattered across the world and shared no common vernacular or secular culture. So if (as claimed by Benedict Anderson) all nations are imagined communities, the non-existence of a pan-Jewish nation-in-itself meant that Zionists had to perform an exceptionally prodigious leap of imagination: inventing a nation that one joins by religious conversion and leaves by apostasy.

However, once this extraordinary feat of positing worldwide Jewry as a single nation had been performed, the ideological task of constructing for it a narrative of common origin, homeland and destiny was easier than for Zionism’s European nationalist models: a ready-made ancient, sacred narrative of history and eschatology offered itself. Jews already ‘knew’ that they were all direct descendants of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who was renamed ‘Israel’. Thus they were all ‘literally’ *Bnei Yisrael* (Sons of Israel). Their god-promised and god-given homeland was *Eretz Yisrael* (Land of Israel), covering a huge area “from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates”.

All that remained for Zionist ideology to do was to secularise this sacred narrative. The eschatological bit, the ‘return’ to Zion, was converted into a political colonising project - hence its very name: ‘Zionism’ - with the impressively bearded Theodor Herzl as secular messiah or his herald.

The seminal role of the Bible in Zionist ideology is widely recognised by historians. Thus, in a recent historical study, Itzhak

Conforti notes that the Bible served as an early ideological bridge and common ground, uniting the various strands of Zionism: the superficially secular and the traditional-religious:

In the modern nationalist era, the Zionist thinkers gave the ancient biblical text national sanctity, which stemmed from its traditional religious holiness. The fact that biblical interpretation provoked internal debates among the various streams of the Zionist movement ... reveals the shared importance of the Bible for all shades of Zionism ... [T]he biblical text became a unifying cultural element that bridged the gaps between secular, religious and traditional Jews ... The Bible served not only as a foundational text for the Zionist movement, but also as a proof text which justified the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. Hence, in the first two decades of the State of Israel, the Bible continued to play a central role in Israeli education and culture.⁴⁵

Conforti’s study does not go beyond Israel’s early years, but in fact the role of the Bible in Israeli education and culture continued to grow in later years.

David Ben-Gurion’s use of the Bible, to which I have alluded before, is of obvious significance. Conforti notes:

National leader David Ben Gurion adopted national and universalist values from the Bible. But, during the early years of the state, his main interest in the Bible was focused on concrete historical issues, such as conquering the land, settlement, the kingdoms of David and Solomon, and the return to Zion during the reigns of Cyrus and Darius. These became the main subjects of discussion in the Bible study group he hosted in the prime minister’s residence.

Despite Ben Gurion’s secular approach, he did not challenge the historical truth of the Bible. On the contrary, he thought that the Bible was a faithful reflection of the story of ancient Israel.⁴⁶

This approach was also shared by leading Israeli academic biblical scholar, Yehezkel Kaufman, who “interpreted the Book of Joshua as a realistic historical book that correctly describes the conquest of the land and the settlement”.⁴⁷

The foundational function of the Bible in Zionist ideology facilitates its converse-presentist reading, as if it were a contemporary document, whose moral values and attitudes to war and conquest may be applicable today. A reverential attitude to the Bible pervades Israel’s entire Jewish educational system, where it takes up a major part of the curriculum, even in secular schools.

Of course, this does not mean that every Jewish Israeli becomes a supporter, let alone an active advocate, of ethnic cleansing and other war crimes. Even among Zionists, there are many who recoil at such acts. But *objectively* the Zionist colonisation project has an inbuilt disposition to ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Palestinian Arabs.⁴⁸

So those who actively pursue this project can find handy support, inspiration and justification in the converse-presentist reading of the biblical myth, which is part of the dominant ideology of their society. Incitement to genocide and other war crimes may escape with impunity by phrasing it as biblical exegesis.

Can the Jewish state prosecute a Jew, let alone a rabbi, for preaching the word of god? ●

Notes

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZenZ3YAvzEk.
2. See *Wikipedia*, ‘Poway synagogue shooting’: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poway_synagogue_shooting.
3. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cave_of_the_Patriarchs_massacre.
4. See, for example, ‘Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel’s minister of chaos’ *The New Yorker* February 27 2023 (archive.ph/Rvwl9); ‘Video shows Ben-Gvir giving speech with words praising extremist Meir Kahane in background’ *Ha’aretz* May 2 2023 (www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-05-02/ty-article/.premium/video-shows-ben-gvir-giving-speech-with-words-praising-extremist-meir-kahane-in-background/00000187-dd31-dea8-af97-dfb1cbaf0000).
5. The original text says “eretz megurékha”, which in biblical Hebrew means the land in which you are a *ger* (ie, a resident stranger).
6. See my discussion of the neoteric theology of religious Zionism in ‘Israel and the Messiah’s ass’ *Weekly Worker* June 1 2017: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1157/israel-and-the-messiahs-ass.
7. Rabbi Brant Rosen, ‘When secular Israelis claim “God gave this land to us”’ *People’s World* May 29 2019: www.peoplesworld.org/article/when-secular-israelis-claim-god-gave-this-land-to-us. Rosen does not mention the revealing elision in Danon’s translation of the Genesis text.
8. *Genesis* 17:5
9. *Genesis*. 11.
10. *Genesis* 17:15.
11. *Genesis* 12.
12. *Genesis* 15:19-21. For the genealogical relations between these groups see *Genesis* 10:15-16.
13. *Genesis* 14:13. For the etymology of the biblical term, see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrews.
14. *Genesis* 23:4.
15. *Genesis* 26:3.
16. *Genesis* 28:4, 36:6.
17. *Genesis* 13-47 *passim*. Tent-dwelling mentioned some 20 times. Occupation as herdsmen: see in particular *Genesis* 46:34, 47:3.
18. *Genesis* 15:18-21 (trans. KJV).
19. *Genesis* 24.
20. *Genesis* 25.
21. *Genesis* 27.
22. *Ibid*.
23. *Genesis* 28.
24. *Genesis* 29-30. Only Jacob’s 12th son, Benjamin, was born in Canaan (*Genesis* 35:16-18).
25. *Genesis* 32:23-30. The enigmatic account of this episode does not specify whether this was the god of Abraham or some other god, possibly one of those alluded to in the previous chapter, such as the god of Nahor (Abraham’s brother and Laban’s grandfather). All English translations of *Genesis* 31:53 that I have consulted make it appear that the god of Nahor and the god of Abraham are one and the same; but this is a monotheistic massaging of the original text.
26. *Genesis* 37, 39-50. The story of Joseph is a literary gem that can be read as a stand-alone novelette. An intermezzo (*Genesis* 38), inserted at a tense juncture, is an unrelated story of the sexual misadventures of Judah, Jacob’s third son.
27. *Genesis* 47:5-6.
28. *Genesis* 15:13.
29. *Exodus* 1.
30. *Exodus* 2.
31. *Exodus* 3:10.
32. *Exodus* 6:4.
33. *Numbers* 14:33, *Deuteronomy* 8:2. A modern reconstruction of their route is shown in the Hebrew Wikipedia map: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Exodus_map_Hebrew.jpg.
34. *Exodus* 23:23-33. Here and in the translated quotes that follow, I rely on the KJV and the New International Version, but I have replaced the euphemism, ‘the Lord’, by his name, as in the original text.
35. *Numbers* 33:51-56.
36. *Deuteronomy* 20:10-18.
37. See accounts of the destruction of the Amorite land of King Sihon and the Bashan land of King Og in *Numbers* 21, recapitulated in *Deuteronomy* 2-3.
38. *Deuteronomy* 37.
39. *Joshua* 6:21.
40. *Joshua* 8:24-26.
41. *Joshua* 10:28.
42. *Joshua* 10:30.
43. *Joshua* 10-11.
44. Review of *The invention of the Jewish people* by Shlomo Sand, *Race and Class* January 2011 (reprinted as chapter 32 in my book *Israelis and Palestinians: conflict and resolution* Chicago, 2012).
45. Y Conforti, ‘Zionism and the Hebrew Bible: from religious holiness to national sanctity’ *Middle East Studies* Vol 60, issue 3, pp483-94 (www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00263206.2023.2204516).
46. *Ibid*.
47. *Ibid*.
48. See chapter 33 of my book *Israelis and Palestinians (op cit)*. This chapter, under the same name as the book, is online: www.matzpen.org/docs/IsraelisPalestiniansConflictResolution-Machover.pdf. See also my article, ‘The decolonisation of Palestine’ *Weekly Worker* June 23 2016: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1112/the-decolonisation-of-palestine.

TECHNOLOGY

A day of chaos

After a botched software upgrade, Microsoft's Blue Friday outage shows the price of putting software and IT infrastructure under the rule of capital, argues **Paul Demarty**

An old joke: in the university staff room, an argument breaks out about the origins of the universe.

A professor of civil engineering notes that God created the world in six days, which seems like a solid work of engineering; therefore, God is an engineer. A professor of mathematics objects: first of all, God created order out of chaos, and only mathematics creates order out of chaos; therefore God is a mathematician. The head of IT laughs loudly: where do you think the chaos came from?

The propensity for computer systems to laugh in the face of the tasks we expect them to do is, by now, legendary. Last week's cataclysmic outage on July 19, which affected Windows PCs and servers running a specific security software package - CrowdStrike's Falcon system - rather underlined the matter. This was not, as failures often are, limited to one organisation or company. Indeed, in the scope of its effects, it was similar to cases where one of the major cloud computing providers - Amazon Web Services, say - has suffered a major breakage. A very, very large amount of random *stuff* just stopped working. Banks could not make transfers. Airports could not get people on flights. Hospitals could not see their schedules. The economic damage caused is estimated at \$10 billion.

Donkey work

Though this is not a specialist technical publication, obviously, it is worth getting our hands dirty a little bit and trying to explain what happened.

Most general-purpose computers nowadays run an operating system - for example, Microsoft Windows, or Apple macOS, or some variant of the open-source Linux. The purpose of an operating system is to take care of the donkey work of instructing the computer hardware to do stuff; then programmers can focus on what their application is actually supposed to accomplish (browsing the web, playing a game, or whatever) rather than how exactly data gets written to memory, or how the file system works, or which of a million possible printers you have connected.

In modern operating systems, the functionality that achieves these very low-level interactions with the computer hardware is carefully isolated from other software running on the machine. This core is usually called the kernel. The kernel has its own memory. Applications make the computer do stuff by asking the kernel to do it for them.

Sometimes, however, an application developer wants to have that same lower level of access as the kernel. This could be because sheer speed is of the essence. It could be because, say, you are a malicious hacker who wants to hijack the system! Or it could be because you are an IT security software company, and you want to see if a malicious hacker *has in fact* hijacked the system.

Enter Windows and CrowdStrike. The latter, in order to provide the level of protection it does, requires kernel access. Bugs running in the kernel, however, are extremely difficult to recover from reliably. So when an update to the Falcon software caused a crash, the consequence was that millions of



Biggest outage in history

computers immediately suffered the notorious 'blue screen of death', and had to be rebooted - and then crashed immediately again, *ad infinitum*. While a fix was, hypothetically speaking, available mere hours later, applying it involved interrupting the system boot process - something most ordinary users would not know how to do; so full recovery for many institutions would take days.¹

So whose fault was this? On the face of it, the answer would appear to be CrowdStrike's. This update was apparently pushed out without being tested. This is a disastrous failure of process, given the consequences of screwing things up in kernel-space. (Anti-malware software has, let us say, a poor reputation among IT professionals for its intrusiveness and threat to reliability, and is tolerated as a necessary evil in the age of Wannacry and Stuxnet.) The company's CEO apologised.² Case closed?

Monopoly

Not quite. Long-time users of Windows may have noticed that they have seen a lot less of the 'blue screen of death' in recent years. This is no accident: earlier versions of the OS had a rather cavalier attitude to isolating the kernel. This produced endless security nightmares. It should be remembered that Apple's selling point for their Mac computers for many years was "They just work" - that is, they don't crash all the time, they're not nearly as vulnerable to viruses and malware, etc.

Apple had a point. The near-total monopoly of Windows (and before it, MS-DOS) in the PC market, from the late-1980s to the mid-2000s, led to enormous complacency. The fact that the whole OS was proprietary meant that nobody outside the company could discover any problems easily. In that same period, the modern open-source software movement kicked into gear, and the earliest version of Linux was published in 1991. It was one of a family of free operating systems

that took inspiration from Unix - an extremely successful OS developed mostly in the 1970s. One other was FreeBSD, on which all Apple's modern OSes are based.

The open source movement has not produced much in the way of consumer apps that compete with commercial offerings (though nearly all incorporate substantial portions of open-source code), but its effect on the operating system world was immense. Linux and the various BSDs - FreeBSD, OpenBSD and so on - benefited from wide, open collaboration between ferociously talented specialists. Windows did not, and woefully failed to meet the standards that were raised, again and again, by this gift economy of cranky nerds.

After Linux began to dominate in the server market - that is, computers in data centres that run large workloads and typically connect to the internet - and a revived Apple began nibbling away at the PC market, Microsoft was at length shamed into improving the fundamentals of Windows. Yet it is still several steps behind. Both macOS and Linux have developed ways to give applications safer kernel access, with reduced risk of catastrophic failure. Windows is still working on support for, essentially, the Linux version of this - something called eBPF (which we will not go into), but has yet to ship it, and it will initially lack a lot of the features of the Linux implementation. By failing to meet the bar, Microsoft arguably set CrowdStrike up to fail.³

There are two political-economic problems posed here: one is the inherent capitalist tendency towards monopoly; and the other is the organisation of work in this unique industry. Like all monopolies, Microsoft's dominance over the PC market had the upside essentially of perpetual rent. The coercive laws of competition are put, for long stretches of time, to one side.

Yet the PC operating system

monopoly is hardly the most significant in the modern technology industry. Another is the extreme centralisation of the silicon chip market in very few hands. Intel continues to dominate in the PC and server market. Several different chip designs are to be found in modern consumer devices like smartphones (and Apple now uses its own silicon in its PCs); but almost all are manufactured by a single, enormous Taiwanese company, TSMC. This has become a direct political issue in the United States, since its insistence on ever greater brinksmanship with the People's Republic of China makes TSMC a potentially dangerous chokepoint if things really kick off over the island's status.

Intel has long been stagnant, and faces challenges in both the PC and server markets. Yet it is Intel that principally benefits from the substantial subsidies created by the US CHIPS Act, which attempted to onshore more semiconductor manufacture. (We should also mention Nvidia, whose products are traditionally used for graphics processing, but are also extremely well suited to modern AI applications - and are also actually manufactured by TSMC.)

Similar concentration has taken place in the server business, with the increasing dominance of a few giant cloud computing companies. Amazon Web Services and Microsoft's Azure platform battle for dominance, with Google's Cloud Platform in a distant third place. All of these, notably, are spin-offs of some of the largest existing technology concerns (sometimes called 'hyperscalers'). This is arguably more of a natural monopoly. Though it is easier to build your own data centre in a particular location than it is to, say, create a competing rail line or sewer network to displace an incumbent, very similar problems result - capacity issues (whether wasteful overprovisioning or unnecessary bottlenecks), vendor lock-in due to very slightly different interfaces to very similar underlying services (somewhat analogous to the proliferation of different railway gauges in the 19th century), and so on.

Because these are private monopolies, meanwhile, they are subject to the same irrational contingencies of the business cycle as other capitalist firms. This is very clearly visible today, with enormous capital investment in new data centres to deal with demand for much-hyped AI applications, which are monstrously power- and water-hungry (for cooling). Is this really wise? So far, the boom in large language models has produced little more than novelty toys (normally slightly broken toys at that). There is no sign that a great breakthrough is coming; these things do tend to come as a surprise, of course, but the only breakthrough worth having would mean making these things more *efficient*. The main purpose of all this expenditure seems to be merely a vain attempt to restore the kind of ready access to capital the tech industry enjoyed in the low-interest-rate era.

A socialised version of the cloud giants - call it the People's Cloud Platform, let's say - would take advantage of the very real economies

of scale on offer here, but rationalise capacity planning, and allow for a certain amount of experimentation - the deployment of novel chip architectures and operating systems, for example - that would then be available to all, not just the customers of some particular vendor at a steep mark-up. A democratically planned cloud, in short, would bring some of the same rigour and experimentation we have seen in the open-source movement at its best to a different part of the overall IT picture.

Future

Which leaves us with, precisely, the problem of proprietary software and open source. The response of some on the left - anarchistic technopians, say - has been gleefully enthusiastic, and seen great promise in the open source model for a modern technological economy *not* based on private property. On the opposite end, some more sceptical Marxists have viewed it as little more than an appendage of the tech giants.

The wonder of the dialectic is that it can be both. It is certainly the case that much of the value of open-source software accrues in profits to major tech firms who use it in commercial offerings, and this is more and more the case. It is also true that, as a result, the population of contributors to open source software has shifted from the old mass of enthusiastic volunteers to engineers being paid deliberately by companies to work on these projects, sometimes on a very large scale. The dominance of certain major individuals in the ecosystem is also a sticking point. Yet it remains a gift economy, albeit one fraying a little at the edges; and in certain critically important areas it has outperformed proprietary equivalents to an astonishing degree. The tech giants have glommed onto it to *avoid being left behind*.

In that respect, there is some real utopian promise here that should not be dismissed. We could draw the analogy with Marx's occasional references in *Capital* to experiments in self-management in factories, or even - more distantly - his musings on the potential future of the *mir* village commune system in Russia, which might perhaps be transformed directly into a fully collective agricultural economy if revolution were successful in Russia's urban centres. The point was not that the *mir* was *the* form of the future, never mind some particular Owenite scheme, but that they were things that pointed imperfectly to the future and were thus raw material for it in a real sense.

Certainly, the capitalist drive for profit makes large parts of our critical IT infrastructure *less* reliable, *less* secure and *more* wasteful. Who knows how we will make operating systems in the future - but one hopes it will be more like Linux, and less like Windows! ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. CrowdStrike's own post-mortem has more details: www.crowdstrike.com/blog/falcon-update-for-windows-hosts-technical-details.
2. www.crowdstrike.com/falcon-content-update-remediation-and-guidance-hub/.
3. See, for example, the comments of operating systems veteran Brendan Gregg: www.brendangregg.com/blog/2024-07-22/no-more-blue-fridays.html.

REVIEW

Flip-flopping programmatically

David Lockwood *The politics of the Malayan Communist Party from 1930 to 1948* NUS Press, 2024, pp248, £31

Australian historian David Lockwood has provided a great service to the contemporary left - not just for those trying to deepen their historical understanding of Malaysian and Singaporean politics, but those grappling with how the modern workers' movement relates political programme to the tasks of rebuilding a mass movement for socialism.

While the book might sound like an obscure speciality subject for 'Mastermind', it is a little ready reckoner for debates over a range of modern as well as historical questions. How does the workers' movement regard mass democracy? How should Marxists regard insurrectionary politics? What type of government are we fighting for? What alliances do we build and with what classes? What is the relationship between our minimum and maximum programme? What is the nature of the 'semi-colonial countries' and imperialism? How should a party deal with opportunism on the left and the right? How do you maintain revolutionary politics in a non-revolutionary period?

It is useful to read the book and seek to understand the political shifts it covers through the framework of Mike Macnair's *Revolutionary strategy*.¹ On display we see a party that shifts from what might be called a strategy of revolutionary patience up to World War II, to adopt one of unprincipled coalitionism (with the British), to finally end up embracing a type of Bakuninism in the form of insurrection and 'people's war' without majority support.

Comrade Lockwood's premise is that the Malayan communists took a small party, formed in 1930 (at a congress attended by Ho Chi Minh), to build a legal mass workers' party that emerged as the only national party in Malaya after World War II. He argues this was done via a patient Kautskyian or Gramscian mass strategy of "attrition" (Kautsky) or "position" (Gramsci), building mass legal unions, navigating the zig-zags of Comintern policy and the rise of Mao in China, dealing with the vicissitudes of British imperialism and fighting a largely guerrilla war against the Japanese from 1941-45. (He notes, of course, that the comrades would not have had access to the writings of either Gramsci or Kautsky.)

Then, comrade Lockwood says, in 1948 the party threw away its patiently built, if tenuous, hegemonic position in the workers' movement for a suicidal and adventurist militarist policy - a strategy of "manoeuvre" (Gramsci) or "annihilation" (Kautsky). In part triggered by a British crackdown on legal unions and mass organisations, this took the form of the party abandoning all its legal work in urban areas for a 'people's war' against the British, for insurrection and guerrillaism. This ended in complete defeat and disaster.

In this short review, I will not go into the fascinating historical slalom of the Malayan Communist Party, as they dealt with shifts in Comintern. I will not touch on the question of whether Lai Teck, MCP general secretary from 1939 to 1947, was an imperialist agent (which most historians accept, but Lockwood challenges). I want to briefly focus on the programmatic shifts.

While comrade Lockwood is painstakingly methodical in his



Headhunters pose inside British army base during emergency

sources and argument, he seems to have missed the importance of the fact that the Malayan communists' attitude to programme drifted considerably under the pressure of global politics and internal stresses.

Not a Malaysia expert, my source for this drift is largely in comrade Lockwood's book itself. The Malayan communists started with a maximum programme for communism and a minimum programme for an independent Malaya without imperialism. Yet towards the end of the war, communism fell from the maximum programme and the minimum programme slipped to an accommodation to the ongoing presence of British imperialism.

This opened the door to the militarists, insurrectionists and left opportunists to denounce this right opportunism, which comrade Lockwood seems to gloss over in his defence of Lai Teck and the MCP's previous strategy of building a mass, democratic movement.

Ten big demands

At its founding congress in 1930, the Malayan communists issued "Ten big demands of the Malay revolution" - its minimum programme, its bridge to taking power, where

the party's aim was to drive out the imperialists ... and achieve self-determination for the peoples of Malay in a federal-republican state. This would achieve all the freedoms plus the eight-hour day and other improvements in working conditions and expropriate the landlords, princes, officials and priests (p25).

Elsewhere, Lockwood states: "The MCP's maximum programme was communism. But that could only be achieved through the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Malaya - the destruction of colonialism and the establishment of democracy" (p63). This programmatic approach is well within the orthodoxy of consistent, democratic and revolutionary Marxism. What comrade Macnair might call the revolutionary strategy of the centre.

There were periods of flip-flopping in the early years, as the MCP tried to keep up with the left-right shifts coming from Moscow. But, while the 'third period' created a sectarian split in the European working class, it had little effect in Malaya.

The MCP during the 1930s built a successful mass movement in the unions and a wide range of civil-society organisations. Much of the

urban working class was ethnically Chinese, which dominated the MCP cadre. But the party was always striving to win Indian and Malay workers and farmers, albeit with limited success.

In 1941, after the British fled, forced out by the Japanese, the MCP launched a guerrilla war against the new occupying force as part of a people's front. But it did not surrender its urban bases - it saw this as part of Comintern's popular front period. However, from having had a minimum programme up to 1940 that aimed to drive *all imperialism* out of Malaya, towards the end of the war it saw the return of the British as inevitable - and dropped opposition to British rule from its minimum programme.

"From December 1941, the bedrock of the minimum programme was the expulsion of the Japanese as the occupying colonial power," Lockwood writes (a position consistent with the earlier minimum programme). However, "the second fundamental point in the minimum programme was cooperation with the British" (p64).

By 1943, comrade Lockwood writes, "the MCP's ultimate goals [maximum programme] were governed by what they believed was possible at this stage of the revolution - an independent, democratic republic in which they would work for communism." Its minimum programme accepted the continued role of Britain in Malaya (p68).

This sowed the seeds of division in the party. At the end of the war, the communists and its united front armed wing, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army, surrendered (most of) their weapons to the British and sought to take up solely legal forms of struggle.

At one point in 1947, when the party started to debate again whether to take up arms, as the democratic space for operation under the British became more pinched, a leading proponent of the 'legal path', Chang Ming Ching, told the *Singapore Free Press*: "I do not think the British should be thrown out of Malaya, but I would like to see a big increase in pay and conditions for the workers" (p124). Classic economism.

The adoption of legalism, dropping all underground work and looking to build a tense coalition with the returned British, was a decided shift from a revolutionary strategy of the centre. In 1947 the MCP's minimum programme was for 'self-government' within the British commonwealth and cooperation with the British Labour government.

This position, in part, seemed to be reinforced by the 'official' CPGB

before Moscow ushered in a more hostile position to the western social democratic parties, as the cold war began.

Comrade Lockwood refers to the 'Conference of Communist Parties of the British Empire' in 1947, where Rajani Palme Dutt gave the keynote speech on behalf of the CPGB. It did not call for the "immediate destruction of British imperialism" (p132). While arguing that empire and socialism are irreconcilable, he also suggested a trusteeship system under the United Nations as a device for decolonisation, while the communist parties built up a "united front for national liberation". In some countries, this would mean complete independence (such as India), in others not.

The motion passed on Malaya did not call for independence, but rather condemned British repression and called for a constituent assembly, albeit still under the British.

Back in Malaya, as the British ratcheted up pressure on the democratic movement, the long-simmering faction fight resumed between those from the former military wing led by Chin Peng and the 'peaceful road in cooperation with the British' wing, led by Lai Teck (who was later denounced as an imperialist spy and murdered by Thai communists in 1948).

It was the section around the demobilised armed wing that eventually gained ascendancy, after two bruising internal fights. The 'Malayan Emergency' began and the 'People's War' was launched.

I shall not go into the debates over whether Lai Teck had been an agent of French, then Japanese and British imperialism. Lockwood argues it is probably immaterial to the outcome and was used more as a smear tool. Possibly. Lai Teck did flee Malaya in 1947, with his opponents accusing him of stealing party funds.

Scylla or Charybdis

However, Lockwood seems to accept that the only two choices available to the MCP at this point were a legal road to bourgeois democratic 'normality' under the leadership of Lai Teck or a Maoist People's War under Chin Peng. The strategy of revolutionary patience, of long-term hegemony, of combining legal with illegal work, with a programme to expel imperialism through a strategy of position and internationalism - all seem to vanish. Only the choice between the Scylla of British collusion or the Charybdis of insurrection remain.

Unsaid in the book, but perhaps referred to in some of comrade Lockwood's earlier work,² is a lingering Menshevik and latter-day Stalinite idea that a bourgeois-democratic revolution of national independence must lead to the rule of the bourgeoisie - or at least a governing alliance with the national or 'progressive' bourgeoisie. However, a more developed Marxism - and the history of the 19th and 20th centuries - have shown that such democratic revolutions are most consistently led by the 'subaltern' classes, as Gramsci would express it. The bourgeoisie will not share power with the working class.

Where the bourgeoisie and reactionary forces triumph, it mostly leads to counterrevolution and the oppression of the working class, not the shortest route to socialism.³ In a country like Malaya in the

middle of the last century, a strategy of revolutionary patience would mean a minimum programme for a democratic republic and the expulsion of the imperialists (like the programme the MCP started with in 1930) and a struggle for the formation of a government of the working class and poor farmers.

It is entirely consistent with Marxism that, given the nature of Malayan society at the time, such a democratic revolution would not immediately lead to socialism. By necessity it would maintain capitalist production and exchange relations for a period determined by the pace of the global shift to socialism, albeit under the rule of the workers and famers. The point of departure for advanced socialism must be from the most advanced capitalist economies.

Transition

The transition to socialism can only ripen with the development of and at the pace of a global transformation to socialism. There were debates in the MCP of a possible post-imperialist democratic union with Indonesia. And, given the successful anti-imperialist war for liberation in Vietnam, who knows where that could have led ... but history did not take such a course.

I am no expert on Malaysian history (and the game of alternate histories, while fun, is a fairly arid field to sow). However, it seems that, while comrade Lockwood's analysis starts with tremendous promise, it seems to lose track of the programmatic shift in the MCP. His initial argument for the patient strategy of position and attrition, as set out by Gramsci and Kautsky, is well put. And he correctly identifies the suicidal adventurism that seeks a short cut through insurrectionism and a general strike without the democratic backing of the majority. This all chimes with the arguments of comrade Macnair for a strategy of revolutionary patience. However, he misses the other opportunistic shortcut sought - a peaceful road to "bourgeois-democratic normality" in coalition with British imperialism and sections of the local capitalist class - also a dead end.

Nonetheless, the book is tremendously valuable in prompting these debates, and in setting out the case for a working class programme and strategy based on popular and democratic hegemony.

Comrade Lockwood, it is worth mentioning, is no typical university historian. In the 1970s he was a founding member of the Cliffite International Socialist tendency in Australia. Now a Marxist in the Australian Labor Party, comrade Lockwood's politics have developed beyond the economic limits of Cliffism, to one that takes political programme and the fight for the democratic rule of the working class seriously.

A healthy and welcome direction indeed ●

Marcus Strom

Notes

1. See communistparty.co.uk/resources/library/mike-macnair.
2. Eg, *Cronies or capitalists? The Russian bourgeoisie* Cambridge 2009.
3. Some of these issues have been raised in the context of the protest movements of the 2010s, including the Arab Spring, in the book *If we burn* by Vincent Bevins, who said in an interview with *Jewish Currents* (jewishcurrents.org/vincent-bevins-if-we-burn-mass-protests-2010s) that "the counterrevolution always comes".

PALESTINE



Law of the land

Benjamin Netanyahu took to X to denounce the ICJ's advisory opinion on the illegality of Israel still holding Palestinian territory captured in 1967. Biblical myth supposedly trumps international law. But, as **Mike Macnair** says, the opinion has some considerable legal significance. That is why the mass media in Britain has been so quiet

On July 19 the International Court of Justice at the Hague handed down its "advisory opinion" on the legality of the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories outside Israel's 1967 borders. The opinion had been requested by the United Nations general assembly on January 20 2023, but was subject to the usual delays in legal proceedings - with written statements, and then comments, received from various states between July and November 2023, public oral hearings in February 2024, and another five months to produce the opinion and the dissents and separate opinions.¹

The 77-page 'opinion' is backed by large majorities of the judges: 14 to one for four points: the court has jurisdiction and should in its discretion give an opinion: Israel is under an obligation to end settlement activity; and to withdraw settlers; and Israel is under an obligation to pay reparations (here only the Ugandan vice-president of the court, Julia Sebutinde, was prepared to back the Israeli, US and British position.)

The majority was 12 to three for three other points: that all states are under an obligation not to recognise the situation as legal or to aid or assist Israel; that the UN is under the same obligations; and that the general assembly and security council should consider measures to bring the occupation to an end. Here Sebutinde was joined by French judge Ronny Abraham and the Romanian former foreign minister Bogdan Aurescu.²

That majority was reduced to 11 to four for the two most general points - "that the state of Israel's continued presence in the occupied

Palestinian territory is unlawful" and "that the state of Israel is under an obligation to bring to an end its unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territory as rapidly as possible"; here the dissenters were joined by the Slovakian judge, Peter Tomka.³

Though most of the majority come from countries outside the imperialist core,⁴ Hilary Charlesworth of Australia, Sarah Cleveland of the USA, Yuji Iwasawa of Japan and Georg Nolte of Germany voted with them. It is perhaps significant that these are all academic public international lawyers by background, with less close relationships to foreign ministries than Abraham, Aurescu and Tomka.⁵ Further, the scope of the dissenters is actually rather narrow; only Sebutinde is prepared actually to defend the Israeli, US and UK line.

The lesson to be drawn from all this is that, in spite of the best efforts of the US, Israeli and British states, the overwhelming majority of public international lawyers think that Israel's conduct in the occupied territories is illegal under the terms of the UN charter and other aspects of the law of war. The same is, of course, true of the large majority of states, but this has already been obvious for years from repeated UN general assembly votes.

Responses

Israel denounced the decision as a "decision of lies". Benjamin Netanyahu took to X to claim:

The Jewish people are not

ICJ in session: use its opinion on Palestine against the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' big lie being peddled by mainstream politicians, the capitalist mass media and sections of the fake 'left'

Benjamin Netanyahu instantly resorted to biblical justifications



conquerors in their own land - not in our eternal capital, Jerusalem, and not in the land of our ancestors in Judea and Samaria ... No false decision in The Hague will distort this historical truth and likewise the legality of Israeli settlement in all the territories of our homeland cannot be contested.⁶

The *Jewish Chronicle* has similarly collected a series of pro-Israel denunciations of the decision.⁷

The USA more cautiously characterised it as unhelpfully over-broad - a state department spokesperson contending that "we are concerned that the breadth of the court's opinion will complicate efforts to resolve the conflict".⁸ Josep Borrell, the European Union's high representative for foreign affairs, was similarly cautious. In general, he said that "it is our moral duty to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to all ICJ decisions in a consistent manner, irrespective of the subject in question". But, on the specifics, the opinion "will need to be analysed more thoroughly, including in view of its implications for EU policy".⁹

The British mass media has been largely quiet about the decision - like the policeman who says, 'Nothing to see here: move along now'. This was to be expected, given the prior suppressive response of the media to the January 26 interim ruling on South Africa's case against Israel for genocide in Gaza. What lies behind this suppressive response is the central role played by the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign in recent British politics. In

this context, even the very tentative January decision on the South African claim was an important blow against the Atlanticists' big-lie operation.¹⁰

The July decision on the occupation as such, though merely an 'advisory opinion', is a more severe blow to this smear operation. In particular, the court ruled that "all states are under an obligation not to recognise as legal the situation arising from the unlawful presence of the state of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory and not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by the continued presence of the state of Israel ...". paragraphs 278 and 279 elaborate on the point. In this context, it could be argued that a boycott of products of the settlement is a legal duty, and that arms supplies to Israel constitute "render[ing] aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by the continued presence of the state of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory".

In turn, it arguably follows that the prosecution of activists for direct actions against firms immediately connected with the settlements,¹¹ and against both arms suppliers to Israel and Israeli-owned arms producers, constitutes such "rendering aid or assistance" by the prosecutors. I have argued before that judges who prevent juries from hearing opinions about climate matters, or about the Palestine question, and so on, violate a long-standing constitutional principle of trial by jury.¹² In the light of the ICJ's ruling, such judicial conduct arguably also amounts to the UK state "rendering aid or assistance" to the occupation.

As usual, though, the mere fact

of a judicial decision adverse to the state's agenda has limited effects. The workers' movement needs *its own* media to draw out and publicise the implications, not to follow the mass-media news agenda. The *Morning Star* covered the decision on July 20, quoting Jeremy Corbyn, who rightly argued that the decision vindicated Palestine campaigners. But for some reason the paper mixed the story with one about a wave of settler attacks on the West Bank (relevant, but less politically important to be given prominence).¹³ *Socialist Worker* only reports the decision as the *fourth* item in a Palestine round-up, below the Israeli attack on Yemen, solidarity with Bella Hadid, and the British resumption of aid to the United Nations Works and Relief Agency.¹⁴

I am not saying that these editorial decisions were, *other things apart*, mistaken. It is that they were mistaken because of the continued centrality of the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign in politics (which the Bella Hadid case illustrates), with the consequence that the mass media downplays the ICJ decision, which means that giving it as much prominence as possible is an important task for left media.

Limits

All this said, the ICJ decision has important limits. In particular, it is very valuable for *defensive* politics against the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign. It is much less use for *offensive* politics (as a banner for Palestinian emancipation).

First, as already indicated, it is an *advisory opinion* requested by the UN general assembly. It would be a great achievement if Israel was forced - as the ICJ opinion proposes - to withdraw unconditionally from the territories occupied in 1967. But, although the USA agreed to security council resolutions to this effect in 1967 and 1971, it has blocked all further enforcement action against Israel and will certainly continue to do so, unless either the USA's global military power is overthrown or the costs the alliance with Israel poses on holding down the rest of the Middle East radically expand.

Relatedly, the ICJ decision is legally framed within the UN charter and related treaties

- and in particular the principle that "acquisition of territory by military conquest is inadmissible" (paragraphs 59, 95, 105-08, 157-79) and, to a much lesser extent, on the principle of the right of nations to self-determination (paragraphs 230-43). But these are, in fact, conflicting principles.

The problem this poses may be expressed by an imaginary example. Suppose that 'Borduria' is in possession of a block of territory - call it 'Bled' - acquired some years or centuries ago by conquest, which is inhabited mainly by 'Syldavian' speakers. Now the Syldavian speakers in Bled in a referendum vote overwhelmingly to leave Borduria and join 'Syldavia'. Borduria responds by imposing martial law on Bled. Would Syldavia be justified to invade and annex Bled? On the basis of the principle that acquisition of territory by military force is inadmissible, the answer is clearly not. On the basis of the principle of self-determination it is equally clear that it *is* justified.

My fictional example is, of course, a variant of the numerous 'irridentism' problems of central Europe in the inter-war period resulting from the borders artificially created by the victorious powers via the treaties of Versailles and related treaties. The Palestine question is, in fact, one of these problems. As I wrote four weeks ago, in 1920-22 the League of Nations (meaning, in practice, Britain and France) partitioned the Ottoman vilayet of Syria¹⁵ into four parts, giving Britain and France 'mandates' to run these. The four parts are modern 'Syria' (to France, to be the Muslim part of the French mandate); 'Lebanon' (to France, to be the national home for Levantine Christians); 'Transjordan', modern Jordan (to Britain, to be the Muslim part of the British mandate); and 'Palestine' (to be the national homeland for the Jews).¹⁶

In 1920-21, at the exact same period, Britain partitioned the island of Ireland between the six counties of 'Northern Ireland', to be the national homeland for Ireland's Protestants, and the 26 counties given to the 'Irish Free state' and expected to be Catholic - today's republic of Ireland.

The age and the legitimacy of these two sets of border arrangements are identical. They both rest on nothing more than the power of the imperialists. The principle of self-determination implies that these borders should be overthrown. The principle against conquest implies that they should not.

Both the US interest and the inherent link of the Palestine question to the imperialists' decision to partition Syria in 1920-22 mean that, as comrades from Matzpen argued in the 1960s-70s and comrade Moshé Machover has continued to argue, it is highly unlikely that there can be any solution within the boundaries of mandate Palestine imposed in 1920-22. But from this standpoint, relying on the ICJ opinion that the occupation is unlawful mainly because of the principle that "acquisition of territory by military conquest is inadmissible", is to commit to these borders and hence to undermine the road to a real solution.

So we should use the opinion defensively, but not limit our arguments to those the ICJ has used ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. The very extensive material in the case is collected at www.icj-cij.org/case/186.
2. Abraham was a senior French lawyer, administrator and judge, before he became an ICJ judge director of legal affairs at the French foreign ministry. Aurescu was closely involved in Romanian negotiations for military agreements with the USA. He was elected as an ICJ judge in November 2023, defeating the Russian candidate - the first time that Russia was unrepresented on the ICJ.
3. Tomka is something of a 'Vicar of Bray', having begun his career in the foreign ministry of the old Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and being promoted after 1989. He moved to the Slovak diplomatic service after the division of the country in 1992.
4. The court's president, Nawaf Salam of Lebanon; Dalveer Bhandari of India; Leonardo Nemer Caldeira Brant of Brazil; Juan Manuel Gomez Robledo of Mexico; Dire Tladi of South Africa; Hanqin Xue of China; Abdulquawi Ahmen Yusuf of Somalia.
5. I should perhaps note that the role of academics as judges in public international law is very longstanding, going back to the *ad hoc* arbitration arrangements that existed for centuries before the creation of the ICJ. Sebutinde's career is more that of an advocate than either an academic or a diplomat. Outline CVs of the judges are available at www.icj-cij.org/current-members.
6. time.com/7000495/un-court-says-israel-presence-palestinian-territories-illegal.
7. www.thejc.com/news/world/israels-settlement-regime-illegal-under-international-law-icj-judge-holds-sac12f8h.
8. www.reuters.com/world/us-criticizes-icj-opinion-israeli-occupation-palestinian-territories-2024-07-20.
9. www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/eu-backs-icj-ruling-on-illegal-israeli-occupation.
10. See the discussion in 'Symbolic victory in The Hague' *Weekly Worker* February 1 2024: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1476/symbolic-victory-in-the-hague.
11. This limitation concerns the *legality* of BDS, not its *political advisability*. I have written on the second issue twice, the second time modifying the first: 'Boycotts and working class principle' *Weekly Worker* October 11 2007 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/692/boycotts-and-working-class-principle); 'No change of line' *Weekly Worker* January 20 2022 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1379/no-change-of-line).
12. 'Defend and extend the jury system' *Weekly Worker* November 23 2023 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1468/defend-and-extend-the-jury-system).
13. morningstaronline.co.uk/article/settlers-launch-wave-attacks-after-uns-highest-court-rules-israel-must-end-colonisation-west.
14. socialistworker.co.uk/palestine-2023/israel-targets-yemen-in-bid-for-wider-middle-east-war. The current edition of *The Socialist* covers July 18-31, so does not feature the story; the AWL's *Western Solidarity*, similarly, covers July 17-August 7.
15. Before it was an Ottoman vilayet, Syria was the Roman imperial diocese of *Oriens*; then the centre of the Umayyad Caliphate; then a province of the Abbasid Caliphate; then, after the crusades and before the Ottoman conquest, a vassal of Mamluk Egypt.
16. See 'Minimum programme again' *Weekly Worker* June 27: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1497/minimum-programme-again.

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.

The *Weekly Worker* is licensed by November Publications under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence: creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode. ISSN 1351-0150.

Subscriptions: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/subscribe

Online Communist Forum



Sunday July 28 5pm

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

Use this link to register: communistparty.co.uk/ocf

Organised by CPGB: communistparty.co.uk and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk
For further information, email Stan Keable at Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk

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

weekly worker

**Legalise all
drugs - including
tobacco**

A very Labour ban

Eddie Ford welcomes any moves towards promoting public health, but a total ban on smoking - as with the so-called 'war on drugs' - is senseless and likely to be counterproductive

In his doomed venture to stay in No10, Rishi Sunak spat out many policies and promises to cohere core voters - most notably the absurd King Canute-like pledge to 'stop the boats'. But there was always one that seemed contrariwise to this effort: namely banning the sale of tobacco products to anyone born after 2009.

Naturally, scores of Tories denounced it as an egregious example of the nanny state and a "slippery slope" that could lead to bans on fast food or alcohol. In a free vote back in April, 57 Conservative MPs voted against the proposed bill and over 100 abstained. One of the most prominent rebels was Kemi Badenoch, a current frontrunner to become the new Tory leader. During the Commons debate, she criticised the bill on the grounds that "people born a day apart will have permanently different rights" - factually correct. But Sunak thought it would be a clever piece of triangulation to potentially capture Labour voters - a plan that does not look particularly smart now - and, of course, Sir Keir Starmer threw his weight behind the ban - the bill passing by 383 to 67.

Logic

Of course, the logic behind it has been with us for a while. It was the Tony Blair government that banned tobacco advertising, and then smoking in public buildings and workplaces - using the same sort of arguments we hear now. Then a subsequent Tory government enforced uniformity of packaging on tobacco products, and banned their sale in small quantities - first packs of 10 cigarettes and then enforcing a minimum of 25 grams on packs of rolling tobacco.

But it was never going to stop there and the Starmer government swiftly adopted Sunak's policy last week as part of the king's speech: the Tobacco and Vapes Bill would see the minimum age that a person can legally buy cigarettes increase by a year every 12 months - meaning that those now aged 14 years and below will never be able to legally purchase cigarettes. Something that Matthew Taylor, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, described as "game-changing". Similarly, professor Chris Whitty, chief scientific advisor at the department of health and social care, said the move to create a smoke-free country would be "a major step forward in public health".

The bill also paves the way for changes to the sale and branding of vapes to reduce their appeal to young people. Trading standards officials will get more powers to fine retailers who sell vapes and tobacco to under-18s - raising the immediate problem of *workability*, as is always the case, when it comes to bans and prohibitions. Enforcement, after all, is down to those behind the counter



Vincent van Gogh 'Skull with a burning cigarette' (1886)

of every corner shop in the country. Fast-forward to 2039 - they will have the thankless task of trying to work out whether a customer is 29 or 30 - would you even bother? What about smuggling in tobacco from abroad?

In other words, the law of diminishing returns kicks in regarding these restrictions. Either they do not actually reduce legal consumption or they shift consumption to the black market - making it far more dangerous, as everything is now completely unregulated and you could be taking *anything*. This is something we have seen in its full idiocy with drug prohibitions - organised criminals moving in and fighting among themselves to take over a lucrative market created in the first place by the government (and not hesitating to adulterate the drugs if that means they get a mark-up on their competitors). This unhappy

situation could be recreated with the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, leading to even *less* quality in tobacco - not increased public health as claimed by Whitty.

Cynicism

Having said that, no-one in their right mind would deny that the tobacco industry is totally venal and has a history of relentless cynicism - doing everything it can, including employing tame scientists, to stifle and ridicule the bountiful evidence about the harm done by smoking. A perfect example was given by James J Morgan during his second stint as CEO of the Philip Morris company. He infamously claimed in 1997 that cigarettes are no more addictive than gummy bears. Such mendacity is highly reminiscent of the fossil fuel industry, which has also come out with endless crap.

For all his promises, Rishi Sunak ditched the anti-smoking bill during the 'wash-up' process, when outgoing governments choose which policies to fast-track and which to drop. Those of a suspicious nature would hardly find it an accident that this happened after intensive lobbying by the world's largest tobacco firms and intervention from MPs and think tanks with close ties to tobacco firms - something that has been extensively documented by organisations like Action on Smoking and Health.

Various documents and freedom-of-information requests reveal how four of the world's largest tobacco firms threatened ministers with a legal backlash. Imperial and British American Tobacco (BAT) wrote in February to the then health secretary, Victoria Atkins, protesting that the consultation process preceding legislation was "unlawful", because industry views "had not been considered". Such claims often went along with public statements about wanting to "phase out" cigarettes. For instance, Philip Morris International chief executive, Jacek Olczak, indicated in 2021 interviews that the company could stop selling cigarettes in the UK within 10 years - how's that going, Jacek? BAT, which has previously advocated a "smokeless future", proposed raising the age of sale to 21 instead - a favourite delaying tactic.

As night follows day, tobacco firms courted rightwing and libertarian Tory MPs. Three months after Sunak announced his policy on smoking, the then Clacton MP, Giles Watling - defeated by Nigel Farage in the general election - attended a "business lunch" with officials from Japan Tobacco International. Strangely enough, Watling then proposed an amendment that would have replaced Sunak's proposals with a new minimum age of 21. Two Conservative MPs, including Kemi Badenoch's closest political aide, also attended a lunch and drinks reception hosted by the 'Freedom Organisation for the Right to Enjoy Smoking Tobacco' - a rather malignant libertarian organisation. Its current director, Simon Clark, once stating that "if people wish to eat themselves to death by eating too much fatty food, that has to be their choice".

Folly

Now, there is an undeniable rationale for such a ban, as no-one can argue any more that smoking is harmless or actually has health benefits. As for vaping, while it might be better on some points, there is just no scientific evidence to call it 'safe'. Surely then it would be perverse for socialists to object? Anti-Capitalist Resistance, for one, lists Sir Keir's Tobacco and Vapes Bill as a piece of legislation it can support alongside ending the Rwanda "racist project", the "gradual

renationalisation" of the railways, imposing VAT on private school fees, and so on.¹ The Communist Party of Britain's *Morning Star* also appears to be enthusiastic about the bill, though - par for the course - it presents no supporting evidence itself, preferring to speak through the mouths of Labour politicians, union officials, health experts, etc.

King James

Far from being a modern phenomenon, anti-smoking sentiment actually has a long tradition. For example, King James I had a strong dislike of tobacco, writing one of the earliest known anti-smoking polemics in his 1604 *A counterblaste to tobacco*. Rather unfairly, he blamed indigenous native Americans for bringing tobacco to Europe and decried tobacco's odour as "hateful to the nose". In an attempt to snuff out the burgeoning industry, James imposed swingeing excise taxes and tariffs. But it all came to naught and in the end the king thought that if you can't beat 'em, then you might as well join 'em, and created a royal monopoly.

But all the evidence shows that prohibition is unlikely to work. The most spectacular case is the alcohol ban in the United States - a folly of epic proportions that led to anti-social drunkenness, the blinding of many with noxious concoctions and, of course, transformed the Mafia from a petty protection racket into a formidable national organisation that still blights America today. Yet, under capitalism, legality itself is self-reproducing, having a tendency to create powerful vested interests wrapped around the substances that have created so much wealth for the companies concerned. Some of that money is used to throw at lobbyists, grease wheels and pay off critics. For everything spent on treating lung cancer and heart disease, the tobacco industry can equally cite - becoming its own insidious truth - the huge sums earned by the exchequer in large sales taxes. Furthermore, how else do you explain the fact that two drugs - tobacco and alcohol - are legal, even though they are clearly more dangerous than many popular recreational drugs that are banned? Something not based on science or rationality.

Contrary to what popular opinion might think or the bourgeoisie tells us, the starting point of communists is the freedom to do as one wants with one's own body and life. Therefore drugs should be legal. Communists are unequivocal about that. Not that we dismiss the health risks and associated health costs - that would be idiotic. But what we rely on is education and persuasion, not prohibition ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. anticapitalistresistance.org/the-labour-programme-in-the-kings-speech-what-next-for-the-left.