

# weekly **worker**



**Joshua myth of conquest provides Zionism with its justification for ethnic cleansing and genocide**

- Letters and debate
- Gaza's health crisis
- Open letter to Sir Keir
- Germany's AfD triumph

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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# HOW FAR IS ISRAEL PREPARED TO GO?





## LETTERS



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

## Machover rejected

Comrade GG makes a number of important errors, basic misreadings and misinterpretations in his August 29 letter responding to mine (August 22). Among other things, I slated Moshé Machover's article ('Promise myth as template', July 25), criticised the *Weekly Worker's* reliance on Machover and Tony Greenstein as supposed 'experts' on Palestinian liberation and also the complete absence of the *Palestinian* communist and Marxist-Leninist perspectives in the *Weekly Worker*. None of this, I think, is accidental.

I take GG's points in order. Machover in his article completely and deliberately fails to critique Judaism as a religion and as an ideological underpinning for the Israeli state. Simply copying and pasting vast quotations from the Old Testament with no accompanying analysis, let alone critique, is to do the precise opposite. I do *not* oppose "criticism of religious barbarism", I opposed the *uncritical regurgitation* of such barbarism from the Old Testament with no supporting analysis or criticism by Machover.

One might have thought some sort of counter-narrative to the violent mythology of the *Bible*, setting out on the basis of historical evidence our best understanding of movements of peoples in the region at that time and the true histories of various peoples, might have been appropriate in an article in a paper claiming to be Marxist, and which would have effectively demolished most of the myths, lies and 'justifications' for mass murder contained in such quotes. But I don't think that was Machover's aim at all.

A "broad socialist revolution in the Middle East" would, of course, be a wonderful thing and we would all be very much in favour of it, but Machover is deliberately *counterposing* such a region-wide revolution to any efforts by the Palestinian people to liberate themselves, primarily through a national democratic revolution - and, yes, ideally through transforming it in a socialist direction. This is my point about Machover *rejecting the capacity of the Palestinian people to liberate themselves*: he thinks they have to be liberated via the efforts of other Arabs throughout the region. Hardly a 'pro-Palestinian' perspective.

By saying a region-wide socialist revolution *has to take place in order to liberate the Palestinian people*, Machover is, I think, deliberately kicking the prospect of any form of liberatory revolution into the far-distant long grass. So a *region-wide* socialist revolution is *more likely* in countries which, yes, are component parts of world imperialism, but also contain very significant feudal elements, such as monarchies, warlords, peasant agricultures and large peasant populations, than in a fairly well developed western-type capitalist state, with a developed working class (ie, Israel)?

We are not into prediction games (unlike Machover, who loves to boast how many predictions he gets right), but it seems to me that - given the Palestinian people's direct oppression by the Israeli state, their decades-long heroic resistance against colonisation, occupation and violent repression, their proven capacity for organisation, the many formations within the Palestinian resistance, including significant

ones aligned within the communist and Marxist-Leninist traditions, the development of independent structures and organisations during mass democratic resistance (including and especially in the intifadas), the fact the Israeli economy and society is a relatively advanced capitalist economy, the fact Israel is so heavily dependent on western imperialism for survival, etc, etc - revolutionary upheavals are significantly more likely here than in either the feudal Arab monarchies or those more advanced Arab countries, which have been deliberately devastated by imperialist wars and imperialist-fostered ethnic divisions.

Machover's advocacy of region-wide socialist revolution - as *opposed to the self-liberation by and of the Palestinian people* - reminds me of that great ultra-left bourgeois 'communist', Grigori Zinoviev, prating on about "world proletarian revolution" in the abstract in the Communist International in the early 1920s. Yet, when faced with a very specific, concrete, immediate and local example of a real proletarian revolution - in Russia in October 1917 - he, along with his bourgeois pal, Kamenev, not only voted against it, but *published* their opposition and the *very plans for the Bolshevik armed rising* (no less!) to their class enemies! Yes, Lenin, inexplicably 'forgave' them, but their subsequent treacherous factional behaviour - first, denying the possibility of socialist revolution, denying the possibility of actually building socialism in Soviet Russia, and, second, doing their damndest to undermine it, as it was being constructed in front of their eyes and indeed the working masses of the world - ensured they eventually obtained their just deserts.

GG makes the absurd assertion that I think there are "no Marxist, pro-Palestinian" writers! No, I don't - that was not my point at all. It was why, given *there is a vast wealth* of socialist, communist, Marxist-Leninist literature, analyses, etc, with a strong track record of organisation, actions and resistance *within the Palestinian resistance and liberation movement itself*, why does the *Weekly Worker* make no use of this whatsoever? Why the extreme reluctance to use *any* Palestinian sources? Relying instead on two oddball writers, both Jewish living in Britain (the former colonial power), and with highly individual views on Palestine/Israel, shared by very few others.

Machover does not, in my view, advocate the self-liberation of the Palestinian people. Indeed, his contempt for the Palestinian people comes through time and time again in his writings - this on top of his recent escapade uncritically publishing vast tracts of the Old Testament to 'explain' current Israeli ideology and policy. Greenstein advocates the "destruction of the state of Israel". By who or what and with what consequences to the present Israeli people? I suspect we know the answers... This is no 'socialism' I recognise (1930s national socialism possibly).

Of course, western Marxists and revolutionaries can express their independent thoughts, analyses and perspectives on how revolutionary changes *may* happen in the Middle East region, Palestine-Israel in particular, while, more importantly, providing full 100% solidarity to the current struggles of the Palestinian people for their liberation. My point was that it is inappropriate, and indeed pointless, for westerners to be *prescribing in detail* what should happen, even to the extent of attempting to write detailed

constitutional outcomes of any such revolutionary changes. That is indeed to get the relationship between oppressor and oppressed completely wrong, is the *opposite* of providing true solidarity and of the concept of *oppressed peoples being able to resist and liberate themselves* in ways they choose or have no choice.

I want the *Weekly Worker* to be a *better* Marxist and communist paper than it currently is. That means being genuinely internationalist in its perspectives and approach and engaging more productively and effectively with the genuine communist tradition.

Andrew Northall  
Kettering

## Lazare goes

Firstly let me congratulate the *Weekly Worker* on having dispensed with the services of Daniel Lazare. Although he wrote many penetrating articles on politics in the United States, his obstinate equation of Hamas with the genocidal Israeli state was beyond the pale.

The Palestinians are most definitely experiencing genocide. The political mood amongst the vast majority of Israeli Jews is exterminationist. A state where 65% of Israeli Jews support or see nothing wrong in sodomising and raping prisoners and engaging in the most horrendous of tortures is one that should be condemned unequivocally by socialists. To compare the victims with the oppressor is obscene.

That Lazare could equate Hamas and the Palestinians with these Zionist barbarians shows how deep Jewish chauvinism has penetrated into his soul. October 7 was not some anti-Jewish pogrom, as he makes out, nor an orgy of murder.

Let me quote from a *Times of Israel* article on October 8, before Israel's propaganda narrative had got off the ground. Reut Karp, told of "an alarming testimony from her children about the murder of their father, Dvir Karp, and his partner Stav in Kibbutz Re'im". She described how both the father and his partner were killed when a Hamas gunman broke into their house.

Her two children were there. If the 'beheaded babies' atrocity propaganda by Israel was true, then the Hamas gunman would have done what Israel's soldiers have done in Gaza and that is murder the children too. Not a bit of it. *The Times of Israel* describes how "The terrorist calmed down my Daria and Lavi, covered them in a blanket, took lipstick and wrote on the wall: 'The al-Qassam [Brigades] people don't murder children.'"

There you have the difference between the genocidal racist and the oppressed. In fact two babies were killed on October 7, both accidentally. Compare that to the orgy of child-killing by imperialism's bastard state.

On a personal level I have a friend, who I worked with in the Palestine solidarity movement in Britain, who voluntarily went back after October 7 to be with her family. I worry every day about the genocidal maniacs who are trying to kill her, her sick mother and the rest of their family. She tells me how tired she is having to constantly flee from one area to another, as Israel hunts them down. To read, in a Marxist paper, that the oppressed and oppressor are no different is really too much. Would someone who had compared the Warsaw Ghetto fighters to SS General Jürgen Stroop, who commanded the Nazi forces be tolerated in a socialist paper?

I am, however, flattered to be

called an "appalling individual with appalling views" by the arid Stalinist, Andrew Northall. I must have done something right in my life!

Northall is nothing if not a Philistine! Moshé Machover's highly interesting article, 'Promise myth as template' (July 25), was clearly beyond his comprehension. He should stick to the *Morning Star* or possibly *Socialist Worker* and avoid anything too challenging!

Anyone who has any understanding of Zionism will know how the *Bible* has been plundered in order to justify genocide and ethnic cleansing in Palestine. As GG explained last week, these biblical verses are being used, often out of context, in order to justify the barbarities we see today.

Just as Israel Shahak brought his erudition and scholarship to bear in what he wrote, so too does Moshé. I disagree with him on certain things, notably the question of the Israeli Jewish nation, but to disparage him in the way Northall does just illustrates how little the latter has to say.

Northall counterposes a Palestinian perspective to a Jewish anti-Zionist one, as if these are somehow counterposed. I work with Palestinians all the time in the solidarity movement. We discuss all the questions that Northall mentions, such as what type of state will enable a permanent solution. There is no one Palestinian or Jewish perspective - it depends on your politics.

Indeed Palestinians expect anti-Zionist Jews to speak out. We are the living proof that what is happening in Palestine is not a sectarian or communal struggle, but a question of settler-colonialism. We are the proof that support for the Palestinians is not anti-Jewish.

I'm sorry that Northall does not understand these most basic of points. Perhaps that is because of the Stalinist tradition of firstly supporting the Zionists in the Nakba and then indulging in an orgy of anti-Semitism culminating in the Slansky trial and Stalin's 'Doctors Plot'.

Tony Greenstein  
Brighton

## Lazare parting

I'm glad to read the letter in last week's *Weekly Worker* that a decision was made to part company with Daniel Lazare (August 29).

As the letter says, he did write many interesting articles, but on the issue of Gaza he never showed the least heart for the people being massacred by the Zionist war machine. He could by accepting their tremendous suffering have gained sympathy for those murdered on October 7, but instead he closed that possibility down and hardened hearts.

There is room to discuss why many genuine socialists of Jewish origin have not the least sympathy for the Palestinian people who had been wiped out in their consciousness long before October 7 - and have been wiped out physically since then in vast and ever growing numbers. Why are such vast numbers of Jews in Israel and around the world not only supporting the determined mass murder of fellow human beings in Gaza and the West Bank, but are not in the least troubled by this ongoing extermination and destruction of all infrastructure?

And the other clear fact is that the European and US governments are doing everything in their power to feed this unholy hate war with arms and complete media machinery backing. It proves everything said by communists and socialists about these former colonial powers. All of them should be removed, as they

are an ideological plague. Only communism has the answers and the practical and organisational ideology to achieve the human necessity of peace and unity the world over.

Elijah Traven  
Hull

## Lazare replies

I'm glad that the CPGB has decided to make public my correspondence with Jack Conrad on the genocide question. If it sparks further discussion, then I'm all for it, since that has been my goal all along.

But I must take exception to Jack's statement in his August 29 letter accusing me of "dismissing the whole notion of genocide in Gaza/Palestine as 'garbage'". This makes it seem that I am dismissing the Palestinian plight, which is entirely untrue. The only time I used the word "garbage" was in my original June 14 article in which I stated: "But, based on the gigo principle of 'garbage in, garbage out', a meaningless term can only lead to further confusion."

Plainly, "garbage" in this instance refers to the theoretical problems associated with the genocide concept, not to the all too real suffering of those on the ground. Indeed, I described Gaza elsewhere in our correspondence as a "nightmare", a war that "has done nothing but bring down ruin on the Palestinian masses", and a conflict that at best will reduce Gazans to "a state of slavery, as they try to eke out an existence amid the ruins". It is my sympathy with the Palestinian masses that causes me to see red whenever people like Conrad equivocate over Hamas's role.

For those interested, I've posted a copy of the original June 14 article at [daniellazare.com](http://daniellazare.com).

Daniel Lazare  
New York

## Being upfront

Mike Macnair has indirectly posed an important question about the democratic-republican conception of socialism to the comrades of the Marxist Unity Group, the Revolutionary Communist Organisation and *The Partyist* ('Solidarity, not sectionalism' August 29). The economic demands of the minimum programme are "generally aimed at *strengthening the position of the working class as a class* in a society that remains" (under workers' political rule) "either capitalist or a 'mixed economy'".

Comrade Macnair is "less than entirely clear" that there is common ground between these organisations and the CPGB on this question, as it is not made explicit in their texts. The *Draft programme* of the CPGB, however, is explicit: "Socialism is not a mode of production. It is the transition from capitalism to communism. Socialism is communism which emerges from capitalist society. It begins as capitalism with a workers' state."

This persistence of the capitalist mode of production is challenging territory, because we are not just opposed to the *political* rule of the capitalist class through their state, but also their *economic* rule through their enterprises: the ordering of daily life in workplaces through managerial control - a practice which spills over into the functioning of the workers' movement. Yet, while we do not want to leave relations at the point of production unchanged in the short term, a rapid and forced collectivisation of petty proprietors has proven to cause immense dislocation.

Some disruption is an inevitable part of proletarian revolution - the old regime has to be replaced and a new ruling class, the working class,



has to come to power. And the threat exists of trade barriers being put up against the new workers' republic, creating a state of siege and the eventual reassertion of bourgeois rule.

How then can a workers' republic avoid its economy being thrown into depression by external pressure? Spreading the revolution only gets it so far: the working class will have to sustain itself where it has already taken power.

The 'commanding heights of the economy' - the largest firms and banks which exert monopoly power over the petty proprietors - are surely targets for rapid socialisation. But legislation of the new workers' republic, the market power of its state-owned enterprises and the operation of a free and independent trade union movement across the whole economy will have to condition a remaining capitalist sector. The challenge will be to prevent the collapse or short-term decline of these small and medium-sized enterprises, while at the same time ensuring that the terms and conditions of their workers do not fall behind the rest of the class.

If this is the reality of the situation, as the minimum programme is implemented in future, then we need to be upfront about it today.

**Ansell Eade**  
Balham

## Climate hysteria

I must confess my heart sank when I read Jack Conrad's piece, 'Nuclear power's useful idiots' (August 29). You've bit by bit been reflecting the hysterical contagion of climate panic, which has infected the left and now is fully absorbed in the *Weekly Worker*/CPGB PCC too.

The logic of this hysteria is that we stop production of coal, steel, oil and gas and that consequently we stop the use of everything made by that use. Which basically means we give up life, at least for the majority of us on the planet. I'm sure that a few tiny communes of small groups reviving a sort of hunter-gathering, primitive existence might survive, but for the mass of humanity it means devastation. No power, consistent heat, medicine, sanitation, transport.

No more will communists be the defenders of the proletariat - the architects of the future with their power to build and produce and make the necessities of life, to invent new methods and discoveries. Will you be standing with the steelworkers demanding continuation of the steel we use daily? Will you be standing with oil and gas onshore and offshore, demanding that their vital work continue, as you once stood with miners demanding no pit closures? Or will you be in the ranks of those eccentric flat-earthers trying to undo the progress we have made and the miles we have come?

The idiocy of the slogan, 'Just Stop Oil', is clear, when the people who declare it haven't the slightest intention of trying to live without oil. Do you seriously think that steel production, or the raw steel we use every day, is going to end with the closure of British blast furnaces? Of course not. The wind turbine foolishness will only be possible by their importation from China and elsewhere, where they are made, as are all others, by use of the blast furnace and coal made into coke. The propeller blades will be made by use of petro-chemicals, and thousands of tons of concrete and cement (made, by the way, with coal) - the bloody things won't operate without thousands of litres of oil. What product of nasty fossil fuel you close down here we will replace by nasty fossil fuel extracted elsewhere by imports. What patently hypocritical posturing.

I am reminded of Harold Wilson's "white heat of technology", as he embarked on his pit closure plan - which closed more mines than Margaret Thatcher did! He said we shouldn't be sending men down the pit, working in cramped, small places with water dripping on their backs. No, we would change all of that with nuclear power - clean, safe and modern. Because Wilson clearly thought nuclear power grew on trees, he obviously didn't know there were Namibian miners working in conditions 10 times worse than ours with radioactive water dripping through on them.

While I thought Emil Jacobs was trying to apply some much-needed common sense ('Nature's gift to humanity', August 22), he misses the point that uranium needs mining, and that mining requires heavy plant, steel, digging equipment and, of course, oil. Jack too cites a host of alternative sources of power, but all of them depend for their existence on coal, oil and gas. There are no - none, zilch - renewables which don't require fossil fuels to exist. When one thinks of the steel and concrete that goes into a nuclear plant, would it be done without coal mining and steel making? I'm sorry to have to raise some fairly basic facts, but we don't grow it: we mine it.

The panic over climate change is just that: it's the way you choose to tell the story, to contextualise it, put it in perspective and proportion. The climate is warming, slightly - in a historic context that's not so unusual, but, even if it were, we will adapt. That's what we do, and we are able to do this at this juncture precisely because of fossil fuels.

There are almost nine billion of us on this planet. We survive and live to the standards we do, albeit with gross inequalities which are totally unnecessary, because of fossil fuels. In time, yes, we will not need blast furnaces - that will be when we stop using steel and move on to some other substance, which is harder and more adaptable - probably micro-biotic. I'm sure both oil and gas or coal will be used in smaller and smaller quantities, but it will be when we already have alternative products which suit our purposes equally efficiently, not because of moral objection. Likewise, we can't uninvent our discoveries and progress, and go back to primitive, inefficient methods.

Perhaps only in this decade and on this shell-shocked island, where the proletariat has been all but decimated, would self-declared communists advocate covering the whole of the country with giant windmills!

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## My trauma

I find myself quite disappointed with the standard of the CPGB's replies to my recent letters (July 25 and August 22). Comrade Macnair's article ('Solidarity, not sectionalism', August 29), fails to fundamentally understand the unique nature of the struggle for trans liberation, I feel - both in an abstract, global sense and in a practical, local sense within the British Isles. Whilst other comrades will raise issues with the ideological and philosophical principles with which you agitate, I will restrict myself to some smaller-level critiques.

The first issue that I take umbrage with is Macnair's framing of the fundamental trauma that comes from transitioning and the political responses which emerge from that. He argues against those "who argue that gender transition is *in itself* an act of resistance against the capitalist patriarchy regime". He continues: "This is a mistaken idea, like 1970s

arguments that homosexuality was in itself an act of resistance, or the arguments of Pat Califia in the 1981 book *Samois* that BDSM activity could be in itself an act of resistance."

This is a fundamental misunderstanding of the socio-cultural shift that is transitioning. The act of changing one's gender is by its own nature fundamentally a rejection of the capitalist paradigm of social reproduction. I have spent lots of time rejecting the role society expects of me as someone born as a 'bloke', and this by necessity has required the rejection of the position I hold in capital's social reproductive hierarchy.

Furthermore the insanely high costs of medical transitioning only further reinforces my position in society, as an 'other' within the capitalist gender hierarchy. As such by necessity I have been excluded from the capitalist centre of politics, with the right wing calling me a child-rapist, blood-drinking degenerate, hellbent on destroying the west (as an aside I will say that the last claim is true!).

I and my many siblings of varied genders are forced into revolutionary politics. Now, of course, many remain in the illusory farce of the 'left' - their politics being nothing more than vague moralising and that godforsaken phrase of 'eat the rich'. Yet many turn towards genuinely revolutionary politics, I am one of them, and in the fight for a Communist Party, we will win over more.

The crucial role that communists play in the fight against capitalism must by necessity require the intervention into arenas not directly related to the class struggle, and winning them over to a basis of class politics. This will include ethnic and religious minorities, as well as sexual and gender ones. This fight must emphasise the fundamental nature of the notion that the negation of class oppression will not in and of itself negate their oppression, but the negation of capitalism *is* the only way for total human liberation.

I do not call for the dissolution of the communist movement into a broad coalition of interest groups oppressed by capitalism, united under the farce of the hammer and sickle (if were to do that, I would join the Revolutionary Communist International). But I do call for communists to take the revolutionary leadership that history pushes us into, in every arena of struggle.

**Brynhilda Olding**  
Australia

## Labour vote

At Ilford South, the Labour Party removed Sam Tarry as its parliamentary candidate because he had supported a strike, and replaced him with Jas Athwal, who rented out flats with black mould and with ant infestations. Athwal was the leader of the local council, so it is inconceivable that no-one knew that he was also a slum landlord. It seems the Labour Party actively preferred a slum landlord to a trade unionist.

Meanwhile, Jess Phillips has made the ridiculous and offensive claim that she had been given priority in hospital treatment because of her support for a ceasefire in Gaza. As much as anything else, far from her being known for such support, that issue very nearly cost her her seat. Her latest remarks give aid and succour to the recent rioters. She should be sacked as a minister.

Phillips and Athwal should both lose the Labour whip, and Athwal, at least, should be expelled from the Labour Party for having brought it into disrepute. Obviously, none of those things is going to happen. Do not vote Labour.

**David Lindsay**  
Lanchester

# ACTION

## Wigan Diggers festival

**Saturday September 7, 11.15am 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/events/493278123654982](http://www.facebook.com/events/493278123654982).

## End the genocide - stop arming Israel

**Saturday September 7, 12 noon:** National demonstration. Assemble Pall Mall, London SW1. March to the Israeli embassy. Demand the government immediately ends all complicity in Israel's violence and apartheid, and pushes for a permanent ceasefire now. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events).

## Don't let the far right divide us

**Saturday September 7, 12 noon:** Counter-protest, George Square, Glasgow G2. Refugees welcome - nae Nazis in Glasgow. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: [www.facebook.com/events/1627401711391178](http://www.facebook.com/events/1627401711391178).

## Stand up for choice

**Saturday September 7, 2pm:** Counter-protest. Assemble at the Millicent Fawcett statue, Parliament Square, London SW1. Oppose anti-abortion groups and stand up for the right to choose. Organised by Abortion Rights: [www.facebook.com/Abortionrightsuk](http://www.facebook.com/Abortionrightsuk).

## Make the rich pay, not the workers

**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](http://www.facebook.com/ShopStewardsNetwork).

## Unite4Palestine

**Sunday September 8, 6pm:** TUC fringe meeting, Community Base, 113 Queens Road, Brighton BN1. Speakers include Huda Ammori, Asa Winstanley and Tony Greenstein. Organised by Unite4Palestine: [www.facebook.com/events/1408836849798872](http://www.facebook.com/events/1408836849798872).

## War, peace and Palestine - trade union issues

**Monday September 9, 6.30pm:** TUC fringe meeting, Friends House, Ship Street, Brighton BN1. British-made bombs rain down on Gaza, while the Ukraine military is equipped with British-made arms. Ordinary people pay with their lives. Workers need welfare, not warfare. Speakers include Fran Heathcote (PCS) and Alex Gordon (RMT). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events).

## Women chainmakers festival

**Sunday September 15, 11am to 5.30pm:** Family festival, Mary McArthur Gardens, Cradley Heath B64. Celebrate the 1910 women chainmakers' victorious 10-week strike against starvation wages. Entrance free. Organised by TUC Midlands: [www.womenchainmakers.org.uk/events](http://www.womenchainmakers.org.uk/events).

## The long depression and the tepid 20s

**Wednesday September 18, 7pm:** Online and onsite lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker Michael Roberts examines the IMF forecast that the major economies are stuck in stagnation. Registration £7 (£4). Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/473](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/473).

## From revolving door to open-plan office

**Wednesday September 18, 7pm:** Online and onsite report launch, 4th Floor Studios, 255 Commercial Road, Whitechapel, London E1. Exposing the ever-closer union between the UK government and the arms industry. Registration free. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: [caat.org.uk/events/report-launch-open-plan-office](http://caat.org.uk/events/report-launch-open-plan-office).

## The racket

**Wednesday September 18, 7pm:** Book event, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Declassified UK journalist Matt Kennard introduces his book, *The racket: a rogue reporter vs the American empire*. Followed by Q and A. Tickets £3 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: [housmans.com/events](http://housmans.com/events).

## 1842 general strike

**Thursday September 19, 7pm:** Online lecture with professor Katrina Navickas. The strikes began in Staffordshire coal mines and spread to factories and mills in Yorkshire and Lancashire, and coal mines in Dundee, south Wales and Cornwall. Registration free. Organised by Working Class Movement Library: [www.facebook.com/events/1530302474502102](http://www.facebook.com/events/1530302474502102).

## Stop Farage - protest Reform UK conference

**Friday September 20, 5pm:** Protest outside Reform UK conference, NEC, Birmingham B40. Reform MPs give confidence to far-right thugs on the streets by whipping up Islamophobia, racism and anti-migrant rhetoric. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: [www.instagram.com/p/C-78NscIfQD](http://www.instagram.com/p/C-78NscIfQD).

## Labour Party conference Palestine protest

**Saturday September 21, 12 noon:** Demonstration. Assemble at St George's Plateau, opposite Lime Street Station, Liverpool L1. Demand a permanent ceasefire and an end to support for genocide. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events).

## What made us human?

**Tuesday September 24, 6.30pm:** Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'Did matriarchy ever exist?' Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.facebook.com/events/451544957846232](http://www.facebook.com/events/451544957846232).

## 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.



**GAZA****By bomb, bullet, hunger and disease**

Israel is trying to drive the Palestinian population to misery, despair and surrender with the overriding aim of ethnic cleansing and, failing that, genocide, writes **Ian Spencer**

**P**oliomyelitis, a highly infectious disease, known since antiquity - but until recently close to following smallpox to eradication - has made an unwelcome return.

An unvaccinated 10-month-old child was confirmed as being infected and showing signs of paralysis in the Gaza city of Deir el-Balah on August 16. The outbreak was entirely predictable, as the polio virus had been isolated from water and sewage in June. Analysis of the virus suggests that it could have been introduced into Gaza as early as 2023.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of those who contract polio show no or only mild symptoms. However, a small proportion go on to develop paralysis and some of those die because of paralysis of the nerves that control breathing. But, in a population which is seriously weakened by malnutrition and other infections, there is every reason to fear an epidemic. Transmission of the polio virus is direct, person-to-person, by droplets or orally, often in epidemics, due to infected water.

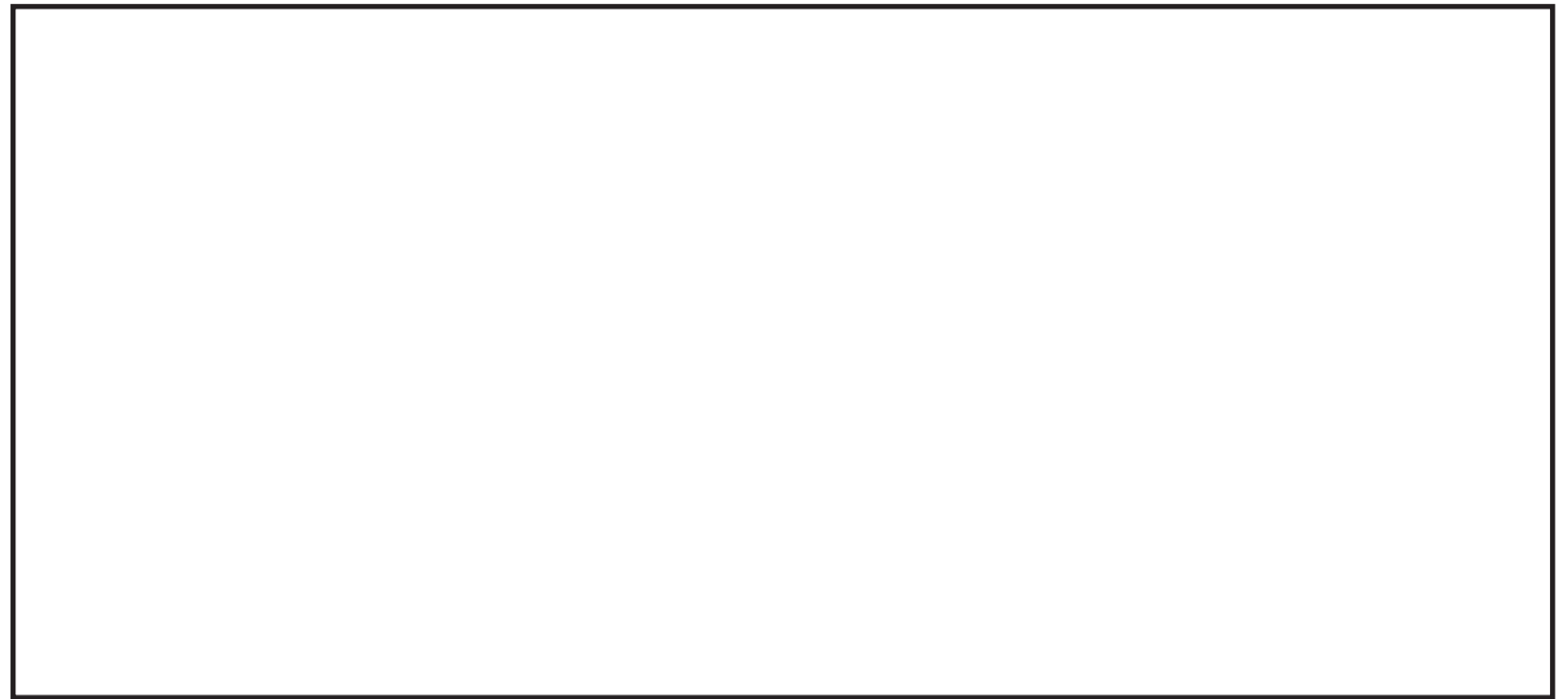
From the outset of its assault on Gaza, the Israel Defence Forces have targeted water purification and desalination plants. According to Oxfam, in a report published in July, Israel has been using the restriction of water as a weapon, with availability having dropped by 94% - people in Gaza have only 4.75 litres or water per person, per day for all uses.<sup>2</sup> The consequences are that water-borne diseases have been having a devastating impact on the population.

Since October, infections, which can be fatal for the vulnerable, such as the very young and old, have raged throughout the Strip. These have included 575,000 cases with acute watery diarrhoea, acute jaundice syndrome (typically hepatitis A), with 107,000 cases, and bloody diarrhoea (12,000 cases). These have also been accompanied by acute respiratory infections (992,000), as well as a range of other diseases, including measles and meningitis. At least some of these may be due to non-paralytic forms of polio, but testing for them is not available because of the IDF's destruction of the medical infrastructure.<sup>3</sup> Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital is the last functioning medical facility in Deir el-Balah.

Prior to the Israeli assault, polio had not been diagnosed in Gaza for 25 years and until this month was only endemic in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Prior to the war, the vaccination rate in Gaza was 99%. Since the outbreak, the World Health Organisation has been trying to bring in a million vaccinations to stop the spread.

WHO has set a target of vaccinating 640,000 children. The type of vaccine being used is an attenuated form of the polio virus, which can be administered orally. This removes the need for sterile syringes and needles, but does require refrigeration, which has been hampered by Israeli restriction on fuel and other supplies to power generators.

The vaccination campaign will involve 2,700 healthworkers, but it has taken the UK government until July to restore funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, even though a UN report in April showed that there was no evidence to support Israel's assertion that Unrwa staff had been involved in the Hamas raid on



**Premature babies: not counted as war victims**

October 7. Even the US restored its Unrwa funding following the report.

**Malnutrition**

Of the 2.1 million Gaza pre-war population, 1.9 million have been internally displaced, half of them children. The repeated evacuation orders, often to areas no safer than those they were leaving, are part of a calculated policy for uprooting the Palestinian population, as families are forced to move from one ill-equipped refugee camp to another, almost entirely dependent on aid for food and water.

This is exacerbated by the fact that Israel has destroyed swathes of Gazan farmland.<sup>4</sup> While the vaccination efforts are naturally welcome, a majority of the 40,700 recorded deaths in Gaza have been due to the indiscriminate air strikes and artillery bombardment by the IDF. But many thousands more die from disease, malnutrition and the want of basic medical care, but are not included in the Gaza health ministry statistics - they are regarded as 'excess deaths' over what might have been expected under normal conditions (or at least as 'normal' as conditions ever were in Gaza!).

As we know from the *Lancet* report earlier this year, the 'excess deaths' may be as high as 186,000.<sup>5</sup> Contributing to the death rate throughout Palestine has been the worsening nutritional state of the population - 96% in Gaza have faced food insecurity, since from the outset the IDF has targeted bakeries and other food outlets. Palestinians are seeing a drastic reduction in calorie intake - needed to maintain a healthy weight.

Further danger is posed by the limited range of foodstuffs, making iron and vitamin deficiency widespread. This disproportionately affects children and nursing mothers. Malnutrition, plus fat and protein deficiency, makes breastfeeding more difficult, and the chronic shortage of infant formula means that is no substitute. The absence of clean water means that the infant formula that is available is often contaminated - a death sentence for a weakened infant. In May a survey found that as many as 85% of children of all ages did not eat for a whole day at least once in the three days before the survey was conducted. Currently, nine out of 10 children in Gaza lack sufficient food for growth, while one

in three are acutely malnourished or suffering from muscle wasting.

Given the importance of brain development in the first two years of life, this ensures that, even if the slaughter were to end tomorrow, there will be lasting developmental and psychological effects for generations. More than one million of Gaza's inhabitants face the most extreme form of malnutrition, classified as 'catastrophe or famine': the deaths of more than 30 children have already resulted officially from malnutrition - mostly in northern Gaza, which has borne the brunt of the IDF assault.<sup>6</sup> However, that is just the tip of the iceberg, as malnutrition severely reduces the body's capacity to fight off infection and repair damaged tissues.

**West Bank**

Israel's *modus operandi* in Gaza is now being extended to the occupied West Bank. Jenin has been under siege, cutting off food, water and electricity supplies. The IDF bulldozed nearly 70% of the city's streets and 20 kilometres of its water and sewage networks since it launched its attack on August 28. As a result, 80% of the Jenin refugee camp, home to 23,628 people, is without water, according to the Jenin municipality. Water is being weaponised, just as it has been in Gaza, and this constitutes a war crime.

At least 675 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank have been killed since October 7, including 142 children. A further 5,670 have been injured and more than 10,300 arrested and detained by Israeli forces, some of whom have died in custody.<sup>7</sup> As in Gaza, the IDF has carried out attacks on health facilities, killing 23 and injuring 100 across 54 health facilities affected, with the widespread obstruction of access to hospitals and the detention of personnel.<sup>8</sup>

Paramedics are being prevented from entering the Jenin refugee camp, while air strikes on refugee camps - a feature of IDF action in Gaza - are now being expanded to the West Bank. Five people, including two children, were killed in an airstrike on the Nur Shams camp, near the city of Tulkarem, home to 13,519 registered refugees. The IDF confirmed the attack, in its now customary fashion, saying it was a strike against the "command room of a terror cell",

but the UN has reported that 128 Palestinians, including 26 children, have been killed by Israeli air strikes since October 7. Four people were also killed by the IDF in the Far'n refugee camp near Tubas, home to 10,868 people. The Palestinian Red Crescent reported that they were having trouble reaching the injured, as the IDF were preventing ambulances entering the area - again a tactic all too familiar in Gaza.

The intensifying violence in the West Bank has come from both the IDF and groups of settlers. Meanwhile, arbitrary obstructions and the closure of entire towns, such as Tulkarem, Tubas and Nablus, has restricted access to healthcare facilities. Palestinians are being routinely prohibited from reaching the most advanced facilities, such as in East Jerusalem, where just six hospitals provide most specialist services. Between October 2023 and May 2024, 44% of 28,292 patient applications to seek treatment in East Jerusalem have been refused.

On top of this, the economic chaos has had a disastrous effect on the health of Palestinians in the West Bank - made worse by Israel's withholding tax revenues for the Palestinian territory. Many health facilities report medicines in exceedingly short supply, with 45% of essential medicines out of stock. Consequently, hospitals and health centres are operating only at 70% of capacity.<sup>9</sup>

There are an estimated 80,000 Palestinians in the West Bank areas where military operations are continuing. The number of raids on the West Bank has more than tripled since the war on Gaza began in October. Israeli minister of foreign affairs Israel Katz called on the army to evacuate Palestinians from the West Bank in a post on X. He said: "We must deal with the threat in the West Bank as we are doing in Gaza, including the temporary evacuation of Palestinian residents and whatever other steps are required. This is a war for everything, and we must win it."

So, while the world is distracted by the ongoing horror in Gaza, the same methods are to be applied in the north of the West Bank to force out the population and kill those who do not move. Israeli forces have been closing the roads leading to Jenin, Tulkarem and Far'a camps. In the Nur Shams camp, residents were given three hours

to leave. In Jenin the director of one of the city's hospitals was told the Israeli army intended to raid the medical facility and ordered them to leave. The hospital has 200 employees and 150 patients.<sup>10</sup> We await with interest the IDF announcement that there is a terrorist command cell operating in the hospital.

**Our response**

Meanwhile, in Israel itself the crisis is deepening. The hand of the Zionist extreme right is being strengthened with no force able to counter it. The people of Palestine and the workers of the world can expect no salvation from token strikes by Zionist workers to 'bring home the hostages'. Nor can they expect anything from the Iranian so-called 'Axis of Resistance', from whoever wins the race to the White House in November, let alone from a Labour government that makes token gestures to rescind 30 export licences for weapons being used to liquidate the Palestinian population, while leaving some 350 in place.

For nearly 11 months we have been forced to watch genocide in real time and we are about to witness the next brutal chapter. In the UK we bear an enormous responsibility to force a self-proclaimed "Zionist" prime minister to end all arms sales to Israel. Workers must lead a movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions and for trades unionists everywhere to act in solidarity with the people of Palestine ●

**Notes**

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## VOLUNTEERS

# A total, not a partial, ban

Medics testify in an open letter to Sir Keir Starmer that the IDF is deliberately targeting children, hospitals and healthworkers. They call for ending economic, diplomatic and military support, reports **James Linney**

**T**his week a group of 30 mostly NHS-based doctors, surgeons and nurses, who have all volunteered to work in hospitals in Gaza since October 7, published an open letter to Sir Keir Starmer.<sup>1</sup> In it they detail some of the atrocities they have witnessed during their time in various hospitals throughout Gaza.

These include the deliberate targeting and killing of children by the Israeli military, the systematic destruction of hospitals and the murder of healthcare workers. Additionally, through the withholding and obstruction of aid, water, medicine and fuel, they say Israel has purposely caused epidemics of infections and malnutrition on a mass scale.

The letter goes on to call for Starmer and foreign secretary David Lammy, with all their "extensive legal background" to acknowledge that Israel is daily breaching international humanitarian law and that Britain therefore should immediately withhold economic and diplomatic support. There should be an immediate ban on the supply of all weapons going to Israel, not just a partial ban - just 30 out of 350 export licences have been suspended.

The authors say it is incumbent on Starmer and Lammy to support "the International Criminal Court Prosecutor's investigation in the Palestine situation, South Africa's case before the International Court of Justice, domestic universal jurisdiction prosecutions, and any other means of judicial, political and diplomatic accountability".

The letter goes on to set out certain other humanitarian measures that it urges the Labour government to prioritise, such as the opening of border crossings for medical professionals, with aid able to pass easily, the provision of mass immunisation schemes to prevent the further spread of deadly diseases, such as polio, the construction of large field hospitals and the provision of adequate clean water.

These 30 signatories join the hundreds of other international healthcare workers who have bravely volunteered, via NGOs such as Doctors without Borders, the Red Cross and Medical Aid for Palestinians, to work in Gaza since the siege started. These in turn have joined the heroic efforts of Palestinian health workers, doing what they can to save lives in increasingly desperate and dangerous circumstances.

Despite having decades of experience working in multiple war zones, these doctors report the situation in Gaza to be the most difficult they have seen. Their first-hand accounts of trying to treat Palestinian victims with the type of injuries only witnessed when a largely defenceless, dense population is subject to the full might of an advanced military machine, determined on their annihilation, are truly haunting.

Their and other doctors' reports from Gaza tell of treating men, women and children with horrific abdominal shrapnel injuries, people with multiple limb loss, burns so severe that facial features are no longer discernible, babies with bullet head wounds from snipers, and many more appalling cases. One of the many heart-breaking facts of the Gaza conflict is that paediatric trauma surgeons are the most desperately needed and doctors have



**Israeli F-35 and F-16: UK-made bits and pieces**

reported the largest cohort of child amputations ever seen in any war in history.<sup>2</sup>

Having faced decades of conflict and blockade, Gaza's healthcare system has been under immense strain for years. Israel's constant bombing and bombardment of densely populated areas since October 7 has created a truly dire situation.

### Save lives

As the open letter describes, now healthcare workers are having to try to treat, operate and save lives where there is extreme overcrowding, no sanitation, often little running water and regular electricity blackouts; where medicines are severely limited and operations are having to take place without any anaesthetic or painkillers. Little surprise that those who survive their initial trauma injuries often die soon after due to contracting hospital-acquired infections, when there are no antibiotics to treat them. Due to their vulnerability to the ever-growing problem of malnutrition, children are particularly vulnerable to these deadly infections.

As the authors of the open letter state,

With only marginal exceptions, everyone in Gaza is sick, injured or both ... Virtually every child under the age of five whom we encountered, both inside and outside of the hospital, had both a cough and watery diarrhoea. Jaundice and hepatitis A infection were widespread in the hospitals in which we worked, while the surgical complication rate was near 100%.

As incredibly difficult as these reports are to hear, it is of the utmost importance that they are told. Due to the almost complete restriction by Israel of access to Gaza by independent journalists and UN/World Health Organisation observers, medical professionals are some of the few with the opportunity to document and report to the outside world the reality of the crimes being committed by Israel in its genocidal campaign.

According to the WHO's most recent update, there have been 40,223 deaths in the Gaza Strip since October 7,<sup>3</sup> with 92,981 serious injuries. In addition tens of thousands of missing people are buried under rubble. In July a *Lancet* journal article concluded that a more accurate conservative estimate is that around 186,000 deaths have occurred in Gaza as a result of the bombardment since October.<sup>4</sup>

Not a single hospital in Gaza is now able to operate effectively and only 16 out of the 36 are operating any services at all. Of these 16, 12 are only partially accessible due to insecurity and damage to the buildings. Some of the partially operational hospitals - such as the largest remaining, Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah - are now within the Israeli-ordered evacuation zone. Such hospitals, as well being impossibly overburdened with the sick and injured, have become shelters for the huge number of ever-growing internally displaced Palestinians: more than 90% of its 2.1 million population.

Despite the desperate, but understandable hope held by Gazans that hospitals might represent a sanctuary, compared to their makeshift tents, this sadly has not been the case. Israel has shown that it has no qualms about destroying hospitals - not just as collateral damage, but in many cases purposely targeted. Again according to the WHO, 32 of the 36 hospitals have suffered damage from bombs, while 752 healthworkers have been killed during the conflict, with an additional 982 being seriously injured and 128 detained. Again doctors and other healthcare workers have been invaluable witnesses to these crimes.

Where Israeli officials have bothered to comment on the destruction of hospitals and the killing of staff and patients, their response has not surprisingly been to blame Hamas, claiming it has been using hospitals as command centres, and places to store weapons or house hostages; in each case it has offered little or no evidence to back up their claims.

### Consequences

This was the case for two of the largest hospital complexes: Al-Shifa in Gaza City and the Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip - both now essentially destroyed.

Al-Shifa Hospital was initially raided in November and again besieged for two weeks by Israeli commandos in March, whilst Nasser Hospital was raided in February. In both cases the Israeli military's official claims were that these operations were targeting Hamas fighters or infrastructure only, that no civilians were harmed and that their soldiers prevented any disturbance to the hospital's provision of care.

The reports from healthcare workers in these hospitals paint a very different picture - one where, despite being told to evacuate the hospitals, those that tried were targeted by IDF snipers, doctors were

detained and tortured,<sup>5</sup> premature babies died due to the cutting off of electricity and fuel supply,<sup>6</sup> leading to the failure of incubators. In both cases WHO requests to access the hospital to facilitate the evacuation of the most seriously unwell patients were denied, and when they were able to access them after the siege they found the compounds scattered with dead bodies hurriedly buried in shallow graves.<sup>7</sup>

After the IDF raids both Al-Shifa and Nasser have become non-functional. Israel has meanwhile horrifically declared both raids a huge success, with government spokesman Avi Hyman saying after the Al-Shifa raid that it will be used as the "gold standard for urban warfare" in the future; no doubt Israel intends further such "gold standard" raids on hospitals in the West Bank, as its horror show spreads wider.

### Protected

According to International Humanitarian Law (IHL), hospitals and medical facilities should be protected from any attack. However they lose their protection if they are being used outside their humanitarian function to commit "acts harmful to the enemy" - a term not defined. Even when a hospital loses its protection, IHL states that any attacking force is obliged to prevent harm to the functioning of the hospital, its staff and patients, and any attack must be "proportional". Clearly Israel has breached IHL guidelines. Even if it had provided good evidence that Hamas was using the hospitals as control centres or for weapons storage, its attempt to claim the raids were in anyway proportional enters the realm of absurdity.

Of course, to rely on international law to curb or punish Israel is a fool's errand, Israel has been in the business of openly flaunting international law for decades - well before it started its

current genocidal war - yet there have never been any legal consequences.

Without functioning medical facilities and staff to run them, the health system has become overwhelmed and totally reliant on outside help. However, as we have seen, food, aid and medical supplies are increasingly finding their entry to Gaza obstructed or threatened. Just this week the UN food agency, the World Food Programme, had to suspend operations after one of its vehicles, despite being clearly marked, was fired on by Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint.<sup>8</sup>

Both the direct murder of Gazans through bombing, shelling and shooting and their indirect murder through the manufacture of a healthcare crisis, mass starvation and infections are part of the plan; namely the annihilation or displacement of the population in the Gaza Strip.

These hideous atrocities will continue, with Israel safe in the knowledge that any attempt to enforce international law will be vetoed by the US, including by whoever replaces Joe Biden come November ●

### Notes

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## Fighting fund

# You did it!

**M**any readers will no doubt recall that, as we approached the end of July's *Weekly Worker* fighting fund, I pointed out that we were just £138 short of our £2,250 monthly target. One comrade in particular responded immediately - AC transferred exactly £138 via PayPal within hours!

Well, would you believe it? Last week I reported that we still needed £137, with just three days remaining and, yes, comrade AC did the same thing again (this time transferring a pound less than in July!). He wrote: "Here's to another month's goal reached. Long live the *Weekly Worker*!"

Thank you very much for your genuine and concrete support, comrade. But you weren't the only one: also received at the very end of August were £25 from BK and £10 from AD, while that well-known comrade Hassan, who features regularly in this column, handed his usual banknote to one of our team - this time a fiver.

That means that we once again exceeded our monthly target, this time by £40. Well done, everyone!

Now to September. We've received a handy £441 in the first four days of the month - that all came in the shape of bank transfers and start-of-the-month standing orders. Most generous was comrade AC with his £100! Other donations came from EW (£55), MM (£31), ST and GG (£30 each), RG (£25), VP (£24), BK and MS (£20 each), MT and BG (£15), TM (£13), MM (£11), AN, CP, DI and YM (£10) and, finally, DC and JS (£6 each).

All in all, a pretty good start, but let's make sure we keep up the momentum and go shooting through that much needed £2,250 target once again. We can do it! ●

**Robbie Rix**

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



## ZIONISM

# Ancient myths as today's weapons

Prime ministers from David Ben Gurion to Benjamin Netanyahu have quoted biblical stories of a promised land, conquest and imperial glory. Jack Conrad shows that, while this owes little or nothing to actual history, it does serve as standard Zionist ideological cover for colonisation, ethnic cleansing and genocide

**M**odern Zionism is a blood-and-soil nationalist ideology, whose origins lie squarely in the malignant reinvention and growing pervasiveness of anti-Semitism in 19th and 20th century Europe.

Jews, for complex historical reasons, were to be found disproportionately in high finance, the liberal professions, the militant working class and the revolutionary intelligentsia and, therefore, could, albeit half-crazily, be blamed for every perceived evil: the Enlightenment and rising bank rates, Marxism and wars that ended badly, demands for universal suffrage and hyperinflation, mass strikes and Freud, syphilis, jazz and comic books. In short, Jews could be systematically diabolised by the forces of reaction, not least the religious establishment, in the attempt to construct a social bulwark against the incoming tide of democracy, modernism and communism.

However, Zionism - to begin with a fringe on the fringe - unlike other, what might be called 'normal', nationalisms, could not aspire to unite a distinct people possessing a common territory, economy, language or even religion. Zionism was a reaction to reaction, a nationalism attempting to make a nation ... and that out of a human miscellany who perhaps only shared one defining common characteristic: being the butt of anti-Semitism (not because of religion - Jews were increasingly secular - but because they had a cultural background in the religion, even if only practised by parents or grandparents).

Tsarist Russia and kingdom Poland contained a Jewish population which formed a distinct, Yiddish-speaking nationality. The 1897 census counted around five million of them. Yet Jews lived throughout the world and spoke numerous languages (as they still do). After the 1789 French revolution the general trend in western Europe manifestly pointed towards rapid assimilation and eventual absorption. In Paris and Brussels Jews spoke French. In London, Leeds and Manchester, English. In Berlin, Cologne and Vienna, German.

Hebrew was a dead language: used only by rabbis, cantors and other such traditional intellectuals. And, besides the few religious Zionists, most Zionists were, of course, secular and atheist. They, in particular the Labor Zionists, formed a clear majority at world congresses of the movement. Indeed till the Nazi holocaust - the apoplectic climax of European anti-Semitism - most orthodox Jews considered Zionism something akin to blasphemy. God alone should restore Israel, not man. An eschatological doctrine still defended by sects such as Neturei Karta (who regularly turn out in all their fur and finery for the mass pro-Palestine demonstrations in London and elsewhere to widespread applause).

Nonetheless, against the growing cancer of anti-Semitism, Zionism held out the promise of 'normal' nationhood and thereby deliverance from persecution and discrimination. Secular Jews like Moses Hess, Leon Pinsker, Theodor Herzl and Ber Borochov arguably - and such was the claim - only truly discovered their Jewishness through being labelled, targeted or attacked as Jews. And there was, for sure, a tsunami of anti-



Robert Hecquet 'Israelites crossing the Jordan river' (1750)

Semitism: eg, the Catholic church's 'Christ-killers' doctrines, preachings and mob violence; Russia's closely related Black Hundreds and state-initiated pogroms; the concoction and dissemination of *The protocols of the elders of Zion*; the Dreyfus affair and Action Française; the 'anti-capitalism of fools' peddled by Édouard Drumont, Adolph Stoecker and Mikhail Bakunin; the pseudo-scientific racial theories of Francis Galton, William Ripley and Ludwig Gumplowicz; etc.

Zionism responded not by demanding equality and democratic assimilation. On the contrary, it rejected assimilation and dogmatically insisted that gentiles were by their very nature irredeemably anti-Semitic. Hence the symbiotic, albeit totally unequal, relationship between anti-Semitism, on the one hand, and Zionism, on the other.

Zionism gained a hearing amongst ordinary Jews solely due to anti-Semitism and therefore had no fundamental interest in uniting with other forces - neither to combat nor extinguish what Abram Leon called the morbid symptoms of a "decaying feudalism" in the east and a "rotting capitalism" in the west.<sup>1</sup> Zionism fed off anti-Semitism and often sought an active accommodation with it.

Herzl - the founder of modern-day, political Zionism - famously explained to the tsar's minister of police, Vyacheslav von Plehve, that by encouraging Zionism he would weaken the revolutionary movement in Russia and vice versa. It should be noted that the Bund, a Jewish organisation, was formed in 1897 - the first mass working class socialist organisation in the tsarist empire. Moreover, Jews, let us add, occupied leading positions in both wings of the even more substantial Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.

Herzl, as might be expected, considered that anti-Semitic governments were the very ones which would "have the most interest" in facilitating the Zionist project of organising a mass exodus.<sup>2</sup> They would be as delighted to see the Jews leave as the Zionists. And between 1881 and 1914 some two million Jews exited the Russian empire - mainly, though, for middle and western Europe, Britain and the United States.

The Nazi regime agreed on a transfer deal for Jews from Germany

to go to Palestine in the 1930s. Zionist organisations were also allowed to continue to function - albeit on a low-profile basis. Under the Haavara agreement some 53,000 German Jews migrated to Palestine. Only when plans for mass removal became impossible due to the outbreak of war in 1939 did that policy come to an effective end. Not that this stopped the armed rightwing Zionist Lehi (militant) organisation, or, as it is pejoratively known, the 'Stern gang', from advocating an anti-British alliance with Germany and Italy.

As an aside, it could be - indeed it has been - argued, that those anti-Semites who supported a Jewish homeland in Palestine were, or are, by definition, Zionists. That would, of course, make a lot of top-brass Nazis, though not Adolf Hitler, Zionists, but then there is Joe Biden, Donald Trump, Kamala Harris, Olaf Scholz and Keir Starmer - all of them say loud and clear that they are proud to call themselves Zionists. What they mean, of course, is that they are pro-Israel.

And it cannot be emphasised too strongly in this context that Zionism has always relied on securing an imperial sponsor. First it was Britain, then France and finally the post-World War II global hegemon itself, the United States. That said, here, in this article, we shall stick to Zionism being an ideology, a nationalist movement of an *oppressed people*, who, in no small part settled in and colonised Palestine, and who have unmistakably gone on to become an *oppressor nation*, with all that this entails in terms of discrimination, racism, exclusion, etc.

### Grand narrative

To begin with, the idea of carving out a homeland in the Argentine and then Uganda was toyed with. But Zionism without Zion could never appeal to the hearts of the masses, especially those in Russia and eastern Europe. The Zionist movement soon decided upon the 'promised land' - and therefore the implicit necessity of armed conflict with the indigenous population, the 'Bedouins', as they were condescendingly described.

"The very name of Palestine would attract our people with a force of marvellous potency," predicted Herzl.<sup>3</sup> And from the early years of the 20th century onwards a steady trickle of Jews arrived

from Europe. The deal with British imperialism agreeing to establish "a national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, the November 2 1917 Balfour declaration<sup>4</sup> - that and, above all, the Nazi genocide, which, of course, included other *Untermenschen* - gave migration a massive boost and helped consolidate Zionism as the dominant ideology amongst wide sections of the Jewish masses. Victory in the 1967 Six Day War and US sponsorship did the rest.

A Jewish state for the Jewish people - in Palestine - could be depicted as part of a grand historical-religious narrative. The grandest. Both the ultimate safe house for Jews throughout the world and the continuation, perhaps culmination, of the Jewish story, as recounted in the 24 books of the Hebrew bible, the *Tanakh* (a collection variously added to by the main branches of Christianity and commonly called the *Old Testament*). Zionists justified - and continue to justify - the ongoing colonisation, the wars and annexations, the mass expulsions, the reduction of the West Bank to a series of Palestinian reservations and the destruction of Gaza, by citing modern Israel's "roots in the distant past".

They, the Zionists, are the (self) chosen representatives of Yahweh's chosen people. They, the 12 Hebrew tribes having escaped from Egyptian bondage, roamed the deserts of Sinai and Arabia under the leadership of Moses, before turning to Canaan, a land "beyond the Jordan and towards the sunrise", which had already been promised to them by god almighty himself (Abram, the first of the patriarchs, was told in a vision that to his "descendants I will give this land"<sup>5</sup>). And against all the odds, now commanded by Joshua, the 12 tribes "smote the kings" of Canaan. The Amorites, Hittites, Jebusites, Hivites, Perizzites and Girgashites were all either comprehensively routed or successfully resisted.

Ominously, however, in terms of present-day Palestinians, Joshua's god told him to slaughter the inhabitants of any city that dared resist ... everyone who surrendered was to be sold off into slavery. When it came to the Amalekites, who inhabited the southern borders, they were to be "utterly" destroyed down to the last "man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass".<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, king David and then his son, Solomon - well, at least according to the narrative - established a fabulously rich empire stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates, with a capital in Jerusalem crowned by a magnificent temple. The envy of rulers far and wide, including, of course, the famed queen of Sheba.

True, because of the continued idolatrous worship of other gods, fornication with foreign women and the all-round wickedness of bad kings, Israel's independence was ended by a vengeful Yahweh. His covenant with the chosen people had been broken. Assyria invaded in the 8th century BCE, then the Babylonians in the 6th century BCE. In both cases members of the elite were subject to forced exile. A biblical account that is seamlessly joined by modern-day Zionists with the sacking of Jerusalem in 73 CE, Bar Kokhba's 132-36 revolt and the absurd claim that the Romans expelled the entire Jewish population from Palestine. After that they were

supposedly a "wandering nation", foreigners living in foreign lands.

Hence, speaking in July 1950, David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, argued in a matter of fact way that it is "impossible to understand the revival of the Jewish state without knowledge of the Jewish people from its beginning". After many generations, what has been called the Jewish 'exiled-people race', had "through incessant efforts" at last returned to its "home".<sup>7</sup> Israel had been divinely given to the Jews, so with the 1948 declaration of independence they simply retook what was rightfully theirs.

A claim echoed many times before and since, including by Israel's current prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Responding to the International Court of Justice ruling that found Israeli presence in the occupied territories to be illegal, he insisted that the Jewish people "are not occupiers in their own land - not in our eternal capital, Jerusalem, not in the land of our ancestors in Judea and Samaria ... the legality of Israeli settlement in all the territories of our homeland cannot be contested".<sup>8</sup> Sinisterly, he, and others on the Israeli right, also compare modern-day Palestinians with the ancient Amalekites.

### DNA evidence

Over the last 2,700 years or so those whom we might call Jews have been fragmented geographically and subject to many different concrete situations. There have been absorptions through assimilation as well as individual and collective conversions - an argument made by others, not least Shlomo Sand in his best-selling study.<sup>9</sup> Leave aside his recapitulation of the Khazar thesis, there are the Falashas - the black Jews of Ethiopia.<sup>10</sup> During the time of Jesus it is guessed that a good half of all Jews lived outside Palestine - commerce, not god, being the prime mover. It is, moreover, quite obvious that Jews, especially males, have freely interbred with those whom they lived amongst.

As a result, in eastern Europe, Jews look what we might call eastern European, in north Africa they look what we might call north African, in India they look what we might call Indian. DNA studies of self-defined Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews might well show markers inherited from distant ancestors in the Caucasus or the Middle East. But there are plenty of other inputs - in the case of Ashkenazis, an estimated 40% of their DNA is from Europe.<sup>11</sup> When it comes to mtDNA (inherited via the mother), the figure is overwhelming: 80% European (mainly traceable back to "prehistoric" times.) So it is clear that, although Jews maintained "detectable vertical genetic continuity along generations of socio-religious-cultural relationship", it is also the case that "intensive horizontal genetic relations were maintained" with the "gentile surrounding".<sup>12</sup> Hence there is no unbroken line of genetic descent, when it comes to world Jewry. So no Jewish 'racial' purity (despite Nazi and Zionist claims to the contrary).

No less importantly, there is culture. Whereas in western Europe Jews escaped from the straightjacket of trade and usury and assimilated, in 19th century Russia they formed a Germanic-speaking national minority and in the Ottoman Sultanate they were a generally



tolerated, Arab-speaking, religious minority. Historically, therefore, we can reliably say that Jews have had many homelands, many languages, many class locations.

Equally to the point: Palestine has been *continuously* inhabited by an *indigenous* population - the majority of whom were once Jewish, but subsequently become Christian, then Muslim. In other words, the descendants of the Jewish masses who rallied to Simon Maccabee, the Nazarene party of James the Just and the Zealots, who rose up and fought the Seleucid Macedonians and after them the Romans in a series of popular revolutions, are, as of now, being oppressed and colonised by a modern-day equivalent of the medieval Crusaders, who, in terms of their late 19th century political origins, had a purely *imagined* relationship with Palestine.

## Legitimation

Understandably, the fledgling Israeli state was concerned not only with expanding towns, building infrastructure, seizing water sources and fighting wars with the indigenous Palestinians and neighbouring Arab countries. Those in government to begin with, the Labor Zionists - who were, as already mentioned, often avowed atheists - generously financed university archaeological departments, extensive digs and scores of museums to display the artefacts. Not because of any wish to promote disinterested science, but as a form of ideological warfare.

The idea was to legitimise the Zionist state by showcasing what was considered its ancient Israeli antecedents. Stone Age and Bronze Age Canaanite discoveries were mere sideshows; there was, though, complete indifference, if not downright hostility, towards examining Palestine under the Arabs or Turks. Islamic civilisation did not fit with the ideological schema.

Not that the Israeli state is unique in such matters. Modern-day Turkey, for instance, does not seek legitimacy through the Hellenistic culture, which dominated the Anatolian coastline from the Bronze Age till the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Quite the reverse. As a result, starved of funds, Greek ruins are often left unguarded from looters or simply given over to the elements and allowed to steadily deteriorate.

Ever since the Byzantine era, travellers well versed in the *Bible* have visited Palestine and compared texts and places. But from the mid-19th century onwards - especially after the pioneering work of the American Congregationalist minister Edward Robinson in 1838 and 1852 - archaeological expeditions flocked to Palestine and soon thereafter permanent schools were established. They were typically sponsored by upright British and American Christians determined to *re-establish* the authenticity of biblical accounts. These men and women passionately believed that archaeology could counter the critical scholars, especially those in Germany, who had concluded, through their detailed literary studies, that the *Bible* must owe as much to myth as history (hence 'mythistory' - a term apparently coined way back in the 1700s).

At first sight, results were spectacular. Using the combined textual-archaeological approach, numerous biblical sites were located. Jerusalem, Hebron, Jaffa, Beth-shean and Gaza had never lost their biblical names. However, other places had become known by Arab names. They were quickly rediscovered and later, using datable pottery shards and other such artefacts, the whole of biblical Palestine was mapped out. It was certainly established that the

*Tanakh* had a real historic basis.

Till the 1970s archaeologists tended to take biblical texts at face value. The *Tanakh* was viewed as a reliable document in all its essentials. Hence archaeologists went into the field with a spade in one hand and the holy book in the other and proved what the Zionist state wanted to prove: roaming desert tribes, invasion and the sacking of cities, Yahwehite monotheism, David's unified state, Solomon's glorious first Jerusalem temple ... and all the rest. Scorched walls, fallen pillars and remaining monumental foundations were, for example, interpreted as hard evidence of Joshua's stunning military achievements.

Biblical criticism and archaeology tended to proceed separately, with each academic discipline considering the other with a suspicion bordering on contempt. Archaeologists, in particular, thought that they had nothing to learn from dusty bookworms. With their microscopes, painstaking excavations and carbon-dating techniques, they were the real scientists.

However, in the 1970s doubts began to surface in the archaeological community about the authenticity of the patriarchs - the heads of the tribal households such as Abraham and Jacob - and the date and scale of the exodus from Egypt. Theories were also developed which suggested that Joshua's conquest of Canaan might not have been a single, unified, military event. Nevertheless even then, the *Tanakh* was still considered reliable when dealing with events following the foundation of David's kingdom (circa 1000 BCE).

Things began to radically change in the 1990s. As explained by archaeologists Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, new approaches gained traction. Instead of using findings to "illustrate the *Bible*", attempts were made to "examine the human realities that lay *behind* the text".<sup>13</sup> The emphasis thereby shifted from associating particular sites with biblical accounts. Instead artefacts, architecture, settlement patterns, animal bones, seeds, chemical analysis of soil samples and long-term anthropological models became "key" to perceiving "wider changes in the economy, political history, religious practices, population density and the very structure of ancient Israeli society".<sup>14</sup>

Especially at its cutting edge, archaeology has thereby drawn progressively closer to the conclusions long upheld by biblical scholars and in certain respects they have gone beyond them. Along with Hebrew inscriptions, pottery fragments and architectural styles, the *Tanakh* is now seen as another characteristic *artefact* produced by a people who have to be recreated *theoretically* in the round.

Till Herodotus the ancients did not write anything we would remotely recognise as history. In that sense the *Tanakh* has rightly come to be regarded, and therefore reinterrogated by archaeologists, in the same manner as other similar texts: eg, the Babylonian *Gilgamesh* epic, Homer's *Iliad* or the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*. Myth is not history, but it can, nevertheless, cast a powerful light on historical reality, if approached discriminatingly and used contextually.

As noted above, biblical scholars and archaeologists alike tended to take for granted the united monarchy of David and Solomon in the 10th century BCE. However, the so-called minimalist school of archaeology - minimalist because of its cautious attitude towards biblical personalities, state boundaries, events, etc - marked a break from this assumption. Finkelstein and

Silberman, for example, conclude that there is no archaeological evidence whatsoever of a state formation in Judah - in Jerusalem in particular - till towards the 8th century BCE. That is more than 250 years after David in the generally agreed biblical chronology. All that turns up in the digs intended to unearth the splendours of David's imperial capital and Solomon's wondrous temple are the remains of a rather primitive and impoverished hamlet.

Others in the field concur. Take Philip Davies: "The evidence recently accumulated ... shows the impossibility of a Davidic empire administered from Jerusalem ... it is necessary for us to exclude the Davidic and Solomonic monarchies, let alone their empire, from a non-biblical history of Palestine."<sup>15</sup>

Embarrassing and infuriating for fundamentalist Christians everywhere, but particularly for the Zionist political and religious establishment in Israel. Not surprisingly accusations rained down: denying the truth of the Davidic kingdom was akin to denying the truth of the Nazi holocaust. But facts are facts and the truth is the truth, no matter how inconvenient.

## General crisis

The current balance of opinion amongst the leading authorities in biblical history and archaeology nowadays is that there never were any Hebrew tribes who set out from the Land of Nod on a mammoth trek, who sojourned in Egypt and who eventually crossed the Jordan and then genocidally exterminated the Canaanite inhabitants.

Those who came to call themselves Jews must, in fact, have themselves been Canaanites - but those who lived on the geographical and social margins. Interestingly there is a stela inscription referring to a people "named Israel" living in Canaan by 1207 BCE.<sup>16</sup> Like the Bedouin of recent times these marginal Canaanites shifted between periods of settled agriculture and semi-nomadic pastoralism, depending on opportunities and the vagaries of climate. They were, for sure, not foreigners with a completely alien culture and language.

The late Bronze Age general crisis certainly hit the whole of the eastern Mediterranean during the close of the 13th century BCE. Archaeological excavations in Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt reveal a "stunning story of upheaval, war and widespread social breakdown".<sup>17</sup> Jericho, Ai and Megiddo were abandoned. Other urban centres were destroyed: eg, Ashdod, Aphek and Hazor. Nowadays this is not put down to Joshua. Rather, explanation is sought in ecological degradation, disease, social revolt due to overexploitation and the raids and dislocation caused by the so-called sea peoples. Doubtless there was a combination of factors at play. But all that was several centuries before Joshua was supposed to have marched Yahweh's chosen people across the Jordan.

So, instead of a brilliant conquest under the command of a god-inspired hero, an increasing number of archaeologists have come to the conclusion that the ancient Israelites came to dominance gradually and peacefully from among the region's peripheral population - through a power vacuum, not a military blitzkrieg. In support of this thesis there is the similarity of the pottery and architecture over the whole period. There is no break denoting a changeover from 'Canaanite' and 'Israeli' style in the late Bronze Age.

As mentioned above, Finkelstein and Silberman give no credence to

the biblical account of David and his son, Solomon. Unlike other minimalists they are prepared to grant that perhaps David might have been a real person - even the founder of a royal line (a celebrated basalt inscription has come to light in Tel Dan referring to the "House of David"). However, if he existed, his Israel - ie, Jerusalem and the Judean hinterland - was demonstrably poor economically and weak militarily.

There was, though, another Israel, the *first* Israel, located not in the south, but in the north. Reaching out from the highland city state of Shechem, it really did gain a pocket-sized empire, along with corresponding cities, temples and fortifications - Samara, Magiddo, Jazeel and Hazor. This state was, however, defeated by the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser V, who besieged and took Samaria in 720 BCE. As the *Tanakh* tells it, after the city fell the Assyrians carted off the local elite.

In all probability the Judean kingdom in the south first began to develop and invent a grand tradition for itself as a not so loyal Assyrian vassal. In the late 8th and early 7th centuries BCE Jerusalem grows dramatically. Industrial-scale olive oil production starts too. However, the kings of Judea nurtured imperial ambitions of their own, primarily directed towards the north. Israeli 'reunification' became the official slogan.

King Hezekiah (727-698 BCE) is known to have rebelled against Assyrian rule, whose armies then proceeded to devastate the Judean countryside in punishment. Sensibly the Judeans sued for peace. Tribute is soon flowing once again to Nineveh. Undaunted, king Josiah (639-609 BCE) was determined to have another go.

Under these circumstances, Finkelstein and Silberman suggest, the opening texts of what is now the *Tanakh* were composed. Spurred on by Josiah, a whole common saga is invented, whereby the southern - Judean - kingdom becomes the elder brother to the wayward northern - Israeli - kingdom. The 12 tribes of Israel are conjured up to unite them both. Tales of the fabled ancestors are interwoven, along with redactive propaganda describing a whole string of good and bad kings, which explains why the north fell and the south survived. And, like the Assyrians, the Judeans/Israelites become mighty warriors who were alone responsible for the still impressive Bronze Age ruins that litter the countryside from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean sea.

Not only did Josiah miserably fail against the Assyrians, but in 586 BCE the Babylonians - having replaced the Assyrians - invaded and subsequently deported the "mighty of the land".<sup>18</sup> However, whereas the northern elite disappeared from history, those in the south were permitted to return some 50 years later. The Babylonians were defeated by the Persian king, Cyrus, and it was he who decided to permit the Judean elite (the Jews) to return to their homeland. There was a catch: they were to serve as his agents. The Jerusalem temple was built with his permission and financial aid - not, it hardly needs adding, over the ruins of Solomon's non-existent marvel. It, the 'second temple', was to serve as the religious-administrative centre of a *subordinate social order*.

From Jerusalem the Jewish elite would oversee the extraction of tribute from the local population and manage the Jewish diaspora (Jewish merchants established themselves in colonies throughout the Persian empire). To facilitate that socio-economic relationship the returned exiles once again reinvented their religious tradition. Doubtless as

ignorant provincials they had been awestruck by Babylonian wealth and cultural attainments and were ideologically enthralled by its sophisticated religion. Therefore Babylonian myths - the garden of Eden, the tower of Babel, the flood, etc - were incorporated into the canon of holy scripts and a whole range of dietary, sexual and social taboos invented, along with what amounted to a henotheism (ie, the elevation of one particular god above all others).

That way the returnees - the people of the book - could legitimise their rule over the masses who had not been deported - the people of the land. Hence for the first time the god of all Israel - Yahweh - emerges fully formed. Before that the Judeans, like the northern Israelis, had been thoroughly polytheistic. They venerated high places and worshipped not only Yahweh, the local deity of Jerusalem, but other, more powerful gods and goddesses, such as El, Baal, Asherah and Marduk. There are numerous references to them in the *Tanakh* - Baal alone appears some 90 times.<sup>19</sup>

I have argued that the "Yahweh cult" and the associated "purity laws" reflected, in no matter how distorted a manner, the class antagonism between the returned elite and the masses: ie, the domination of history or social forces over humanity (in contrast to nature). As Persian vassals the elite had no army - only a religious police force. They had to rely on remaking and then maintaining the Jews as a people-religion.<sup>20</sup>

Needless to say, none of that matters a jot to Benjamin Netanyahu, Yoav Gallant, Bazalel Smotrich, Itamar Ben-Gvir and other members of the national camp. Be they secular or religious, they do not give a damn about historical truth. However, myth, the story of a promised land, of conquest and of genocide - that serves as the standard ideological weapon for a Zionist settler-colonialism, which by the very logic of its political economy is driven to exclude, to expel the indigenous population.<sup>21</sup> Failing that, there is mass extermination ●

## Notes

1. A Leon *The Jewish question: a Marxist interpretation* New York NY 1986, p226.
2. Quoted in I Halevi *A history of the Jews* London 1987, p152.
3. T Herzl *The Jewish state* London 1972, p30.
4. en.wikisource.org/wiki/Balfour\_Declaration.
5. Genesis 12:7.
6. 1 Samuel 15:3.
7. D Ben Gurion, 'Statement of introduction of the law of return before the Knesset', July 3 1950.
8. *The Times of Israel* July 19 2024.
9. See S Sand *The invention of the Jewish people* London 2009.
10. Falashas "descended from ancient inhabitants of Ethiopia, who converted to Judaism", conclude G Lucotte and P Smets in 'Origins of Falasha Jews studied by haplotypes of the Y chromosome' (December 1999) - see pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10592688.
11. See N Abu El-Haj *The genealogical science: the search for Jewish origins and the politics of epistemology* Chicago 2012.
12. See R Falk 'Genetic markers cannot determine Jewish descent' *Frontiers in Genetics* May 2014.
13. I Finkelstein and N Silberman *The Bible unearthed* London 2002, p21.
14. *Ibid* p22.
15. P Davies *In search of ancient Israel* Sheffield 1992.
16. I Finkelstein and N Silberman *The Bible unearthed* London 2002, p101.
17. *Ibid* p83.
18. 2 Kings 24: 12-16.
19. W Herrmann, 'Baal' in K Toorn, B Becking, PW Horst (eds) *Dictionary of deities and demons in the Bible* Grand Rapids MI 1999, pp132-39.
20. J Conrad *Fantastic reality: Marxism and the politics of religion* London 2012, p211.
21. Moshé Machover has insightfully dealt with the uses and, crucially, the abuses of the *Tanakh* by Israeli government minimisers, parties and propagandists in a recent article: see 'Promise myth as template' *Weekly Worker* July 25 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1501/promise-myth-as-template).



**NETANYAHU**

# Gambling on all-out war?

In the current situation it is virtually impossible to predict how far Israel would be prepared to go in spreading the war, but its strategic aims are clear, argues **Moshé Machover**

Is Benjamin Netanyahu trying to provoke an all-out regional war? Even some mainstream media commentators venture to suggest this, a case in point being Simon Tisdall's recent article in *The Guardian*. Referring to Israel's war on Gaza, the escalation of its fighting with Hezbollah, and Jewish settler violence and land grabs in the West Bank, he says:

The fear today ... is that all these bitter conflicts will merge together into one huge regional conflagration, drawing in other Iranian proxies in Yemen, Syria and Iraq, and forcing, in turn, a military response from the US and its allies, which have built up their military presence in recent weeks. The ultimate nightmare is that Iran itself will directly confront Israel (or the other way around) ...

But there will also be suspicions that the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, purposely seized on an opportunity to escalate the border confrontation with Hezbollah that has simmered since October 7. Opponents and critics accuse Netanyahu, with some justice, of blocking a Gaza deal in his unrealistic pursuit of "total victory" - and deliberately stoking an expanded conflict to aid his political survival.<sup>1</sup>

Israeli commentators put it more directly. They include former prime minister Ehud Olmert, whose article in *Ha'aretz* bears the title, 'Netanyahu wants an all-out war in the north, south and centre'.<sup>2</sup> The title of an article by *Ha'aretz* columnist Rogel Alpher, referring to Netanyahu's histrionic performance at the US Congress on July 24, is even more blunt, if a tad hyperbolic: 'Netanyahu wants a world war'.<sup>3</sup>

There are indeed several clear indications that Netanyahu is aiming to extend and escalate existing armed conflicts and ignite a grand regional conflagration. Israel's genocidal war on the Palestinians in Gaza goes on with no end in sight, while Netanyahu keeps torpedoing the ceasefire/hostages negotiations in Doha. As Olmert puts it, "Netanyahu does not want the hostages back ... The talks are likely to continue indefinitely, or blow up at some stage and end with another round of military moves in the south, and perhaps in the north as well."<sup>4</sup>

## Provocation

On July 30, Israel escalated its hitherto controlled hostilities with the Lebanese Hezbollah by assassinating that organisation's senior leader, Fuad Shukur. On the following day, an even more blatant provocation: the assassination of Hamas's top leader, Ismail Haniyeh - who, as it happened, headed the team with which Israel was supposed to be negotiating a Gaza ceasefire and release of hostages. This assassination in Tehran, where Haniyeh was attending the swearing-in of Iran's new president, Masoud Pezeshkian, was a Zionist state gauntlet thrown down to the Islamic Republic.

Meantime, in the occupied West Bank, there has been a rising tsunami of anti-Palestinian pogroms perpetrated by savage gangs of religious Zionist settlers, flanked by Israeli military personnel. And, since the early morning of August 28, there has been a massive offensive of the



**Keen to stoke the fires**

Israeli occupation forces against the major towns in the northern part of the West Bank, deploying hundreds of ground troops, as well as fighter aircraft, drones and bulldozers, and using war-criminal tactics - long practised against the population of Gaza - such as targeting hospitals, and 'encouraging' the population to dislocate to 'safe' areas.

An article in *The Times of Israel* refers to the foreign minister in the introduction: "Israel Katz calls for 'temporary evacuation of Palestinian civilians' from cities where IDF is engaged in anti-terror raid," Katz is quoted as saying: "We need to deal with the threat exactly as we deal with terror infrastructure in Gaza, including the temporary evacuation of Palestinian civilians and any other step needed." He referred to the latest IDF operation as part of "a war in every sense".<sup>5</sup>

## Motives

But *why* is Netanyahu keen to stoke the fires of regional war? The simplistic explanation favoured by the bourgeois media is his own self-interest. Here, for example, is *The Guardian*'s Simon Tisdall once again:

What is Netanyahu's plan? Does he have one? Because his governing majority in the Knesset, and his own position as premier, depend on the support of a handful of extremist religious and Jewish nationalist ministers and deputies, and because he could face jail on corruption charges, once he is out of power, opponents say Netanyahu has no interest in peace on any front.<sup>6</sup>

This echoes Olmert:

Masses of [Israeli] people from the political right, left and centre see that the person responsible for their welfare and security wants to create and maintain a constant, indefinite state of emergency. He wants to use this state of emergency as cover under which he can go on fleeing from responsibility for the disaster of October 7 and even prolong his corruption trial endlessly. (Wait and see what other disaster he's preparing for us ahead of his scheduled December 2 testimony.)<sup>7</sup>

It is clearly true that Netanyahu has personal reasons to favour war without end. But this falls far

short of a satisfactory explanation. Suppose for a moment that self-interest compels Netanyahu to act, against his better judgement, as a tool of his more extremist coalition partners. Then this would only shift the question: Why are *they* pushing for an all-out war? What do *they* expect to gain from it?

In any case, the self-interest explanation fails because it suffers from short memory and lack of attention. In fact, Netanyahu has been trying to foment a regional conflagration long before he could be suspected of doing so for personal reasons. For many years he has not missed a chance, especially when speaking to an American audience, of inciting war against Iran, allegedly the root of all regional evil, including Palestinian resistance.

In this connection I would like to recall an article I published in the *Weekly Worker* in 2012, entitled 'Netanyahu's war wish'.<sup>8</sup> The analysis offered in that old article remains substantially valid today. Here is a brief summary, with a few quotes. Netanyahu has two motives for fomenting a US-Israeli war against Iran. First:

... the real political threat [Iran] poses to Israel's regional hegemony, not the imaginary threat of being attacked by the Islamic Republic. Possession of nuclear capability is certainly a component of this political threat, inasmuch as it would contribute to Iran's diplomatic muscle in its dealings with other Middle Eastern states and with the US. But it is only a component. Even without the nuclear issue, the Zionist state has a clear interest in replacing the present Iranian regime by one compliant with global US hegemony.

But there is a second motive, no less important. And it explains why Netanyahu would prefer the Iranian regime to be overthrown by the risky means of war rather than by subversion. As I wrote in that article,

To explain Netanyahu's reckless calculation we need to turn our attention to Zionism's nightmare: the Palestinian 'demographic peril' ... By now most people are aware that the present Israeli government has done all in its power to torpedo a so-called 'two-state solution'.

Many observers have been puzzled by Israel's adamant rejection of any Palestinian

sovereign state, however small, west of the Jordan river. This seems terribly short-sighted. For, if the whole of pre-1948 Palestine is to remain under Israeli sovereignty, that would mean that Israel would have to rule over a hostile Palestinian Arab people. In effect, the whole of that territory will be one state. Right now there is a rough numerical parity between the two national groups. Since no large-scale Jewish immigration is expected, and since the natural rate of increase of the Palestinian population is higher than that of the Hebrew population, the former will considerably outnumber the latter within a few decades. Surely, the Palestinian majority cannot indefinitely be denied equal rights; but equal rights would lead to the demise of the Jewish state. For Zionism this 'demographic peril' is worse even than a sovereign Palestinian mini-state. So it would seem that by sabotaging the creation of such a state, Israel is heading for what its own ruling ideology regards as the abyss.

This apparent contradiction disregards a third option: neither a two-state solution, nor a single state with an Arab majority, but 'population transfer'. Large-scale ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Arabs would result in a single state in the entire territory, with a large Jewish majority, which is the ultimate aim of all mainstream Zionist parties.

But implementing ethnic cleansing on a sufficiently large scale ... is politically very tricky. It cannot be done in normal, politically tranquil circumstances. It requires what in Zionist parlance is called *she'at kosher*: an opportune moment of major political, and preferably military, crisis ...

A war with Iran would present a golden opportunity for large-scale expulsion of Palestinians, precisely because ... fighting would not be over too soon, and major protests and disturbances are likely to occur among the masses throughout the region, including the Palestinian Arabs under Israeli rule. What better way to pacify such disturbances than to "expel many people"?

Of course, a decision to ignite a war against Iran is not one that any Israeli leader would take lightly. There is a non-negligible risk that Israel would suffer many casualties. This is not a price that even the most adventurous prime minister would consider paying, unless the expected prize is extremely high. But in this case the prize is the highest possible one from a Zionist point of view: eliminating the demographic threat to the future of Israel as a Jewish ethnocracy. So Netanyahu will be sorely tempted to make a sacrifice of his own people for the greater national good.

## Strategy

A long-standing Israeli plan for ethnic cleansing, hatched by Ariel Sharon (Israel's prime minister from 2001-06), and revealed by an eminent Israeli military theorist, involved the West Bank.<sup>9</sup> The Gaza Strip was to be dealt with at some later stage. One of Sharon's last actions was withdrawal of Israeli settlements and troops from Gaza, which was turned into a huge

concentration camp, subject to ever harsher siege and to repeated brutal military offensives. Under Netanyahu, Israel also bolstered Hamas rule of the Strip in a Machiavellian stratagem that included transmitting large subventions from Qatar. Netanyahu deluded himself that this carrot-and-stick scheme would keep Gaza safely under control. Israel's top political and military leaders kept ignoring contrary warning signs.

Hamas's onslaught on October 7 2023, which traumatised Israel, caught the self-deluded Israeli leadership by surprise. But Netanyahu - ever a chancer - soon made a strategic adjustment, turning a disaster into an opportunity to launch a genocidal war against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. By now, Gaza has been utterly devastated; it will take years to make it inhabitable. But the war has so far failed to bring its object - ethnic cleansing - to conclusion: the Palestinian population is still there. Reduced and ravaged by megamassacre, but still there.

The Sharon plan for ethnically cleansing the West Bank had envisaged a scheme for disposing of the Palestinians, who would be stampeded across the River Jordan: they would settle on the East Bank. The Hashemite regime of Jordan would be overthrown and replaced by an Israeli-controlled 'new Palestine'. No comparable scheme existed for the people of the Gaza Strip, hemmed in by Egypt's Sinai desert and the sea.

Getting rid of them now poses a problem for Netanyahu's genocide. He may possibly hope that by prolonging the war on Gaza, conditions inside it would become so unbearable that the people would somehow try, or be helped, to escape to the desert or the sea; but this would take a very long war.

Meantime, Israel's provocations on other fronts, especially against Iran, have encountered the same obstacle as in the past: US reluctance to be dragged into a new major regional war. But without US direct involvement Israel alone would be too vulnerable to retaliation by Iran and, even more so, by Hezbollah. On top of this, Israel is undergoing an unprecedented internal crisis, that could cause it to implode under the pressure of a difficult war.

In this turbulent situation, prediction is pure speculation. All bets are off ●

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## GERMANY

# Government parties rejected

Alternative für Deutschland was the clear winner in state elections and the establishment has been rattled. But what to make of former 'official communist' Sahra Wagenknecht and her BSW? Carla Roberts investigates

**R**egional elections in the east German states of Saxony and Thuringia on September 1 have gone about as badly for the governing parties as they had feared. It is telling that chancellor Olaf Scholz expressed "relief" that his own Social Democratic Party "held it together".

It is all a question of perspective, clearly, considering that the SPD polled a derisory 7.3% in Saxony and 6.1% in Thuringia - which is admittedly down only marginally from the last elections in 2019. In fact, all three government parties got a smacking, with the Greens at 5.1% and 3.2% respectively (down around 2% in both states), with the Free Democrats losing 4% in both regions, getting barely 1% of the electorate to vote for them.<sup>1</sup>

The rightwing Alternative für Deutschland is the clear winner, coming a convincing first in Thuringia with 32.8% (up 9.4%), with the conservative Christian Democratic Union in second place (23.6%). In Saxony, the AfD finished a close second with 30.6% (up 3.1%), just behind the 31.9% polled by the Christian Democrats.

Nationally the picture is not quite as dramatic. A recent poll has the CDU on 32%, SPD and AfD on 16%, the Greens on 12%, BSW on 7%, FDP at 5% and Die Linke on 3%.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the success of the two 'fringe parties', the AfD and BSW, might change the picture in the run-up to the national parliamentary elections in September 2025 and certainly in time for the September 22 regional elections in the east German state of Brandenburg. The 74% turnout showed that people really wanted to 'stick it' to the extremely unpopular ruling coalition parties.

### Wagenknecht

Before we turn to the character of the AfD, let us take a look at the new party on the block. The BSW, whose full title is Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht - Vernunft und Gerechtigkeit ('Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance - Reason and Justice'). As the name suggests, it is entirely focused on the rhetorically talented Wagenknecht.

As an 'Ossie', the former leader of the Kommunistische Plattform within Die Linke is particularly popular in eastern Germany. It was no surprise really that she had become frustrated by the failure of Die Linke to make any political headway. It was constantly being outmanoeuvred by the right in the shape of the AfD. In October 2023, Wagenknecht and eight other Die Linke MPs resigned their membership, forming instead the BSW parliamentary group.

BSW polled 11.8% in Saxony and 15.8% in Thuringia, reducing Die Linke to 4.5% in Saxony (down 5.9%). In Thuringia, Die Linke polled 13.1%, which sounds a lot. Until you know that in 2019, it was the strongest party with over 31% of the vote. The 'realo' Linke politician, Bodo Ramelow, had been leading the regional government in coalition with the SPD and - while he is personally quite popular in Germany, with half the national electorate recently declaring that they would "vote for him if they could"<sup>3</sup> - Die Linke is now very much seen as part of 'them'. Part of the establishment, that needs to be punished.

Under the leadership of the 'neutral bureaucrat', Janine Wissler, formerly of Linksruck, the German section of the International Socialist



Targetting some 20-30 million

Tendency, Die Linke has become increasingly pro-Zionist and pro-imperialist.<sup>4</sup> Instead of being a strong party of opposition, it has been keen to compromise and, whenever it has come to office in any of the 16 federal states, it has been eager to show how 'responsible' it is by slashing budgets, closing libraries and generally being a reliable manager of capitalism. Even without the BSW breakaway, Die Linke would have struggled to cross the 5% threshold to get back into parliament in September 2025. Now it looks like an impossible task.

There is certainly considerable space to the left of Die Linke, but that is not the direction that Wagenknecht has chosen. Yes, the BSW takes a far more critical approach to Israel and the war in Ukraine, and Wagenknecht has led peace demonstrations of tens of thousands, which were stupidly shunned by her former comrades (because Die Linke feared that AfD members and supporters would show up).

But the main character of the BSW is 'populist', deeply nationalist and shares a lot with George Galloway and his Workers Party of Britain: anti-imperialist, but conservative on social issues, while spouting nonsense about being 'tough on crime' and 'uncontrolled immigration'. Just like Galloway, Wagenknecht has been ranting about the "lack of police on our streets", the "threats to our national security", etc.<sup>5</sup>

BSW is also not a hundred miles away from the AfD: Both organisations have been campaigning pretty much on the same issues - one from the right, the other from left. Like the AfD, BSW appeals particularly to the 'little people', those who see themselves as having been 'left behind' - not just by the German unification of 1991

and an economy in the doldrums, but also, chiefly, over the Ukraine war, which is becoming increasingly unpopular.

### Nord Stream

According to a recent poll, 82% of people do not believe that Ukraine can win the war.<sup>6</sup> Both parties demand that German military, political and financial support for Ukraine should be ended. Germany has officially given €41 billion in support of Zelensky's government, while also helping to train the Ukrainian army and spending another €22 billion on supporting Ukrainian refugees - second only to the US, which has given an official total of around €71.25 billion.<sup>7</sup>

Both parties have been outspoken about the need to stop "counterproductive" sanctions on Russia and have called on the government to facilitate peace negotiations with Russia. AfD has organised a demonstration for October 8 specifically to demand the urgent repair of the Nord Stream gas pipeline, which was blown up in September 2022. It is unclear if the BSW will join, but it would not be surprising.

It is an open secret in Germany that the attack was almost certainly orchestrated, if not actually carried out, by the CIA in order to cut off Russian revenues - and in all likelihood with the active cooperation of the German government, which has made a huge sacrifice by foregoing cheap Russian gas. Energy prices have soared, with all the negative effects that has on profitability.

Sahra Wagenknecht has used her position as an MP to call for an official investigation into Nord Stream: "Should it emerge that German authorities had advance knowledge of the attack, we would

have the scandal of the century," she has said.<sup>8</sup>

However, the German establishment and the media continue to parrot the script written for them by the US administration, blaming Ukrainian freelancers for the sabotage - specifically a Ukrainian diving instructor named publicly as Volodymyr Z. A warrant for his arrest was issued in August, with a huge media fanfare.

You do not have to be a nutty conspiracy theorist to smell this absolutely massive rat (though the AfD in particular does indeed attract a lot of oddballs, including plenty of anti-vaxxers). This scandal will have played a significant role in people sticking two fingers up to the German establishment on September 1.

BSW and AfD also sing from the same hymn sheet when it comes to immigration. Wagenknecht has been going on about the dangers of "uncontrolled" migration and, while the party's programme is not the rabid anti-immigration rhetoric of the AfD, it is unpleasant enough, warning that "immigration and the coexistence of different cultures can be enriching", but only "as long as the influx remains limited to a level that does not overwhelm our country and its infrastructure".

The AfD shouts about the danger of the "Islamification" of Germany and the August 23 knife attack in the city of Solingen, in which three people were killed, could not have come at a better time for it. The alleged perpetrator is a failed asylum-seeker from Syria who had evaded his planned deportation.

In 2015, ex-chancellor Angela Merkel had opened the door to more than a million refugees from Syria - and most definitely not because of "my concern for human dignity", as she has claimed. Firstly, at the height of the Syrian civil war, she wanted Germany to be seen as a key political player once again. It also served German capital, which was seriously short of cheap, exploitable labour - similar to the 1950s, when millions of *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) were invited in. Most of the refugees from Syria were allowed to work after three months and indeed, over 75% soon had steady full-time employment.<sup>9</sup>

That was, however, *before* the Ukraine war, the arrival of lots more refugees and the decline of the German economy. In 2015, almost everybody celebrated Merkel's move. Now, almost everybody thinks it was utter madness. The government coalition too has jumped on the bandwagon, promising deportations.

Officially, the AfD demands the immediate "remigration" of 250,000 people, but numerous leading figures in the party have publicly talked about up to "20 to 30 million" people who could and should be expelled, "including more than 15 million people with German citizenship", as Maximilian Krah, the AfD's top candidate in the June European elections, said to much furore in the German media.<sup>10</sup> This and similar such statements have led to the party's expulsion from Identity and Democracy, the rightwing group in the European parliament led by none other than Marine Le Pen.<sup>11</sup>

The AfD is not a "fascist" party, but it certainly is full of dodgy types like Krah. Its leader in Thuringia, Björn Höcke, has been convicted twice for using the banned phrase, "Alles für Deutschland" ("All for

Germany', the rallying cry of the Sturmabteilung, the paramilitary wing of the German Nazi Party). In his first court case, the former history teacher claimed not to have known about the past use of the phrase - and then went on to repeat it at a demonstration, where he was filmed by the German media.

### Attractive

Clearly, those convictions - which came with a fine of €13,000 each - have done nothing to stop the rise of the AfD. Quite the opposite. It will have made it look *more attractive* to many of those who want to give the ruling class a bloody nose. Add to that the official characterisation in 2021 of the AfD as a rechtsextremistischer Verdachtsfall ('suspected rightwing extremist organisation') by the German Verfassungsschutz (Office for the Protection of the Constitution) - and you have the makings of what to many disgruntled people look like true martyrs.

As has the fact that none of the mainstream bourgeois parties will allow the AfD into government locally, regionally or nationally, opting instead to form the shakiest of coalitions to uphold what is called the *Brandmauer* (firewall).

Sahra Wagenknecht too rejects forming a coalition with the AfD - but has no such qualms about participating in government coalitions, even with the conservative CDU: "Of course we want to be part of a government coalition. We have always said that we want stable governments."<sup>12</sup> She is currently negotiating for the BSW to become junior partner to the CDU in both regions. It does not take a genius to work out that it probably will not be very long before Wagenknecht and the BSW go the way of Die Linke and the many, many 'socialists' who help manage capitalism as junior partners: into oblivion.

Renewed calls by outraged mainstream bourgeois politicians for the AfD to be banned will just add fuel to the fire and add to the party's popularity. Communists should stay well clear of calls for such bans, even when it comes to allegedly 'neo-Nazi' parties. We are, after all, interested in overthrowing the capitalist system, including the 'oh so democratic' constitutions. It is no coincidence that the last time the German government was successful in implementing such a ban was in 1956, when the Communist Party of Germany was declared illegal ●

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**IRAN**

# Don't bank on ayatollahs

There are those, including on the 'left', who credit the Islamic Republic with being a bulwark of 'anti-imperialism' and potentially the nemesis of Israel and US hegemony, writes **Yassamine Mather**

**T**he ongoing genocide of Palestinians has both short-term and long-term consequences for the Middle East and maybe the rest of the world.

One of the most obvious immediate effects of Israel's assault on Gaza has been the collapse of the Abraham Accords. These were a series of treaties aimed at normalising diplomatic relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco, facilitated by the US administration between August and December 2020.

In the span of five months, four Arab states joined Egypt and Jordan in "making peace with Israel".<sup>1</sup> The expectation was that Saudi Arabia would also join the accords. They were isolating Iran's Islamic Republic as the rogue 'anti-Israeli' state in the region. The agreements were called the Abraham Accords in honour of Abraham - the mythical patriarch of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

However, the events immediately after October 7 2023 put an end to all this. Some have argued that Hamas's attack on Israel was aimed at stopping the Abraham accord, as well as obtaining the release of a large numbers of prisoners held by Israel. If that was the case, they achieved the first part of their aim. For all practical purposes the Abraham Accords are dead and buried.

No Arab state, however much under pressure by the US and its allies, will be able to admit to the normalisation of relations with the Zionist state openly. Even without such steps, authoritarian states in the region, including the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan and Morocco, are threatened by the growing anger in the streets of their towns and cities. These days any talk of diplomatic relations with Benjamin Netanyahu's genocidal government in Jerusalem would be political suicide.

The second and less talked about consequence of 11 months of uninterrupted killing of tens of thousands of Palestinians, with the direct support of the US and the approval of most of its allies, has taught any country thinking of 'dissing' the hegemon power a bitter lesson: if the US and its allies decide that you should be flattened by bombing and military attacks, there is nothing you can do about it. You might complain to the United Nations, but do not pin any hope of hostilities ending, even if several UN agencies and the secretary general intervene on your behalf. Many countries had learned this lesson after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. However, the relentless massacre of Palestinians has been a serious reminder of what awaits those who do not follow the US diktat and this includes Iran's Islamic Republic.

There are those, including those on the 'left', who bank on Iran and see it as the leading element in the so-called 'Axis of Resistance'. They picture Iran as a bulwark of 'anti-imperialism' and the potential nemesis of Israel and even US hegemony in the Middle East. This is more than foolish. Not only is Iran no 'anti-imperialist' power, it is determined to secure a deal with imperialism. It longs to end its isolation and once again to be allowed to rejoin the 'international community'.



**Test launch of Shahab 3 ballistic missile**

More than that. As I shall show, Iran is desperately weak according to almost every conceivable index.

## Diplomatic

By early 2024, after a few years of pursuing a policy of rapprochement with China and Russia, Iran's supreme leader decided that the regime could not take the threat of a US attack lightly. He was well aware that the country's military arsenal is old, and in desperate need of upgrade/replacement. He knows that the regime could not survive any US military intervention and furthermore even the Chinese 'Belt and Road' way to economic development depends on the removal of at least some of the western sanctions imposed by the US and its allies.

Signs of this change of heart were present before the accident that killed former president Ebrahim Raisi and his foreign minister in May. Secret (and not so secret) negotiations with US officials had started in early 2024 and current changes in the Iranian government show a major shift in ayatollah Khamenei's position.

In other words, the lesson from the onslaught in Gaza is felt all over the world, including in Tehran. The message is loud and clear: there is no room for any dissent against US rule. Iran's Islamic Republic continues using slogans about the 'Great Satan', but at the same time, contrary to all false reports about its role in the 'Axis of Resistance', the supreme leader and his newly selected 'reformist' president are pursuing political and economic rapprochement with the west for two obvious reasons:

■ They are scared of what might happen if they engage in a war with the Zionist state and the US comes to

the 'rescue', as promised repeatedly by the Biden administration and echoed by presidential candidates, Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. The US could attempt to bomb the country back into the stone age, not least by using bunker-busters to destroy the precious nuclear industry. ■ They need the removal of some sanctions for the country's economy to survive.

## Military

The Iranian airforce is in desperate need of new equipment after decades of international sanctions. The regime has been prevented from accessing the latest advanced military technology. As reported by Reuters:

The airforce only has a few dozen working strike aircraft, including Russian jets and ageing US models acquired before the Iranian Revolution of 1979 ....

Tehran has a squadron of nine F-4 and F-5 fighter jets [bought between 1971 and 1979], one squadron of Russian-made Sukhoi-24 jets, and some MiG-29s, F7 and F14 aircraft .... The Iranians also have pilotless planes designed to fly into targets and explode. Analysts estimate the country's drone arsenal to be in the low thousands.<sup>2</sup>

Iran has developed at least 10 different models of suicide drones, designed to explode on impact. These drones can be as accurate as ballistic missiles, but with the advantage of flying lower to evade radar detection. Smaller models, such as the Shahed-136, carry approximately 45 kilograms of explosives. One of the smallest models, the Meraj-521,

carries only about three kilograms of explosives.

Due to their slower speeds, many of these drones are easier targets for anti-aircraft batteries, fighter jets or missiles. Their operational ranges vary significantly, from as short as five kilometres to as long as 2,500. Iran's largest suicide drones, like those in the Arash series, can carry nearly 260 kilograms of explosives and have ranges of up to 2,000 kilometres. However, both the range and the accuracy of this type of drone were seriously challenged after Iran retaliated against the Israeli attack on its Damascus consulate in April.

In addition to suicide drones, Iran possesses more than a dozen models of combat and surveillance drones, capable of attacking ground, sea or air targets before returning to base. Larger models, such as the Shahed-149, have operational ranges of up to 2,000 kilometres and can carry payloads of up to 500 kilograms. It is also believed that Iran has more than 3,500 surface-to-surface missiles, some of which carry half-ton warheads (the number capable of reaching Israel may be lower).

When it comes to naval power, the combined forces of the Iranian navy and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps patrol the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Although they have been relatively effective in defending Iranian waters, it is unlikely they can do much beyond these coastal zones. In addition, the navy has seven frigates, 49 patrol boats, 31 amphibious ships, 17 auxiliary ships, 19 submarines, and 54 aircraft.

Again Iran has no particular naval capabilities to defend itself against the United States and the dispatch of several aircraft carriers to the region

over the last few months is mainly aimed at warning Iran.

According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, in 2013 the regular Iranian army was estimated to have 357,000 personnel (167,000 conscripts and 190,000 professionals) plus around 350,000 reservists for a total of 700,000 soldiers.

Of course, no-one envisages a land attack on Iran and US generals constantly warn how foolish it would be to launch such an operation: Iran is a big country, approximately four times the size of Iraq, with diverse and challenging terrain, including mountains, deserts and dense urban areas. The Zagros and Alborz mountain ranges, along with the vast Dasht-e Kavir and Dasht-e Lut deserts, create natural defensive barriers that would make large-scale ground operations extremely challenging. Also the country's large size provides it with significant strategic depth, allowing its military forces to disperse and operate from different parts of the country, complicating any invasion plans. Conducting a land invasion would require establishing and maintaining long supply lines across hostile territory.

However, if the US pursues a policy of regime change from above, military occupation on the ground will not be necessary. Destroying the country's infrastructure might lead to the collapse of the current Shia regime. That is why Iran's Islamic Republic has no intention of responding to Israel's successive attempts to draw it into a hot war and the supreme leader aims to avoid an US attack no matter what.

## Economic

Another reason why Iran is desperate to improve relations with the west relates to the country's economic situation. In his first television interview as the new president, Masoud Pezeshkian said that his government needs more than \$100 billion of foreign investment to increase the economic growth from 4% to 8%, but he admitted that solving the economic problems will depend on foreign relations.

He referred to problems such as power cuts and pressure on factories, adding: "What experts and economists say is that we need \$200 to \$250 billion of investment to achieve 8% economic growth. However, we need investment to achieve growth."

Blaming the previous government for the current deficit, Pezeshkian added: "They said that we inherited a good economic situation, but we don't have enough. I don't want to complain, but we got permission from the leadership to take some amount from the national fund and settle some debts."

One of the most pressing structural issues facing Iran in recent years has been the significant deterioration of its economic and civil infrastructure.

In a recent interview with *Entekhab*, a reformist website, economist Amirhossein Khaleghi highlighted the severe challenges in maintaining critical services operational, pointing to a lack of electricity and a shortage of gas as key examples. Khaleghi noted that the sanctions have had a profoundly negative impact on these sectors, leading to power cuts in the summer and issues with providing heating in the winter.



# What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question—ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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Bourgeois economists inside and outside Iran have given the same message for the last few years. They state that domestic laws have to be adapted to the 'rules and standards' of the Financial Action Task Force so as to remove obstacles to trade and foreign investment.

## Sanctions

The latest round of US sanctions began in November 2018. The White House was adamant they were not aimed at regime change, rather at compelling Iran to alter its regional policies, cease its support for "militant groups" and "end its ballistic missile programme". However, the close relations between the Trump administration, Israel and their well-financed exile stooges did point to sanctions aimed at triggering 'regime change from above'.

In September 2019, a US official announced that sanctions would be imposed on anyone engaging in trade with Iran or purchasing its oil. That same month, following a suspected Iranian attack on key Saudi Arabian oil facilities, Trump instructed the treasury department to "substantially increase" sanctions on Iran, with a focus on the national bank. A senior Trump administration official later indicated that these new sanctions specifically targeted the financial assets of the supreme leader's inner circle. However, Tehran denied any involvement in the attacks on the Saudi oil facilities, according to *The New York Times*, and in August 2020 the UN security council blocked the US attempt to re-impose 'snapback sanctions' on Iran.

In September 2020 the US claimed that UN sanctions against Iran were reinstated - a position rejected by Iran and the other remaining parties to the JCPOA nuclear agreement. The following day, the US imposed sanctions on Iranian defence officials, nuclear scientists, the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran, and anyone involved in conventional arms deals with the country. Then in October of that year the US expanded its sanctions on Iran's financial sector, targeting 18 Iranian banks.

In February 2023, the German state-owned broadcaster, Deutsche Welle, reported that the pressure

on Iran had diplomatic costs for Washington and could ultimately lead to an increase in oil prices, in light of the rise in Iran's oil exports. It is assumed that this prompted the Biden administration's latest moves in terms of the relaxation of sanctions regarding Iranian oil sales.

However, the basic effects of the sanctions have contributed to a wide range of adverse macroeconomic effects, including sharp currency devaluation, severe trade and fiscal deficits, high inflation and increasing poverty rates. Successive Iranian governments have struggled to effectively counter the economic pressures resulting from these sanctions.

The EU has also imposed sanctions against Iran in response to its human rights abuses, nuclear proliferation activities and military support for Russia's war efforts in Ukraine.

In 2011, the EU introduced a series of sanctions in response to what it called "serious human rights violations" in the country. The restrictive measures have been renewed annually since then and were last extended in April 2024. Since October 2022, the EU has drastically increased restrictive measures, adopting 10 packages of sanctions.

There is no doubt that there are "serious human rights violations" in Iran's Islamic Republic. However, it is debatable whether they are worse than those in pro-western authoritarian regimes in the Middle East or the apartheid, colonial-settler state in Israel, all of whom benefit from EU political and financial support.

The combined EU and US sanctions have significantly impacted Iran's logistics infrastructure, exacerbating existing challenges, while also imposing new hurdles. Below is a general overview of how sanctions have affected Iran:

1. Shipping and maritime trade: There are shipping line restrictions: major companies like Maersk and the Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC) have scaled back or stopped operations in Iran due to sanctions, complicating international goods transport for the country and driving up costs and transit times.

Many shipping firms avoid transporting Iranian goods due to sanction risks, leading to increased costs. Moreover, international insurers often refuse to cover vessels that dock in Iran, further isolating the country from global trade networks.

The sanctions have also resulted in increased congestion at Iranian ports. With fewer shipping options available, bottlenecks form, causing delays in importing essential goods, including food and medicine.

2. Aviation sector challenges: There is limited access to aircraft parts. Sanctions have drastically reduced Iran's ability to acquire spare parts and modern aircraft, causing airlines like Iran Air to struggle with maintenance, leading to flight cancellations and reduced options for both domestic and international travel.

There is reduced international connectivity: Many airlines have discontinued their routes to and from Iran, further isolating the country. This impacts both passenger travel and the transport of goods.

3. Road and Rail Transportation: Foreign investment in Iran's transportation infrastructure has been stifled by sanctions. Modernisation projects for roads and rail systems have been delayed or abandoned, reducing the efficiency of the logistics network.

There have been increased operational costs. The reliance on outdated vehicles and infrastructure has led to higher maintenance costs and decreased efficiency for trucking companies, which are crucial for domestic logistics.

4. Supply chain disruptions: Sanctions have driven up the costs of importing goods, disrupting supply chains. Businesses face higher prices for raw materials, which increases production costs and ultimately raises prices for consumers.

Sanctions have led to a significant rise in illicit trade and smuggling. While this may temporarily ease shortages, it weakens the formal economy and can introduce non-standard or substandard products into the market, often resulting in enriching every section of the regime targeted by sanctions.

5. Technological isolation: Sanctions have limited Iran's access to modern logistics technologies and software that could optimise inventory control and transportation efficiency. This has hampered the development of a competitive logistics sector.

Iran has attempted to develop home-grown alternatives, but these often fall short of international standards, reducing overall efficiency and reliability.

6. Economic consequences: We have seen both inflation and an economic downturn. There have been shifts in trade relations. Sanctions have prompted Iran to strengthen ties with non-western countries, particularly in Asia.

## Ecology

A recent article in *Eurasia Review* entitled 'Did sanctions cause Iran's environmental problems?' explores the multifaceted environmental challenges facing Iran, primarily focusing on the severe water crisis, agricultural practices, pollution, and air quality issues.<sup>3</sup>

This is my understanding of the situation.

■ Iran is experiencing a severe water shortage, driven by rapid population growth, mismanagement and unsustainable agricultural practices that consume over 90% of the country's water. Despite frequent droughts and decreasing water resources, agricultural expansion has continued, relying heavily on non-renewable groundwater.

The drying up of critical water bodies, like Lake Urmia and other wetlands, has been exacerbated by

dam construction and water diversion for agriculture. Water quality has deteriorated due to pollution from the agricultural runoff, industrial waste and untreated sewage. Key water bodies like the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf are suffering from high pollution levels.

■ Deforestation is increasing due to urbanisation, overgrazing and illegal logging, contributing to soil erosion and desertification, and diminishing biodiversity.

■ Air pollution in urban areas, especially Tehran, is severe, driven by factors such as urbanisation, reliance on low-quality fuels and an ageing vehicle fleet. Cities like Zabol have ranked among the world's most polluted due to dust storms and other such sources.

Economic costs associated with air pollution, such as for healthcare and lost productivity, are substantial, with Tehran's air pollution estimated to cost around \$2.6 billion annually.

The adverse impacts of international sanctions on Iran's methanol and oil industries illustrate how these restrictions have led to suboptimal technological choices and significant environmental degradation. Despite having the potential to become a leading methanol producer, Iran's access to modern technologies has been hampered. Companies like JM and Haldor Topsoe have refused to provide critical auto-thermal reforming technology for Iranian refineries, forcing Iran to use outdated methods that result in higher water consumption and carbon emissions.

For example, the Eslamabad-e Gharb refinery is being launched with older technologies, while neighbouring Turkmenistan successfully operates a state-of-the-art methanol plant. In another case, Haldor Topsoe failed to deliver the necessary equipment for a methanol project, leading to the use of local alternatives that did not meet environmental standards.

The consequences of projects like the oil extraction in Hur Al-Azim, where original designs for wetland drilling were ignored, have resulted in significant ecological damage and increased dust storms badly affecting the local population.

The imposition of sanctions in 2010 on gasoline imports further exacerbated these environmental issues. While Iran managed to increase its local refining capacity, the quality of the domestically produced petrol was severely compromised, with high levels of contaminants. This shift illustrates Iran's response to sanctions, prioritising short-term survival over long-term environmental health.

Additionally, Iran's pursuit of self-sufficiency in food production as a national security measure has led to increased environmental degradation due to unsustainable agricultural practices. Iranian leaders view food dependency as a vulnerability. Consequently, similar policies promoting self-sufficiency in other sectors, like car manufacturing and pharmaceuticals, have been adopted, despite their long-term costs to the environment. The overarching consequence is the tension between national security concerns under sanctions and the resulting environmental degradation ●

## Notes

1. [www.aapeaceinstitute.org/latest/robert-greenway-the-abraham-accords-are-an-opportunity-for-our-european-partners-to-build-a-new-relationship-with-the-middle-east](https://www.aapeaceinstitute.org/latest/robert-greenway-the-abraham-accords-are-an-opportunity-for-our-european-partners-to-build-a-new-relationship-with-the-middle-east).
2. [www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/what-iran-israel-would-wield-long-range-air-war-2024-04-18](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/what-iran-israel-would-wield-long-range-air-war-2024-04-18).
3. [www.eurasiareview.com/08092021-did-sanctions-cause-irans-environmental-problems-analysis](https://www.eurasiareview.com/08092021-did-sanctions-cause-irans-environmental-problems-analysis).

## Online Communist Forum



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# weekly worker

Individuals,  
even super-rich  
individuals,  
cannot entirely  
opt out

## Revenge on the internet

Encryption can be broken with a \$5 wrench. The legal actions against Telegram and X show the fragility of free expression in the face of state power, argues Paul Demarty

On August 24, a certain Pavel Durov was arrested at a Paris airport.

Durov is Russian by birth, but has accumulated numerous citizenships over the years - including that of France in 2021. His arrest was on account of his ownership of the Telegram messaging app-cum-social network, whose strict and fanatical defence of user privacy has made it a bugbear of governments around the world and given it enormous clout among those who fear their governments, be they criminals, dissidents or mere paranoiacs. The French indictment is grandiose, essentially naming him as a co-conspirator in innumerable crimes alleged to have been organised on the platform.

On the other side of the Atlantic, X - the website formerly, and largely still, known as Twitter - ran into trouble in Brazil, where it was banned by the supreme court, principally under the direction of chief justice Alexandre de Moraes. He has been on a crusade for some time now, clamping down on the spread of "misinformation" after supporters of the far-right former president, Jair Bolsonaro, attempted their own January 6-style coup, with much the same level of success. X CEO Elon Musk, as is his habit, engaged in a childish war of tweets with the august justice, and the Brazilian decision has been largely welcomed by liberal opinion in the west, given Musk's increasing ardour for far-right lunacy.

The coincidence of these two events is instructive, and perhaps when future historians write about the first decades of the internet they will date the death of its first great ideology to August 2024.

### Pirate utopia

The canonical expression of that ideology is a manifesto published by John Perry Barlow in 1996 entitled 'A declaration of the independence of Cyberspace', though it was hardly novel then. Barlow - once a songwriter for the Grateful Dead, and co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation - addressed his text portentously to the "governments of the industrial world". Its tone is defiant. Regulation of cyberspace is not only unwanted, but impossible. The net is "naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. You have no moral right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement we have true reason to fear." The libertarian assertions pile up: "We are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity."<sup>1</sup>

Barlow was protesting against the US Telecommunications Act of 1996, which included extensive provisions for censoring obscene publications on the internet. Barlow got his way - the supreme court gutted that section of the act. The



Pavel Durov: up against state power

remainder, ironically, includes the one clause that effectively allows social media companies to let their users run riot - the infamous section 230, which makes users rather than platforms legally liable for content.

For these original cyber-libertarians, however, the dream was not a future where the internet was effectively carved up between a few giant corporations. It would be a pirate utopia for freaks and geeks; a great, chaotic bazaar and cultural melting pot, such as one hopes to find at Burning Man or, indeed, in the parking lot outside a Grateful Dead concert. Between the lines, it was not as universalist as it wanted to look. Pirate utopias are not for everyone: they are for pirates. It was in the rapidly expanding ranks of IT professionals that this idea truly spread, that with the correct know-how one could, at least partially, secede from the bureaucratic world all around.

This required defence mechanisms, of course. Essential among them was encryption. Cyberspace runs on information, but the relative ease with which nodes in the network can communicate presents the problem that the powers that be can simply listen in and see what everyone is up to. Encryption makes that - if not impossible - considerably harder. In its modern forms, it is possible to obscure almost all aspects of a message, with the single exception of the sender and recipient, in ways that are punishingly difficult for third parties to circumvent.

Secure encryption was always the main selling point for Telegram. Durov founded it after he was bought out - under duress - from his first great success as a businessman: a social network targeted at Russia and

the wider post-Soviet world called *Vkontakte*. After the Maidan events of 2014 and subsequent military confrontations between Russia and Ukraine, the site came under increasing pressure from the Russian government to cooperate with its clampdown on regime critics. Durov, a die-hard libertarian capitalist, resisted, and was edged out. He left Russia, and began to accumulate passports.

Telegram was his answer. Unlike *Vkontakte*, all messages were to be encrypted end to end - that is, they could only be read in practice by the sender and receiver, in possession of the required encryption keys. It has become a major hit, and a source of controversy in the west since it began to blame all its misfortunes on Russia. Durov has continued to refuse all but the most desultory cooperation with the proper authorities. That has made it popular with political dissidents, especially on the eastern European far right, but also with straightforward criminals. Much on-the-ground information and rumours about the current Ukraine war circulates first on the platform, in both Russian and Ukrainian circles.

### Two spooks

The problem with the encryption approach is that it is based on a false premise, illustrated neatly by an old entry in the *XKCD* webcomic. On the left panel is what cryptography nerds seem to think would happen if they were arrested, with two spooks foiled because the nerd's laptop is encrypted. On the right panel is what would actually happen, with one spook telling the other: "His laptop's encrypted. Drug him and hit him with this \$5 wrench until he tells us the password."<sup>2</sup>

The power of the state against individuals, in other words, rests not on technological superiority so much as preponderance of force. In fact, this plays out in apparently more benign ways. One of the great inventions of the crypto nerds was the cryptocurrency, which attempts to circumvent the need for trusted intermediaries in the financial system by way of a shared system of record - the famous blockchain - that can be cryptographically verified by any participant in the economy. All that discretion and paranoia, however, turns out to be useless when somebody steals all your money. At that point, you need the state or sufficiently powerful financial institutions to step in for you - but you opted out of all that in the first place. (To say that cryptocurrencies have a fraud problem is an understatement - there is little else *apart from* fraud going on, though they just about function as a currency of last resort for people undertaking criminal activity.)

Durov's arrest is a daring assertion of the pre-eminence of the state in these affairs. He is unlikely, admittedly, to be beaten with a wrench; but he will be beaten with a bevy of spectacular charges. It is not over yet for him, or for Telegram; he is a very rich man, after all, and rich men are accustomed to having some influence over their legal difficulties by way of unleashing armies of lawyers after their adversaries. Still, he cuts a strange, diminished, altogether friendless character at present. Telegram is so closely associated in the western mind with Russian perfidy that it is easy to forget that his relations with the Russian state are not historically very good. Rumours abound that, shortly before his arrest, he met with Vladimir Putin in Azerbaijan, though both sides deny it. He does not seem likely to show up in any prisoner exchanges any time soon.

Durov at least has the street-smarts of the typical Russian billionaire, who make their fortunes in a dangerous crowd and must box clever with a shrewd security state. None of that is true of Musk - a self-mythologising narcissist who inherited a mining fortune and gilded it when his failing dotcom start-up was absorbed into what became PayPal. His tenure at Twitter reminds us of a detail from *Fire and fury*, Michael Wolff's first book on the inner goings-on of the Trump White House: Trump, apparently, was deeply wounded by the press hostility to him. He simply could not understand why they did not appreciate what a good job he was doing. A similar sense of wounded pride seems to have driven Musk quite mad. He can buy Twitter - albeit largely with other people's money - but he cannot buy respect, except from his army of servile fanboys.

He returns to 'free speech' ideals periodically to justify his actions more grandly, though he has been

perfectly cooperative with several world governments. Why not with this Brazilian judge? Perhaps it is more than a mere personal feud, but there is precious little evidence to that effect. In any case, Brazil is hardly the first country to simply switch the damn website off. After all, what is he going to do about it - take the supreme court to court?

### Going to war

Musk or no Musk, a truly 'free speech' Twitter was never on the cards, and certainly not since 2016, when the American state's drive towards great-power war shifted gears considerably, between Trump's anti-China sabre-rattling and the Democrats' attempts to pin their failures on Vladimir Putin.

Both of these apparent political accidents acted as accelerants for wider strategic imperatives. As the cliché goes, the first casualty of war is the truth, which is usually nobbled some time in advance of hot conflict; and the means by which it is done away with is state censorship. Ironically, many of the privacy techniques at issue in the Telegram affair are products of the security state itself, in the interests of espionage. That has made them somewhat difficult to control without causing other problems, but not, in the end, impossible.

Marxists, properly so called, favour maximum free speech, even for hated enemies, for a variety of reasons. Some of them are intrinsic to our project: we want a society where broad masses govern all the affairs of economy and state democratically, and such a thing is scarcely possible if state and private bureaucracies can combine to silence our voices or drown them out with lies. We need to educate ourselves in political leadership *now*, and can only do so if we can maintain some freedom of inquiry and a culture of critical analysis and curiosity.

But there is also the matter referred to above - that the dynamics of capitalism point inevitably towards mass bloodshed. When the state interferes in these matters, it is because it wants to hide certain things from view, like the small matter of the common humanity of those it considers its adversaries. In the course of struggle, we can and should use technological measures like strong encryption, and we should exploit differences in political regimes to maintain publication, as Durov did with his many passports, and the Russian and German socialist movements did by smuggling literature into their countries from abroad in the face of repression. However, we cannot simply secede from tyranny, as Barlow once thought we could ●

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### Notes

1. www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence.
2. xkcd.com/538.