

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



**Class society puts people, especially women, at the mercy of sadists like Mohamed al-Fayed**

- Letters and debate
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- Collective divisions
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No 1508 September 26 2024

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10



# LABOUR SNOUTS IN TROUGHS

## LETTERS



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

## Auto Trot

I find Lars T Lih's argument in relation to Lenin and permanent revolution strange ('A hundred years is enough', September 19).

Firstly, are Lenin's April theses and 'Letters on tactics' a rebellion against his own earlier "dogma"? No, for reasons that both Lenin and Trotsky described. The formulation of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' (bourgeois democracy) was seen to be algebraic. The working class was a small minority, and the peasantry was the largest section of society. Only history would determine how the balance of forces would play out.

As Lenin notes even in his 1905 *Two tactics of social democracy in the democratic revolution*, "Like everything else in the world, the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry has a past and a future. Its past is autocracy, serfdom, monarchy and privilege... Its future is the struggle against private property, the struggle of the wage-worker against the employer, the struggle for socialism..."

Yet, Lih says, "In account after account of 1917, you will read that Lenin's theses called for 'bourgeois-democratic revolution' to be replaced by 'socialist revolution' - and yet, despite ubiquitous quote marks, neither these words nor any equivalent expression appears in Lenin's text." What does Lih think Lenin means here then by "the struggle for socialism"?

Lih talks of Trotsky introducing a new "anti-Lenin" character, Kamenev, suggesting that no theoretical antagonism between the two existed. A reading of 'Letters on tactics' shows precisely such an antagonism between Lenin and the "old Bolsheviks", of whom Lenin picks out Kamenev as their representative.

Even before the publication of the April theses, this antagonism between the two had flared up, with Lenin sending increasingly angry missives back to Russia about the positions taken by Kamenev in relation to his support for the Provisional Government, on the basis of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'.

According to Trotsky, he telegraphed to Petrograd: "Our tactic; absolute lack of confidence; no support to the new government; suspect Kerensky especially; arming of proletariat the sole guarantee; immediate elections to the Petrograd Duma; no rapprochement with other parties. In this directive, only the suggestion about elections to the Duma instead of the Soviet, had an episodic character and soon dropped out of sight..."

Trotsky adds that Lenin wrote a letter, filled with alarm: "Our party would disgrace itself forever, kill itself politically, if it took part in such deceit... I would choose an immediate split with no matter whom in our party rather than surrender to social patriotism... Kamenev must understand that a world historic responsibility rests upon him."

Trotsky says: "Kamenev is named here because it is a question of political principle. If Lenin had had a practical militant problem in mind, he would have been more likely to mention Stalin. But in just those hours Lenin was striving to communicate the intensity of his will to Petrograd across smoking Europe, Kamenev with the cooperation of Stalin was turning sharply toward social patriotism" (*History of the Russian*

*Revolution* chapter 15).

It was neither Lenin nor Trotsky 'innovating' here, but applying, in practice, their existing theory. It was Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin who were failing to apply that theory, in practice, on the basis of the real material conditions, and who, instead, were applying a dogma, without analysing the nature of the material conditions they faced. It was they who had sought to support the Provisional Government, and adopted a "revolutionary defencist" position.

Lih says: "The story as told by Lenin himself a few years later is very different: 'On April 7, I published my theses, in which I called for caution and patience.' He goes on to tell his 1921 audience that in April 1917, a 'left tendency demanded the immediate overthrow of the government', but that he 'proceeded from the assumption that the masses had to be won over. [The government] cannot be overthrown just now [in April 1917], for it holds the *vlast* due to support from the worker soviets; to date, the government enjoys the confidence of the workers.'"

This is a false dichotomy, introduced by Lih, who continues: "According to the rearming narrative, the danger Lenin faced on his return was (allegedly) from conciliatory 'semi-Mensheviks', such as Kamenev and Stalin. According to Lenin himself in 1921, the danger he faced consisted of impatient leftists, who needed to be slowed down. And, when we turn to the text of the theses, we find - surprise, surprise! - Lenin's memory did not fail him. The need for 'patient explanation' (Lenin's mantra after his return to Russia) was the central novelty of the theses."

So Lenin's threat to split the party (not a split with ultra-lefts, but with the "old Bolsheviks" and other elements driving the Bolsheviks towards "social-patriotism") is all just a myth, it appears. Of course, Lenin - and Trotsky - argued against leftists and Blanquists seeking a premature insurrection. That was precisely what their response to the July days was all about! Of course, Lenin - and Trotsky - argued the need to "patiently explain" in order that the dialectical processes of the revolution, in a condition of dual power, provided them with the conditions for such an overthrow.

Lih fails to quote those bits of the theses that rip his argument to shreds. For example, contrary to the impression given by Lih, Lenin writes, following up the sentiments expressed in his earlier messages from abroad: "How can the petty bourgeoisie be 'pushed' into power, if even now it can take the power, but *does not want to*?" ('Letters on tactics').

He goes on: "This can be done only by separating the proletariat - the communist - party, by waging a proletarian class struggle *free from* the timidity of those petty bourgeois. Only the consolidation of the proletarians who are free from the influence of the petty bourgeoisie in deed and not only in word can make the ground so hot under the feet of the petty bourgeoisie that it will be *obliged* under certain circumstances to take the power; it is even within the bounds of possibility that Guchkov and Miliukov - again under certain circumstances - will be for giving full and sole power to Chkheidze, Tsereteli, the SRs and Steklov, since, after all, these are *'defencists'*."

Again, what does Lih think Lenin means here, when he talks about "waging a proletarian class struggle" if not a struggle to convert the bourgeois revolution into proletarian revolution? Lih does not understand the meaning of permanent revolution. He understands it, in the corrupted form presented by Bukharin, to justify the

Stalinist tactics and failure in 1927, in relation to the Chinese Revolution. In other words, in formalistic rather than dialectical terms. He sees these as two distinct and separated revolutions, as events, rather than as part of a single, continuous and intermingled process. The point about permanent revolution, as set out by Marx in his 1850 address, and by Trotsky and Lenin, is not only that the tasks of the bourgeois national revolution are undertaken by the proletariat, in conjunction with the peasantry/petty bourgeoisie, but that they are undertaken by proletarian means, not by bourgeois-democratic means.

In 1850, Marx could not formulate that precisely, because it is only after the Paris Commune that the outlines of such means become apparent. Yet he was still able to write: "Alongside the new official governments they must simultaneously establish their own revolutionary workers' governments, either in the form of local executive committees and councils or through workers' clubs or committees, so that the bourgeois-democratic governments not only immediately lost the support of the workers, but find themselves from the very beginning supervised and threatened by authorities, behind which stand the whole mass of the workers. In a word, from the very moment of victory the workers' suspicion must be directed no longer against the defeated reactionary party, but against their former ally, against the party which intends to exploit the common victory for itself" (K Marx and F Engels, 'Address of the central committee to the Communist League').

1905 and 1917 confirmed permanent revolution, because the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, were carried out by proletarian means, by the establishment of workers' and peasants' soviets, but - as Marx, Lenin and Trotsky recognised - in the process, the conflicting class interests of the proletariat with those of both the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie/peasantry would become apparent. It is this context in which the process of patiently explaining occurs, and through which the Bolsheviks win over the majority in the soviets that in April they lacked, and which was required to move to the insurrection.

Lih fails to distinguish between a proletarian revolution and a commitment to immediately introduce socialism. That is the same conflation that Stalin introduced later, in justification of his theory of 'socialism in one country'. If Lenin did not believe that socialism could be constructed in Russia, Stalin argued, then why did he argue for the socialist revolution, rather than limiting himself to simply the bourgeois-democratic revolution? But, as Trotsky notes in his appendix to *The revolution betrayed*, even Stalin, initially, recognised the distinction.

He writes: "In April 1924, three months after the death of Lenin, Stalin wrote his brochure of compilations called *The foundations of Leninism*." He quotes Stalin as saying: "For the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the efforts of one country are enough - to this the history of our own revolution testifies. For the final victory of socialism, for the organisation of socialist production, the efforts of one country, especially a peasant country like ours, are not enough - for this we must have the efforts of the proletarians of several advanced countries" (*The revolution betrayed*).

A proletarian revolution and creation of a workers' state are a necessary condition for the development of socialism, but not a sufficient condition. Neither Lenin nor Trotsky could argue in 1917 for an immediate introduction of socialism, but that is not at all the same thing as

arguing for a proletarian revolution.

The proletarian revolution was, in fact, the precondition for the Bolsheviks commencing those tasks which, indeed, lay the basis for a future transition to socialism, such as utilisation of the state to promote large-scale socialised capital (state capitalism) at the expense of small-scale capital, and petty commodity production, the introduction of a monopoly of foreign trade, and so on.

Arthur Bough  
email

## Trans rant

Comrade Macnair's recent letter (September 19) has several weaknesses, which I feel like deserve a reply. The first I will deal with are the claims he makes around queer bashing and the historical role that trans people have played in the fight for general queer liberation, and the reason why there is on the whole such unyielding solidarity between cis gays and lesbians and their gender-queer siblings. (That is not to say the relationship is perfect - I can rant long and hard about the cultural norms of transphobia even in supposedly accepting queer spaces, but that is neither here nor there.)

Macnair claims: "This includes right now (but not 10 years ago) the demonisation of trans rights." Now I will admit I am young - by the time I damned the earth with my presence the twin towers were a historical memory. I know that trans rights may not have been the big media palava they are today, but it was still a fucking vicious field.

To give a series of examples around the sheer fucking normalisation of bigotry to trans people 10 years ago, which Macnair claims was when the basic rights that we are still fighting for today weren't demonised. First off, we have the 2013 suicide of Leelah Alcorn, a 17-year-old trans woman who killed herself, having been forced into conversion therapy by her parents. Also in 2013, but across the Atlantic in the United Kingdom, we have the fucking murder of Lucy Meadows - a teacher who was forced to announce her transition in the press and got the full force of the *Daily Heil's* wrath against her. Her very existence as a trans woman saw one of the biggest newspapers in the UK asking if she had the right to exist as a teacher for the simple act of being trans.

So, no, comrade Macnair: trans rights were demonised 10 years ago; they have been demonised for longer. Many of the horrendous cases of queer bashing were trans people being murdered, and the case of Brandon Teena in 1993 saw comedians on national television making light of their death. Even in the fair city of Melbourne, where I routinely blight the walls with Revolutionary Communist Organisation posters, there are still routine attacks against queer people. So Macnair would do well to retract his claim that I "downplay the very real risks of queer-bashing and other forms of victimisation experienced by people who were identified by others as gay or lesbian in the 1970s".

Now on to the more theoretical arenas. I do not disagree with my illustrious comrade, when he argues that: "In the first place, 'the class struggle' includes all the divide-and-rule means used by the capitalist class and its state to maintain its rule." The phrase that I live and breathe in my politics is the ancient slogan of 'No war but class war'. However, I feel that comrade Macnair misunderstood my point. The struggle of communists in the fight for trans and broader queer liberation is revitalising the earlier understanding that only militant revolutionary action on a class basis will smash homophobia. These are

facets of the class struggle - nothing more, nothing less.

I made a mistake in my last letter. The struggle is to intervene in them in a manner that allows for us to remove the lies that capitalism or bourgeois reformism will save queer lives, and I will admit that there is an air of moralism in the way I wrote here. The scourge of Aids may have faded, but it is still far too common for queers to have to bury each other; it is far too common for our bonding to be over trauma and fear than over joy. I want a better life, better politics and better hopes for my friends and siblings - that is as much a driving force of my politics as is the historical role that communists must play.

Macnair's second-last paragraph touches on my argument that the negation of capitalism will not in and of itself negate queer oppression. I stand by this: even during the periods of Bolshevik rule that I would categorise as socialist, women's oppression, for instance, was not dealt with on an effective basis, because of the lack of thought paid to feminism by the Second International. Now, since a major facet of capitalism is the oppression of minorities, socialism will have to deal with the muck of the ages that its birth pangs will leave it covered in. It is the task of communists to fight unerringly against these relics to scour them away. So, no, Macnair, the negation of capitalism will not in and of itself negate oppression of minorities, but the task of communists is to ensure that it does.

Finally, I would like to return to the original thrust of my first letter. The failure of the CPGB to uphold a revolutionary position on trans liberation is a fundamental one that must be addressed post-haste. The United Kingdom is a deeply transphobic country - in its culture, in its medical institutions and in its politics. The death of Alice Litman in 2022 after having to wait 1,023 days for an appointment with the Gender Identity Development Service is the tip of the tip of the iceberg. Communists must wage an unerring fight against this: when Sunak used Brianna Ghey as a cheap ploy against that worthless scab, Stammer, there was no clearer example of the flat-out reactionary politics towards trans people held in the British state. As the government debates implementing the Cass report - which is nothing more than flat-out, bullshit pseudo-science that only seeks to make trans people's lives worse - the struggle for communists is to smash this oppression and secure revolutionary leadership of this fight. Because, if you don't fight, you lose.

If comrades want to see more of my writings on this topic, the RCO has recently uploaded our archive onto our website. In *Direct Action* 12 is the transcript of a small speech I gave on Trans Day of Visibility. There is also a piece by me on this issue in the final issue of *Direct Action*.

Brünnhilde Olding  
RCO, Australia

## Thumbs up?

In her article, 'Corbyn's maybe party' (September 19), Carla Roberts comments on Andrew Fisher, stating that he "has just given the thumbs up to Italy's rightwing prime minister, Giorgia Meloni", as well as to her policies in asylum.

Roberts doesn't specify the location of Fisher's "thumbs up" to Meloni, but evidently she's referring to Fisher's September 16 article, entitled 'We have nothing to learn from Giorgia Meloni about immigration' at [inews.co.uk](http://inews.co.uk). I'm not particularly a supporter of Fisher's politics, but I don't think Meloni would read that article and think 'Hey, that guy's giving me a thumbs up!' in

general or in relation to the xenophobic basis of her policy on immigration and border control. The article was a critique and, for all its limits, doing better than almost all you'll see in the mainstream media - and most from the electoral left.

But, even if you don't agree with that characterisation of his critique of contemporary UK border control politics, I don't think anyone could read that article and seriously believe Roberts is giving an accurate account of what Fisher says about Meloni.

**Ben Rosenzweig**  
email

## Tired Stalinism

I thought the left was way beyond praise or apology for Joseph Stalin and all the political shibboleths associated. I see that illusions die slowly, as the *Weekly Worker* letters have proven.

Stalin had a lot of 'accomplishments' under his belt during the years of ruling the degenerated 'communist' movement in Russia, which took on the acronym, 'USSR'. The Soviet Union was not well represented, to say the least, by the said person, Joseph Stalin.

It's not unjustified - on the contrary, perfectly understandable - to dismiss the 'communist' party after Lenin's demise in 1924, as a sheer bastardisation of the political intentions of the brave proletariat, aligned with the peasantry, who put into effect the first fledgling workers' state in history. It wasn't a revolutionary bourgeois democracy, as some academics and others claim - it was undoubtedly the beginnings of proletarian hegemony and a socialist revolution. Stalin was in charge of the unfolding degeneration, so the buck stops with him and the bureaucratic caste he was enmeshed in.

Stalin didn't basically show signs, during 1917 or before, of the future counterrevolutionary life that was to consume him. But there were plenty of signs during the Civil War; his actions were those of a loose cannon: ie, his over-the-top, violent approach to things and lapses in judgment. He garnered a lot of criticism from Lenin and Trotsky. But Lenin nominated him in 1922 to be the general secretary at the 11th Party Congress; this was a fateful decision of monumental proportions.

There are disadvantages with the passing of time in terms of the maximal perspectives of primary witnesses, but there's enough of a perspicacious Marxist consensus that would convict Stalin of being one of the most consequential and sinister criminals in human history. He was a skilful tactician with relatively low-level theory to speak for himself, similar to Zinoviev's limitations in theory (Grigory was good with oratory and agitation). By 1923, before Lenin died, the 'troika' (Kamenev and Zinoviev, who were master vacillators, and Stalin) formed the notorious conspiracy to prevent Leon Trotsky from getting anywhere near the levers of power: a triumvirate of three symbiotic peas in a pod. Stalin exploited these two smart (but not smart enough) Jews to further his political ambitions, being someone with a lust for power.

For Andrew Northall (Letters, September 19) to say that Zinoviev and Kamenev "obtained their just deserts" is an off-the-wall assertion that betrays a deficiency in his thinking. It's widely recognised that they were railroaded with fabricated charges. Their questionable past and chequered role in the communist movement in no way makes null and void the injustice of their subsequent false imprisonment and execution - and the execution of their family members. Their story, and the ultimate fate that befell them and countless others in Stalin's orbit, is not to be swept under the rug of history.

'Lenin's Testament' (1922-23),

generally authenticated by many scholars, expresses his wishes: Lenin explicitly rejects Stalin and wants him removed from power. He infers that his preference is for Leon Trotsky to be in a top political position as his successor. Lenin's words were thrown to the wind. Everything that came afterwards which was the brainchild of Kamenev, Zinoviev, Stalin and their ilk, such as the concepts of 'Trotskyism', 'Bolshevisation', 'the cult of Lenin', 'Luxemburgism', 'social fascism', 'popular front', etc, is a commentary about the corrupt, anti-Marxist, undialectical, privileged clique that Stalin was a part of.

These concepts persist, and can differ in form, to this very day. So those comrades such as Andrew Northall who want to say that 'Stalinism' only refers to the narrow definition of Stalin and his years of autocracy (my word) are trying to avoid accountability for the endurance of these ideas. For him to say it's "anti-communist" to identify and fight these trends is a complete escape from all scruples and responsibility. It's not "anti-communist" to recognise that 'Stalinism' has been an abiding and intractable political tendency that doesn't fade, but has a phoney legitimacy way beyond Stalin and his Russian totalitarian time span. Stalin was a master manipulator of power, who took advantage of the exhaustion of the working masses after the Civil War: the isolation, scarcity, economic depression and external pressures - all were like a truncheon which destroyed the aspirations of the toiling masses.

Whatever good intentions Stalin had to uplift the Russian people - and that's very debatable - are cancelled out by all the wrong decisions he made in respect to the collectivisation programme, the first five-year plan, forced labour, the campaign against the kulaks, etc. There were many bad policies regarding the industrialisation period - an industrialisation which, if it helped defeat the Nazis, was by accident and not because Stalin had a handle on what he was doing. Not to mention the Moscow trials and the Great Purge: possibly millions of people in the Soviet Union were wiped out - all opposition or imagined opposition, and their families and comrades. Deportations, executions, etc (also, Stalin's murder squads were sent to other countries).

This virulent repression is a true fact that some people (probably Andrew Northall) would see as an unfortunate minor footnote in Stalin's 'balance sheet', but it can't be cancelled out or mitigated by any perceived 'good' that Stalin did. To say there was a "negative side to Stalin in dealing with his political rivals", as Tony Clark states, also in last week's letters, is a euphemism which would be hard to swallow at a Leninist tribunal. I'm not in the business of sugar-coating Stalin's Cheka-inspired portfolio. (He was directly involved in the Cheka - arguably not a bad organisation in itself - but he initiated some of its worst excesses.)

The prime reason that the Soviet Union vanquished the German fascists was not due to anything to be put at the feet of Stalin - that gives him far too much credit. It was the indomitable determination of the working Russian masses, who, against all odds, refused to succumb to Nazi barbarism and slavery. The Russian people displayed an unrelenting fighting spirit, which absorbed the sacrifice of more than 20 million of their own. It was a tragic, but glorious, moment of overriding resistance and perseverance. No-one should give an iota of merit to this self-seeking, deluded opportunist, Stalin, for what the Russian people accomplished. He certainly did not have a "decisive role in saving Europe and potentially the world", as Tony Clark declares. The accolades should be reserved for the Russian people, whose existential fight should forever

be memorialised and who have yet to be compensated for their noble struggle.

I would think that it's crucially important for the international socialist movement to approach history in an objective, materialist manner. To look at the good and bad sides of past leaders is another suggestion offered in the *Weekly Worker* letters, which I wholeheartedly agree with, but at a certain point this becomes a 'popular front' attitude that goes against the rules of communist theory and practice: ambivalence and misconceptions are the seeds of annihilation.

Stalinism is a 'here and now' phenomenon, which is not in any fashion an exemplary, unadulterated communism and should be opposed firmly and decisively. The sooner the left can reckon with Stalinism (there's more work to be done) and learn from the mistakes, the sooner it can further restore communism's good name - a name which it exquisitely deserves. We should try to distil what's valuable in our traditions, not repeat the old, tired talking points of Stalin's political descendants.

GG  
USA

## Fine writers

I used to be a Palestine Solidarity Campaign member and still receive news letters from them. But I would like to address Andrew Northall's regular criticism of Moshé Machover and Tony Greenstein for writing about Palestine because of their non-Palestinian origins. By implication or by stated remarks he is also criticising the paper. It is not a position taken by the paper, as that would be absurd: it just happens to be the case that these two fine writers are not Palestinian.

I'm sure that it wouldn't take much effort by the paper or its readers who are active all over the country to simply contact the PSC or any other Palestinian group in the country and invite them to write to the letters page or even write an article from someone of Palestinian descent. It really isn't an issue and is certainly not the fault of the paper/party. This is Britain after all, so we will one way or another mainly get a socialist perspective on our country and the rest of the world from British people.

Palestinian authorities are working in most countries of the world to get support for their cause and they welcome support from all the different nationalities, as any nation being bludgeoned to death would do. Celtic Football Club fans, by the way, continue to fly Palestinian flags and pro-Palestinian messages on match days, and Sinn Féin in Ireland are vocal supporters of Palestine. We can all do our bit to help the Palestinian people. Whoever we are or wherever we come from is not really relevant.

The massive demonstrations that have taken place in London and all across Britain and rocked the establishment, as you would imagine, mainly consist of British people. Palestinian authorities and Palestinian groups have been generous in their praise of this upsurge of support in most countries of the world. We work together to get the desired result, which is the end of war by the Zionist war machine against the mainly civilian population of Gaza, as well as West Bank, which is boiling over into Syria and Lebanon, Iraq and Iran, threatening a worldwide conflagration.

The guilty parties are the US, EU and UK. It is these criminal regimes that need to be challenged every step of the way and I don't care what country in the world offers us support and what the national origin is of those prominent in this vast liberation movement. We are all human beings and what is happening in Gaza is a terrible human catastrophe, which cannot leave any heart unmoved.

**Elijah Traven**  
Hull

# ACTION

## Stop the far right! No fascists in London

**Saturday September 28, 12 noon:** Counter-protest. Assemble Trafalgar Square, London WC2. Stop the far-right thugs who are attacking Muslims, mosques, refugees, black and Asian people on the streets of Britain. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: [www.facebook.com/events/543602381563028](http://www.facebook.com/events/543602381563028).

## Stop the genocide in Gaza, stop arming Israel

**Saturday September 28:** Nationwide local actions to demand the government ends its complicity in Israel's ongoing genocide, and imposes a comprehensive, two-way arms embargo on Israel now! Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [palestinecampaign.org/events](http://palestinecampaign.org/events).

## Anti-war assembly

**Sunday September 29, 2pm to 5pm:** Conference, Tyneside Irish Centre, 43 Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1. End Britain's support of the US for genocide in Palestine; end Britain's support of the US for escalating war through Nato in Ukraine and elsewhere. Organised by Newcastle Stop the War: [www.facebook.com/events/2276077929407348](http://www.facebook.com/events/2276077929407348).

## Tower Hamlets council: divest for Palestine

**Monday September 30, 5.30pm:** Lobby of the council's pension committee, Town Hall steps, 160 Whitechapel Road, London E1. Divest pension funds from companies complicit in Israel's genocide. Organised by Unison Tower Hamlets: [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=822101263458121](http://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=822101263458121).

## End outsourcing at City University

**Tuesday October 1, 12 noon:** Rally outside University Building, Northampton Square, London EC1. Cleaners at City are outsourced, so do not have the same pay, rights and benefits as directly employed university staff. Demand City University ends outsourcing and treats the cleaners with equality, dignity and respect.

Organised by Unison and IWGB: [www.instagram.com/iwgb\\_universities/p/DAGRSNnRpye](http://www.instagram.com/iwgb_universities/p/DAGRSNnRpye).

## What made us human?

**Tuesday October 1, 6.30pm:** Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taverton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'The sex-strike theory of human origins'. Speakers: Chris Knight and Camilla Power.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.facebook.com/events/2216117652096622](http://www.facebook.com/events/2216117652096622).

## One year on

**Wednesday October 2, 7pm:** Public meeting, Augustine United Church, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1 and online. The ongoing invasion of Gaza is only the latest escalation in a 75+ year history of settler-colonial violence. Where does the left go next? Speaker: Barnaby Raine. Organised by Edinburgh RS21: [www.facebook.com/events/1670246267152374](http://www.facebook.com/events/1670246267152374).

## Your right to protest

**Friday October 4, 7pm:** Book launch, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Human rights barrister and campaigner Christian Weaver introduces his new book. This guide details your rights and the laws that protect you - and those laws you may inadvertently break as a political activist. Entrance £3.50 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: [housmans.com/events](http://housmans.com/events).

## Troublemakers at work

**Saturday October 5, 9.30am to 5pm:** Conference for trade unionists, Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1. Share experiences with other workers: from organising from scratch or reviving a moribund union to resisting a rotten deal or winning a strike. Tickets £10 (£5). Organised by Troublemakers At Work: [troublemakersat.work/conference-2024](http://troublemakersat.work/conference-2024).

## End the genocide - stop arming Israel

**Saturday October 5, 12 noon:** National demonstration. Assemble Russell Square, march to Whitehall. Demand the government ends complicity in Israel's genocide and pushes for a permanent ceasefire. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [palestinecampaign.org/events](http://palestinecampaign.org/events).

## Defend the winter fuel payment

**Monday October 7, 12.30pm:** Protest and lobby of parliament. Assemble by George V statue, Abingdon Street, London SW1. The government's decision to axe universal winter fuel payments is the latest policy to target the oldest and most vulnerable in society. Organised by National Pensioners Convention: [www.npcuk.org/post/lobby-of-parliament](http://www.npcuk.org/post/lobby-of-parliament).

## We're not going back

**Tuesday October 8, 7pm:** Musical comedy about the miners' strike, Fenton Town Hall, 3 Gimson Street, Stoke-on-Trent ST4. In a pit village hit hard by the government's war on the miners, three sisters are determined to set up a branch of Women Against Pit Closures. Tickets £10.46. Presented by Red Ladder Theatre Company: [www.facebook.com/events/328087337041304](http://www.facebook.com/events/328087337041304).

## Ceasefire now - stop arming Israel

**Thursday October 10:** Nationwide workplace day of action. Take up the struggle for a ceasefire and an end to Britain's arming of Israel with work colleagues at solidarity actions. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events).

## School and uni strike for Palestine

**Thursday October 10:** Nationwide mass student walkout. Students taking action in solidarity with the people of Palestine. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events/national-school-uni-strike-for-palestine](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events/national-school-uni-strike-for-palestine).

## 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.

## LABOUR

# Snouts in the trough

Endless freebies, generous donations, lavish hospitality, talk of a 'nest of vipers' in No10 - welcome to the new Labour government. Yet again we see how corruption is built into the political system, writes **Eddie Ford**

**K**eir Starmer, can you believe it? Or, as *The Daily Mail* headline puts it, "Sir Shameless is at it *again!*"<sup>1</sup> Yes, we are talking about the avalanche of stories about the near endless freebies and lavish hospitality showered upon professional politicians by those trying to gain favours and influence - even if we are now told that government ministers will stop accepting clothing donations, because they do not want ordinary people to think that they are "living very different lives" to them. An outrageous suggestion!

Still, the idea of Sir Keir as the antidote to Tory corruption already seems laughable. In the case of the *Mail*, it was making a big fuss about Starmer - a devoted Arsenal fan - enjoying a corporate box at Tottenham Hotspur with a powerful lobbyist, Katie Perrior of iNHouse Communications, which delivers "high-impact strategic advice" to the likes of Google and worked with Spurs on its attempt to form the "hated" breakaway Super League, along with five other England clubs. In the relatively short time that Starmer has been Labour leader, and then prime minister, big business has assiduously courted the party, with money flowing into the shadow cabinet - and now the cabinet - essentially to buy valuable access to ministers and the prime minister himself. OK, the nearly £19,000 worth of clothing and glasses that Starmer got this year is hardly brazen big-time corruption like a Silvio Berlusconi or some US senators (or perhaps even high-ranking Communist Party of China officials). But it shows yet again that corruption is built into the political system - it is not just a case of weak or greedy individuals. Though there are plenty of those, of course, as the last Tory government handsomely demonstrated - meaning that the Boris Johnson-loving *Mail* is guilty of gross hypocrisy (nothing new there).

So we have had the Taylor Swift tickets, power suits, corporate boxes, London accommodation, New York holiday pads, and so on. A lot of the stuff came from Labour peer Waheed Alli, one of the party's main fundraisers and donors, including Sir Keir's fancy new clothes and glasses. He even accepted a rent-free flat - worth £20,000 - so that his son could study for his GCSEs free from press hassle.

Not wanting anyone to feel left out, Lord Alli gave Angela Rayner, the party's deputy leader, clothes with a price tag of £3,550 in June. In fact, he generously paid for Sir Keir's wife, Victoria Starmer, to have her own *personal shopper* to make the best use of the £5,000 of clothing gifts he had given her. Something that Keir Starmer initially failed to declare, as it so happened, as MPs are supposed to declare gifts and donations to the parliamentary authorities within 28 days of receiving them. Regarding Lord Alli, last month it emerged that he had been given a temporary Downing Street security pass without actually having any formal government role - another breach of the rules that the *Mail* dubbed the "glasses for passes" affair. But for every Lord Alli, of course, there are dozens of others like him with deep pockets, including Gary Lubner (£4.6m), David Sainsbury (£3.1m), Fran



Same as it ever was: James Gillray 'Monstrous craws, at a new coalition feast' (1787)

Perrin (£1m) and Ecotricity (£1m), the green energy firm owned by prominent eco-capitalist Dale Vince.

But, while Starmer's designer glasses might be fairly small beer compared to his peers worldwide, it is still a fact that he has accepted over £100,000 worth of bribes, err, no, gifts since the 2019 election - far more than any other MP during that period.<sup>2</sup> Amidst a continuing cost-of-living crisis, facing a new round of austerity, this is not nothing - more an insult. By contrast, for what it is worth, during David Cameron's time as opposition party leader he declared one set of Rugby World Cup tickets, along with various gifts of hampers and other treats - also registering £4,475 of discounted personal training sessions. Of course, as an aristocrat with several distant familial connections to the royal family, Cameron is hardly short of a penny or two - having an estimated net worth of about £50 million and hence not someone really in need of freebies. But what the hey! Take what you can, while you can!

## Humbug

Another related story that dominated the news was about Sue Gray, the former civil servant and political advisor made chief of staff at Downing Street. The government had to deny that there was a "nest of vipers" within No10 after a stream of reports about bitter clashes between her and other personnel. Some complained that Gray had "micromanaged every appointment" of special advisors, but what they were most unhappy about was that their salaries had been reduced, compared with those for their previous roles in the Labour Party - with Gray on £170,000 compared to the prime minister's salary of £166,786. Indeed, a source told the BBC that it was suggested to her that she might want to go for a few thousand less to avoid this very story - obviously she declined!

But this entire non-scandal is total humbug. Loads of civil servants get paid more than the prime minister. Some of the journalists covering the Sue Gray story get paid more than the PM. On half a million, Sky's Kay Burley would not get out of bed for £170,000, even if she was outraged by the size of Sue Gray's salary - the

same probably goes for the BBC's Fiona Bruce and very many other TV presenters.<sup>3</sup>

Then there are the wildly inventive excuses as to why they deserve the freebies - indeed, must accept them as a matter of public duty. Lisa Nandy, the culture secretary, explained to the BBC that, while she understood why people are upset that Labour ministers have been accepting these free gifts while cutting the winter fuel payment for pensioners, she thought that people want a government that is "well turned out", not a bunch of scruffs, representing the country "properly" at lots of different events - just so long as ministers declare donations in an open and transparent manner, so that people can see that there has not been any "undue influence".

As for Sir Keir, he defended his decision to accept corporate largesse from Arsenal FC to the tune of £6,000 (part of the £35,000 in free tickets he gets from various clubs) on the basis that he can no longer use his normal seat as prime minister. Naturally, especially as an ex-Pabloite, he would love to be there with the masses, but the security cost of continuing to watch matches from the stands would have been "disproportionate" - therefore it was a "perfectly sensible arrangement" to accept a corporate box. Be grateful as you are saving money!

Acting, not for the first time, as the new Grant Shapps in justifying the unjustifiable, it was left to business secretary Jonathan Reynolds to spell out in no uncertain terms why there was nothing wrong with accepting hospitality. Attending Arsenal matches, European Cup games, Taylor Swift concerts, Coldplay gigs and other "major cultural, sporting events" was all "part of the job" if you are a prime minister acting as the country's public face. The minister had "no problem" with politicians accepting gifts that can be of "a more personal nature". After all, hard-working politicians were entitled to "a bit of relaxation", as they are only human - only a dour puritan would disagree with that. By the way, can you get me an Oasis ticket?

What you get the most from these stories is the overwhelming *sense of entitlement* felt by this caste of professional politicians - the same

going for those clamouring to become MPs. Have they not devoted years slumming it as graduates and minor functionaries, to earn the right to get their snouts in the trough? Hence the stupid excitement over Sue Gray. They are not angry that she is getting paid too much: rather that *they* are not getting what they feel *they* deserve.

## Professional

But this is how the system works in Britain. It is not about receiving extraordinary levels of pay while a professional politician - some in the US and beyond cannot understand why British MPs work for so little (why bother when you can make real money elsewhere?). But, freebies and football tickets aside, what these onlookers fail to understand is that you get your reward *after* leaving office - using your carefully cultivated connections to get that job at a top bank or company like

Google, maybe become president of global affairs at Meta/Facebook like the former deputy prime minister of the coalition government, Nick Clegg. Or look at Tony Blair: he may not be a billionaire, but he has a net wealth of around £60 million - not because of his prowess as a singer for Ugly Rumours, but due to his national and international connections and contacts.<sup>4</sup> That is the sort of lifestyle that those people grumbling about Sue Gray, or defending Keir Starmer, basically view as their birthright.

So, yes, the new Labour government is basically no different to the last Conservative government - which was in office long enough for scandals to accumulate about it. Clearly the scandals will start to accumulate under Starmer (perhaps this has got off to an early start), precisely because you are dealing with a self-interested caste that is not in politics to advance the interests of ordinary people, whatever they might say with such righteous fervour.

In some respects, professional politicians and those aspiring to that position are the same as professional footballers. However they might have started off, they are not the same as your average fan. You might play football for Everton one month, but then, after you get transferred, play *against* Everton the next month.

For all the sound and fury of PMQs every Wednesday, both the Labour and Tory front benchers are part of the same bribable caste of professional politicians ●

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## Notes

1. [dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13877225/Sir-Shameless-PM-Sue-Gray-enjoy-Spurs-freebie-lobbyist-backed-breakaway-football-super-league-advises-tax-avoiding-tech-giants.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13877225/Sir-Shameless-PM-Sue-Gray-enjoy-Spurs-freebie-lobbyist-backed-breakaway-football-super-league-advises-tax-avoiding-tech-giants.html)
2. [reuters.com/world/uk/uk-pm-starmer-accepted-more-gifts-than-any-other-member-parliament-sky-news-2024-09-18](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-pm-starmer-accepted-more-gifts-than-any-other-member-parliament-sky-news-2024-09-18)
3. [www.checkasalary.co.uk/blog/tv-personality-salaries#:~:text=Kay Burley](https://www.checkasalary.co.uk/blog/tv-personality-salaries#:~:text=Kay%20Burley)
4. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ugly\\_Rumours\\_\(band\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ugly_Rumours_(band))

## Fighting fund

# On the brink!

**T**he good news, as we near the end of the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund campaign for September, is that we are now within touching distance of our £2,250 monthly target. With, as I write, five days still to go, we have in the kitty £2,122.50 - in other words, we're just £127.50 away!

In fact over the last week we received individual contributions from three comrades that actually *each exceeded* that sum - thank you, comrades SK, JC and PM, for your three-figure donations. On top of that, there were bank transfers/standing orders from SO (£35), DR (£20), OG (£15), CS (£10), TT (£6) and DS (£2.50 - it's not often someone makes a bank transfer for that amount!).

And I must mention comrade AK, who spent £34 doing bits and pieces for us last week, but said we should include that amount in our fighting fund!

Finally, comrade Hassan handed a £10 note to one of our team. In other words, no less than £721.50 came our way over the last seven days.

So now we've got to finish the job by not only raising that £127.50, but hopefully smashing right through the £2,250 barrier and in that way making up for some of the shortfall from earlier in the year. Please play your part by either using PayPal or making a bank transfer. Make sure we get there by Monday September 30, please, comrades! To get the details of how you can contribute please go to the web address below.

Here's to the smash-through! ●  
**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](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate)

**MEDIA**

# Another predator escapes justice

Class society puts people at the mercy of sadists like Mohamed al-Fayed, says Paul Demarty. However, a counter-culture of radical egalitarianism can combat the established culture of abuse

**S**o the BBC has, at long last, exposed the late billionaire, Mohamed al-Fayed, as an especially prolific and - even for the genre - creepy sexual predator.

We have learned what, naturally, 'everyone knew': that, while owner of Harrods, he used the luxury department store essentially as a harem. He would monitor CCTV footage to pick out women who were his type - the usual fantasy of unimaginative men: young blondes. He would pick out those in the worst position (financially or otherwise) to resist. His staff would cajole them into submitting to intrusive medical examinations for unknown purposes, but presumably to detect sexually transmitted infections (one victim believes her virginity was also being assessed). Then he would start to make his moves.

Some, apparently, would submit, presumably on a transactional basis, and would be showered with gifts. Many would not, but men of his class are not accustomed to taking no for an answer. The BBC mentioned five accusations of rape and many more accusations of lesser sexual assaults. He used every mechanism available, from hush money to legal threats to threats against the victim's family - to ensure silence. He employed various toughs, mostly ex-policemen, to make his points plainly.

There are distinct echoes, of course, of the BBC's former golden boy, Jimmy Savile. Both men were thought of as maybe a bit dodgy, but mostly no worse than eccentric. Both were establishment figures who did not exactly fit the usual template - Savile on account of his Yorkshire twang and garish clobber, Fayed thanks to his Egyptian ancestry, celebrity vulgarity (remember the statue of Michael Jackson he had placed at the front of Craven Cottage?) and strange accessory role in many great events of the 1990s, from the 'cash for questions' scandal to the death of Diana Spencer.

## Opportunities

Fayed's *modus operandi* was rather different, however. Savile was a rapist of opportunity, and was prolific because a British establishment apparently bereft of common sense gave him so many opportunities: he would assault a child at some charity event, or a patient at Broadmoor, or a corpse in the mortuary of Leeds General Infirmary. Fayed, as we have seen, had a more methodical approach - of selecting, grooming, molesting and terrorising young women from a small, but constantly refreshed, pool of candidates.

In that respect he is somewhat more typical. The trouble with the Savile case is that he was *so* depraved, grotesque and bizarre - it is as if he walked off the pages of the *120 days of Sodom*. The institutional failings thereby revealed were real enough, but appeared to pose the problem of how we prevent our institutions from being infiltrated by insatiable psychopaths. In absolute terms, with due respect to Savile's many victims, this is a much smaller problem than that posed by cases like Fayed's (or, a few years ago, Harvey Weinstein's).

There is a much-quoted characterisation of the goals of political conservatism, made by an obscure American composer by the name of Frank Wilhoit: "There must be in-groups whom the law protects, but does not bind, alongside out-groups whom the law binds, but does not protect." It is arguable whether this truly applies to conservatism *as an*



**Harrods: al-Fayed's harem**

*ideology*, but the phenomenon itself is easily attested as a social reality. What is defended by conservatism, after all, is social inequality - its natural character, and the disastrous consequences of trying to get rid of it. The predations of billionaires are the most obvious of the disastrous consequences of maintaining it.

The law, after all, certainly protected this most litigious of men. Only the most prestigious outlets with the largest armies of lawyers could take on Fayed; the threats he made to his victims - that they were powerless, that he would crush them - were surely correct. Very occasionally, a major media organisation would take the bait. ITV produced a documentary raising allegations of sexual harassment against him in 1997. Two years earlier, *Vanity Fair* published a scathing profile by Maureen Orth, which included allegations of sexual harassment, though it was mainly focused on the dubious character of Fayed's finances.<sup>1</sup> He sued, naturally.

What happened next is told in a recent article in *The Guardian* by *Vanity Fair*'s then editor, Henry Porter. Porter and a lawyer named David Hooper began to dig into Fayed's affairs, and discovered ample justification for Orth's claims, and worse: "Hooper and I are not professional investigators, so it's significant that by the summer of 1997 we had gathered enough evidence in those three areas, particularly on the sex abuse, to be confident of a good outcome at trial."<sup>2</sup>

But the evidence never came out at trial, because the magazine's owner began to mend fences with Fayed in a Turkish bath in the summer of 1997. Porter wanted to press ahead, to get some of the more troubling evidence discovered out in open court - but then

the death of Diana happened. It was decided that destroying the reputation of a grieving man would not seem wholly proper! Porter kept much of the evidence, and gave it over to the BBC.

Because the law protects the rich, things are therefore open to being settled by extra-legal means: back-scratching, Turkish baths, representations to the right sorts of people. There are few legal regimes in the world more favourable to the well-off than English libel law, which, in the end, descends from laws protecting the dignity of the *state* from troublemakers and perceived traitors.

The question is not so much how can he have got away with it, but rather: how stupid would you have to be to get caught? According to Orth's profile (and the more recent disclosures), Fayed managed his affairs in a way that left him utterly dependent on armies of flunkies, whom he nevertheless treated like dirt (quite literally: he was a severe germophobe). His 38-strong security detail codenamed him "the fat bastard". He bugged his employees' phones, had them followed, ranted at them. And yet they all more or less kept mum, because he kept opening his wallet - either to pay them off or pay his learned friends to write threatening letters.

## Phoney pharaoh

Fayed got away with it despite being hardly the best integrated of the billionaire class - neither blue-blood nor blue-chip. He was a member of that strange subspecies of the very wealthy, or at least the extremely profligate, whose wealth was very often largely in doubt (the most famous surviving example, of course, is Donald J Trump).

Fayed always seemed to be

flashing around more money than he could possibly have had. Indeed, he bought Harrods in the mid-1980s with hundreds of millions of pounds that he claimed was his own money, backed by assurances that he owned substantial assets in shipping, real estate, oil and much else. He was no pauper, but most of these assets were fictional. The money, in all probability, belonged to the Sultan of Brunei, who was leaking scads of cash to all kinds of chancers at the time. That was the time of Thatcher, of the deregulation of finance, where fictional wealth could be rolled over into real money with a little prestidigitation and luck when it came to one's enemies.

The power granted to the rich in our post-Thatcher, post-Reagan world is extraordinary. It serves to isolate them from the consequences of their actions almost entirely. Jeff Bezos recently went through the most expensive divorce in history, and still has more money than he could possibly spend in a thousand lifetimes. He gets to go to space, in a rocket that looks more than usually like an enormous toadger. We have not ever heard any allegations of sexual impropriety against him, but should they arise and be substantiated, it would hardly come as a shock. Well, naturally: billionaires do that sort of thing, don't they? Because they have a handful of passports to hide behind, and the ability to make such problems go away. They are protected, but not bound, by the law and morality of the age, free to get out there and grab life by the pussy.

What are our means of protection against this? On the evidence of the Harrods business, certainly not the world's HR departments. Admittedly, Fayed's exploits came early in the period of mandatory sexual harassment awareness training and bureaucratic procedures, but all this

stuff is, in the end, about avoiding *liability*, not preventing misdeeds.

There are political aspects to this, and cultural ones. Politically - besides the struggle for an egalitarian socialism *per se* - we battle against the various sectionalisms of the working class, which prevent, in one place, native and migrant workers fighting together or, in another, male and female. It is as a collective that the workforce even of a place as strange as Harrods can protect each other - from sexual predations and from the various reprisals that can follow.

## Taboo

All of that entails, so far as is possible, a *culture* of equality in our organisations, be they trade unions or parties. We must revive the *taboo* that once existed against 'making good': 'Rise with your class, not out of it' was the slogan (attributed to Scottish communist John Maclean). Yet that was not a mere 19th and 20th century thing, and extant hunter-gatherer societies *enforce* an egalitarian culture by humiliating those among them who get too cocky.

Conservatives of the Thatcherite stamp like to ridicule this kind of moral practice, perhaps as 'tall poppy syndrome', which we used to hear so much about. I do not see anything ridiculous in it at all - certainly not compared to an ideology which must, in the end, be content with rich men turning the world around them into giant harems ●

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## Notes

1. archive.vanityfair.com/article/share/526f6c7b-03b1-4ea5-b406-5daaa159beb7.
2. www.theguardian.com/global/2024/sep/22/remorseless-ruthless-racist-my-battle-to-expose-mohamed-al-fayed.

## POLEMIC

# Fetishising revolutionary crisis

Clinging to the general strike, and to the idea of taking the tide at the flood, is at the core of present failures. Mike Macnair argues that Steve Bloom's call for 'synthesis' is badly misconceived

This article begins a response to Steve Bloom's recent series criticising my book, *Revolutionary strategy*.<sup>1</sup> In summary, although comrade Bloom's first article claims to be seeking a synthesis, he is not actually proposing a synthesis, but a capitulation on my part.

I would be capitulating to what appears, from his three articles taken together, to be an 'offer' of a form of Trotskyism that abandons the decisions on forms of party organisation made by the Russian communists and Comintern in the face of civil war in 1918-21, without abandoning *any of the other*; *connected*, judgments made by the Russian communists and Comintern in 1918-23; but which conversely refuses to accept responsibility for the repeated failures of *real existent Trotskyism* since 1945.

In support of this proposal comrade Bloom relies on fundamental errors of method. First, he deploys 'physics envy' arguments (we cannot attain the degree of probability in our political or historical judgments that can be attained by 20th century experimental methods in physics and related disciplines) to deny the utility of hindsight in politics or the testability of political/historical claims.

Second, his response to my use of history entails arbitrary *caesuras* that cut off periods from one another, thereby prohibiting historical causality between them. Thus he refuses my arguments for the relevance of the weaknesses of the *pre-1914* left (the Bakuninists, the syndicalists, the 'mass-strikist' wings within the Second International) to understanding the present problem. And he draws a sharp line in the mid-1920s, so that the decisions of the Bolsheviks and Comintern in 1918-21 have no causal relation to what followed.

He similarly draws a sharp line between the 1970s and 1989, so that the transparent political dynamics of the fall of the eastern bloc regimes in 1989-91 and after cannot be used to understand the very similar political dynamics of Hungary in 1956 *before* the second Soviet intervention, of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and of Poland in 1980-82. I flag here the fact that the Mandelstam Fourth International radically failed to understand 1989 and after, which should by now be completely obvious. Its failure of understanding of the dynamics of 1989 and after was precisely *because* its misconceptions about 1956, 1968 and 1980-82 as examples of potential 'political revolution' led it to have radically unrealistic judgments about Gorbachev, Yeltsin and co.

At Communist University in August 2023 we offered comrade Gerry Downing, who holds 'orthodox Trotskyist' views, and his co-thinkers in *Socialist Fight*, membership of the CPGB with factional rights, including the right of publication. After a little hesitation comrade Downing refused: he wants to build an organisation based on Trotskyist *theory* (he said at the August meeting that the CPGB would not be welcome to join *Socialist Fight* with the rights of a public faction: we are not Trotskyists). We could make this offer because in our view party organisation is not based on *agreement* to any sort of theory, but on *acceptance* as the basis of common work of a short, stated *political programme* (which is available both in print and online).

The issue is not directly posed to comrade Bloom: he is in the USA, not the UK, and the Marxist Unity Group is not an *alter ego* of the CPGB. But,



Portugal 1974: yet another failure, yet another lesson gone unlearned

even if he *was* seeking 'synthesis', rather than merely asserting the continued validity of (his version of) Trotskyism, seeking that as the basis for unity poses the issue in the same way as comrade Downing: that is, as unity based on theoretical agreement.

## Synthesis

I begin with comrade Bloom's claim in his first article to be offering a 'synthesis' of his own views and mine. From a Marxist, one would normally expect this to be a 'dialectical' reference (JG Fichte's tag thesis-antithesis-synthesis - commonly, though inaccurately, used to characterise GWF Hegel's dialectic).

One might then imagine that the idea of the general strike and the Grand National Trades Union that went along with it (thesis) was negated/*aufgehoben* in the antithesis, Chartism, which aimed for a mass political movement round the six points of the Charter; that the ideas of Chartism persist in Marx's arguments for working class *political* action against the Proudhonists and Bakuninists in 1869-72; and that the synthesis, the negation of the negation and *Aufhebung* of the Marxists' negation of the general strike in the political movement, is then the (failed) Belgian general strike of 1902 for extended suffrage, the Russian revolutionary crisis of 1905, Rosa Luxemburg's arguments in *The mass strike* (1906)

and her arguments for the mass strike for suffrage in the Prussian suffrage campaign in *The next step* (1910). Here the strike movement *serves* the political movement, because it seeks constitutional change.

The defect of such an approach would, plainly enough, be that the dialectical movement of history ends in Luxemburg's 'synthesis': Luxemburg no more identified the end of the history of the proletarian strategy in 1910 than Francis Fukuyama identified the end of history in general in 1989.

But what comrade Bloom offers is not such a dialectical movement. Rather, what he proposes is at most 'synthesis' in the sense of pasting together his own views with a part of mine. In the summary of my argument at the end of *Revolutionary strategy* (pp161-67), he proposes to set on one side my first and most fundamental point - the class perspective, as opposed to the various forms of people's frontism - on the basis that we disagree on the issue.

He also sets on one side point 7, which asserts the legitimacy of illegal strikes and other forms of direct action to defend workers' immediate interests, given the corrupt character of the 'democratic' (rule-of-law liberal) regime, while rejecting the idea that the use of force or minority action can be a strategy. This second point he claims is "useful clarifications ... but

not really a point of strategy in itself". This would be true if you accept comrade Bloom's arguments for the mass strike strategy, but false if you do not: as soon as you assert, as I do, that it would *not* be acceptable, or indeed possible, "to impose our minimum programme on the society as a whole through minority action", the issue is posed as a point of strategy.

He accepts point 2 on the meaning of the working class: which is only really relevant if you accept point 1, which he does not. Similarly, he accepts point 3 on the working class collectively appropriating the means of production through democratic-republican decision-making: which, again, depends on the argument for the class perspective in point 1, since *strategic* (as opposed to tactical) alliances with sections of the property-possessing middle classes, however 'oppressed' they may be, are inconsistent with this perspective.

He says that "Points 4, 5 and 6 reflect the problem with Mike's misunderstanding/rejection of the mass strike and can, therefore, be fairly easily adjusted if we are able to accept the synthesis proposal I make above." That is, he finds potentially acceptable only if they were 'synthesised' with the mass strike strategy, para 4 (the working class needs to fight for political power), point 5 (self-government of the localities and sectors, not Bonapartist centralism or

constitutional federalism), and point 6 (achieving the democratic republic requires clear majority support for the democratic republic, not the action of an enlightened minority).

He agrees also with point 8 (political party standing for the independent interests of the working class, which again depends on point 1, on the class perspective) and point 9, that the party needs to be democratic-republican in its forms. He agrees with point 10 (the party needs to be independent both of the capitalists and their state, and cannot take responsibility as a minority in government without immediate commitment to bring in the democratic republic); and with point 11: that, though a unified workers' party including both the loyalist left and communists is *desirable*, it is *impossible*, because the loyalists insist on censoring the communists as a condition for unity; so that united front policies are necessary.

That said, in a footnote he argues that "on the party-building question we also need a synthesis, since elements of what traditionalists might tell us about the need for a 'vanguard party' continue to be correct, even if their overall approach demonstrably leads to the creation of sects rather than revolutionary parties". Since I argue about this issue more elaborately on pp91-98 of the book,<sup>3</sup> this observation is insufficient to make clear what "elements of what traditionalists might tell us" comrade Bloom wishes to defend that I do not already defend.

He disagrees with point 12, essentially on the basis of the supposed 'law of uneven development'.<sup>4</sup> This is a very fundamental strategic issue, and really central to the current implausibility of left alternatives to 'capitalist realism'. However, he accepts point 13, that there cannot be working class class-political consciousness in a single country, so that an international is essential; and point 14, that, as at the national level, so at the international level, it is essential to reject "both bureaucratic/Bonapartist centralism and legal federalism". Again, however, the question is posed: how far the caveat in his footnote, that a "synthesis" is needed on the party question with "elements of what traditionalists might tell us", is consistent with his real acceptance of these points.

I have listed all this at length in order to demonstrate just how *little* comrade Bloom concedes to my arguments. In essence, he agrees *only* to those elements in my arguments that are consistent with views he already holds; or, put another way, with the general views of the Mandelstam Fourth International before its most recent evolution. At the core, I am asked to abandon the critique of general-strikism on the ground that I 'misunderstand' it or that I 'misunderstand' what counts as strategy. In comrade Bloom's second and third articles, we will find (as I indicated above) that he claims that I am also wrong on pretty much all the rest of my historical judgments, in so far as these depart from Trotskyism.

It is for this reason that I say that what comrade Bloom seeks is not synthesis, but political capitulation. Further, by way of the 'synthesis' argument, his proposal (if I accepted it) would suppress the existence of serious political differences about present political tasks, by blurring these differences in the direction of agnosticism.

As far as comrade Bloom's relation to the Marxist Unity Group

is concerned (and it is, of course, up to them to take their own decisions), if they accepted comrade Bloom's 'synthesis' as a basis for unity, this would not amount to an open factional participation of Trotskyists on the basis of an acceptance of a common programme as the basis for common action (as we in CPGB proposed to comrade Downing in 2023), while continuing fighting on the differences. It would amount, rather, to a typical Mandelite entry-tactic operation, in which differences are blurred in the hope of 'capturing' the target group as a 'transitional organisation' on the imagined, but usually illusory, road to a larger Mandelite group.

## Strategy

The series that became *Revolutionary strategy* was written in 2006 and the book was published in 2008. As is transparent from the first chapter, it does not start from the history of the workers' movement, negative balance-sheets, and so on. It starts from the situation of the left in the present (meaning, our inferences that the, usually recent, past will continue into the, usually near, future, which is what 'the present' generally means). This question comrade Bloom does not address at all.

I judged in 2006-08 that the global situation was characterised by (1) the deepening weakness of capitalism, and the end of the liberal triumphalism of the 1990s; but (2) that the principal gainers from this development are forms of the nationalist-patriarchalist and religious right. It seems to me obvious that these judgments are confirmed by the subsequent evolution of politics. As far as the left is concerned, I judged in 2006-08 that it remains in the shadow of the Soviet-style bureaucratic regimes, and that this shadow is reflected in division between, on the one hand, a broad left committed to nationalism, people's front politics and bureaucratism, following old 'official communist' politics even when they are by origin social democrats, and a far left that "is widely - and often accurately - perceived as undemocratic in its internal functioning, as tending to export this undemocratic practice into the broader movement, and as unable to unite its own forces for effective action" (pp9-10).

Again, it seems to me clear that this problem has if anything worsened since 2008. The 2019 collapse of the US International Socialist Organisation, which had deliberately attempted to distance itself from the bureaucratic centralism of its 'mothership', the British Socialist Workers' Party, but without breaking with the SWP's fundamental conceptions of what a party is for, is exemplary; there are many other examples.

Nor is this a short-term problem. It is now 35 years since the fall of the Soviet bloc, which many leftists imagined would clear the way for their own progress. It did not. It is more than 60 years since the 'new left' 'rediscovered' Rosa Luxemburg as a 'western Marxist', and since Hal Draper's 1960 article, 'The two souls of socialism', that coined the idea of 'socialism from below'. This 60-plus years is a history of consistent failures of far-left groups to be able to give effective political leadership during real revolutionary crises (as in Chile under Popular Unity; Argentina in the same period; Portugal in 1974-76; Iran in 1979-80; and others) and large mass movements (as in France in 1968; the Italian 'creeping May'; the British strike movement of 1970-74; and many others).

They have equally been unable to turn the mass movement into a means of reaching mass scale: unlike, for example, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party factions in 1905, or the Chinese Communist

Party in 1925-27. Equally, far-left groups have been unable to grow beyond a few thousand outside such conditions - unlike, in their earlier histories, socialist and communist parties.<sup>5</sup>

After this 60-year history of failure, continuing to repeat the nostrums created by 1960s 'new left' re-readings of Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky is like keeping banging your head against a brick wall in the hope that finally you will knock the wall down.<sup>6</sup> The problem is not the mere fact of repeated defeats, but repeated and increasing ineffectiveness, splintering and marginality.

*Revolutionary strategy* is about what to do now about this situation. It is for this reason that I insist that 'strategy' is about the long-term coordinates of political action. It is for this reason that I reject out of hand comrade Bloom's argument that "when the word 'strategy' is used by proponents of the mass strike, they are not using it in the same way that Mike is in the title of his book". The point is precisely that, as I argue on pp168-69 of the book,

The trouble is that social revolution and political revolution alike involve both the gradual molecular processes of change and the short burst of crisis. By fetishising the short burst of crisis, the Trotskyists devalue the slow, patient work of building up a political party on the basis of a minimum political programme in times of molecular processes of change. The result is, when crisis does break out, they have created only sects, not a party, and are effectively powerless.<sup>7</sup>

## Party

The issue is, precisely, what the point of a workers' party is, and hence what sort of party we should be seeking to create now. In this context, comrade Bloom wants to overcome the problems of the bureaucratic-centralist sects (though how far remains unclear, given the caveat in his footnote, mentioned above). But he clings to the conception of the purpose and tasks of the party that actually necessarily entail the bureaucratic-centralist sect. As I have argued elsewhere, advocates of 'socialism from below' seem to be particularly prone to fall into bureaucratic-centralism; for this reason.<sup>8</sup>

The core of the issue is precisely the "tide in the affairs of men" issue - of the need for action at a particular moment in time - which comrade Bloom starts with, and which he makes the centrepiece of his argument. Begin with comrade Bloom's comment on the question of the timing of the October revolution:

This was the danger Lenin noted in 1917, when he objected to Trotsky's plan to wait until the Congress of Soviets to give the Bolsheviks a clear democratic mandate for the insurrection. Lenin feared that even a delay of weeks might result in an ebb in the mass sentiment for revolution, making insurrection more difficult or even impossible. Lenin's fears turned out to be unfounded. But they were based on a proper understanding of how revolutionary situations unfold - in particular how they come upon us and then disappear in a matter of weeks or months, if we fail to take advantage, in a timely way, of the majority sentiment in favour of revolution that has developed, while some tangible form of mass mobilisation is ascendant.

This is personalised as 'Lenin versus Trotsky'.<sup>9</sup> It is actually Lenin versus the Bolshevik leadership majority (which sided with Trotsky on the issue). Here, the leadership majority

were clearly correct: October could not have succeeded without the alliance between the Bolsheviks, probably representing a majority of the urban proletariat (which was, however, a small minority of the country), and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, probably representing a majority of the peasantry (which was the large majority class). That alliance was possible because the Petrograd Military-Revolutionary Committee, which overthrew the provisional government, acted in the name of the Congress of Soviets that was about to meet. A 'Bolshevik-only' insurrectionary general strike without that political alliance and its constitutional legitimacy would have met the fate of the Berlin radicals' attempted forcible resistance of January 1919, or the 1921 'March Action': that is, decisive and demoralising defeat. It is the democratic political commitments of the Bolsheviks, and their commitment to the worker-peasant alliance, which allowed the Bolshevik leadership to reach the right decision here.

We can, in fact, go further. Luxemburg argued in *The mass strike* that

To give the cue for, and the direction to, the fight; to so regulate the tactics of the political struggle in its every phase and at its every moment that the entire sum of the available power of the proletariat, which is already released and active, will find expression in the battle array of the party; to see that the tactics of the social democrats are decided according to their resoluteness and acuteness and that they never fall below the level demanded by the actual relations of forces, but rather rise above it - that is the most important task of the directing body in a period of mass strikes. And this direction changes of itself, to a certain extent, into technical direction. A consistent, resolute, progressive tactic on the part of the social democrats produces in the masses a feeling of security, self-confidence and desire for struggle; a vacillating weak tactic, based on an underestimation of the proletariat, has a crippling and confusing effect upon the masses.<sup>10</sup>

And in 'The next step' (1910) we find:

For the expressions of the masses' will in the political struggle cannot be held at one and the same level artificially or for any length of time, nor can they be encapsulated in one and the same form. They must be intensified, concentrated and must take on new and more effective forms. Once unleashed, the mass action must go forward. And if at the acknowledged moment the leading party lacks the resolve to provide the masses with the necessary watchwords, then they are inevitably overcome by a certain disillusionment, their courage vanishes and the action collapses of itself.<sup>11</sup>

A German left that had been trained up with arguments like these (and those of Anton Pannekoek - for example, in his 1912 'Marxist theory and revolutionary tactics', part of the same debate<sup>12</sup>), would inevitably be unable to hold radicalised local mass movements back from minority adventurism in order to allow the 'rearguard' to catch up, as the Bolsheviks did in the 'July Days' in 1917. And so it proved in 1919 and 1921 ...

## Initiative

The significance of timing is not unique to conditions of revolutionary crisis. On the one hand, if George Galloway had walked out of the Labour Party

and called for a new party on the day British troops went into Iraq on March 20 2003, as opposed to hanging on until the Labour Party expelled him on October 23, it is likely that the resulting movement would have been more powerful than Respect (founded January 2004). On the other hand, the role of the SWP in Respect was possible because of its role in Stop the War Coalition. And its role in StWC was possible because the SWP seized the initiative in creating the coalition in 2001 to campaign against the war on Afghanistan.

This 'seizing the initiative' is precisely the problem. In the first place, each grouplet is determined to have the initiative, and hence creates its own front, which it hopes will be the one that 'takes off' (as StWC 'took off'). Equally, groups walk out if they lose the majority (and thus initiative control) - thus the Socialist Party in England and Wales in the Socialist Alliance in 2001, and thus the SWP in Respect in 2007. Or they create competing initiatives to prevent their rivals' operations 'taking off' (as the three main French far-left groups have done against each other, repeatedly since the 1970s).

In terms of internal organisation, the centrality of creating a party that can seize the moment implies that internal dissent is as such antagonistic to the role of the party. The International Left Opposition pre-conference in February 1933 correctly resolved that

The frequent practical objections, based on the 'loss of time' in abiding by democratic methods, mount to short-sighted opportunism. The education and consolidation of the organisation is a most important task. Neither time nor effort should be spared for its fulfilment. Moreover, party democracy, as the only conceivable guarantee against unprincipled conflicts and unmotivated splits, in the last analysis does not increase the overhead costs of development, but reduces them.<sup>13</sup>

The problem is that, if the task of the party is to catch the moment, to take the tide at the flood, to be "a political party that is capable of taking power, precisely at that moment when the mass strike poses this as a social necessity", this point resolved by the ILO cannot be true: the loss of time "wasted talking to ourselves", as advocates of bureaucratic centralism of various sorts put it, is fatal to the party. Hence, in reality, the driver for the endless splittism of the far left: comrades are reluctant to "waste time talking to ourselves" and hence either minorities walk out of organisations in search of fresh fields and pastures new, or majorities find factitious excuses of one sort or another to drive minorities out. The advocates of the mass strike policy before 1914 were already driven towards bureaucratic-centralist sect-making in Luxemburg's and Leo Jogiches' Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, and in the US and British De Leonist Socialist Labour Parties. The reason being that the mass strike policy logically implied party control over the trade unions, and logically implied that internal dissent is time-wasting.

Back to Bolshevism and October. Their strategic orientation to political democracy, and the worker-peasant alliance, enabled the Bolsheviks to grow into a large-minority party with a mass-circulation paper in 1912; enabled the Bolsheviks to pursue a policy of patient explanation with a view to winning the majority during 1917; and enabled them to make the practical alliance with the Left SRs that actually took power.

In reality, all this was the inheritance of August Bebel's and Wilhelm Liebknecht's strategic conception, which was the foundation

of the revolutionary social democracy of pre-1914. And this in turn was the legacy of Marx's and Engels' arguments against the Bakuninists, for a workers' party that attempted not to lead the strike movement, but to create a political voice for the class in high politics.

So 'synthesising' does not work. This is not an issue just about what would be done under conditions of revolutionary crisis. It is an issue about what should be done under present conditions. Fetishising revolutionary crisis and clinging to the general strike and to the idea of taking the tide at the flood is at the core of the present failures of the far left ●

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## Notes

1. 'In search of a synthesis' *Weekly Worker* August 1 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1502/in-search-of-a-synthesis); 'Historical and methodological differences', August 29 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1504/historical-and-methodological-differences); 'Matters past and present', September 12 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1506/matters-past-and-present).
2. GE Mueller, 'The Hegel legend of "thesis-antithesis-synthesis"', *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol 19 (1958), pp411-14. JE Maybee, 'Hegel's dialectics' (plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel-dialectics) (2020) discusses in more depth the limited basis for the use of Fichte's tag to characterise Hegel's logic.
3. And I have argued about it at considerably more length elsewhere. See, for example, 'Origins of democratic centralism' *Weekly Worker* November 5 2015 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1081/origins-of-democratic-centralism) introducing Ben Lewis's translation of Karl Kautsky's 'Constituency and Party'; 'Full-timers and "cadre"', April 25 2019 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1248/full-timers-and-cadre); 'Reclaiming democratic centralism' May 23 2019 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1252/reclaiming-democratic-centralism); 'Negations of democratic centralism' May 30 2019 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1253/negations-of-democratic-centralism), on the collapse of the US ISO; and my 2020 five-part series critiquing Neil Faulkner and Martin Thomas on the issue, linked at [communismuniversity.uk/mike-macnair-programme-and-party-articles](http://communismuniversity.uk/mike-macnair-programme-and-party-articles). Cf also Ben Lewis, 'Sources, streams and confluence' *Weekly Worker* August 25 2016 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1119/sources-streams-and-confluence); Lars T Lih, 'Fortunes of a formula' (johnriddell.com/2013/04/14/fortunes-of-a-formula-from-democratic-centralism-to-democratic-centralism), and 'Democratic centralism: further fortunes of a formula' *Weekly Worker* July 25 2013 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/972/democratic-centralism-further-fortunes-of-a-formula).
4. It does not assist to modify this supposed 'law' by speaking of a law of uneven and combined development. I polemicalised against this in 2008: 'Stalinist illusions exposed' *Weekly Worker* September 17 2008 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/737/stalinist-illusions-exposed).
5. I put on one side the ephemeral large sizes of Lotta Continua in 1969-76 or of the Iranian Fedayeen in the revolution of 1979, since in both cases the groups continued to think like, and organise like, groups of a few thousand - and hence could not survive political differences.
6. See also my 'Defeat was fault of enemy machine guns' *Weekly Worker* May 24 2007 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/674/defeat-was-fault-of-enemy-machine-guns).
7. I make the same point in my 2019 series on the US Kautsky debate: 'Widening frame of debate', August 8 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1263/widening-frame-of-debate); 'Fabian or anarchist?'. August 16 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1264/fabian-or-anarchist); 'Organisation or "direct actionism"', September 5 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1265/organisation-or-direct-actionism); 'Containing our movement in "safe" forms', September 12 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1266/containing-our-movement-in-safe-forms); 'Revolution and reforms' September 20 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1267/revolution-and-reforms), especially in the last three articles.
8. I argue this most elaborately in 'Socialism from below: a delusion' *Weekly Worker* August 13 2015 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1071/socialism-from-below-a-delusion).
9. Part of the cult-of-personality stuff developed from 1924; see LT Lih, '100 years is enough' *Weekly Worker* supplement, September 19 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1507/a-hundred-years-is-enough).
10. [www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/ch04.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/ch04.htm).
11. [www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1910/03/15.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1910/03/15.htm).
12. [www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1912/tactics.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1912/tactics.htm).
13. W Reinsner (ed) *Documents of the Fourth International* New York 1973, p29.

**SOFT LEFT**

# Hidden divisions in Collective

After the ‘private meeting’ of the former Labour leader and a host of other former this and thats, **Carla Roberts** investigates the disorientation of the soft left and the probable results

As soon as we published last week’s article about Jeremy Corbyn’s ‘maybe party’, Collective, a number of people got in touch to tell us more.<sup>1</sup>

On the one hand, this is encouraging, because it shows that comrades value the openness of the *Weekly Worker* and the role it plays in dragging into the light of day the left’s differences, manoeuvres and splits. We report such things not because we are gossip-mongers but because we are serious about the need to fight for the *self-liberation* of the working class as the only strategy that can lead to the achievement of socialism and communism. This understanding requires Marxists to discuss issues around programme and platforms, principles - and even what might superficially appear to be minor political disputes - frankly, honestly and fully, so that people can make up their own minds.

On the other hand, for that same reason, it is a very bad sign indeed that the possible formation of what might (or might not!) become the first sizeable organisation to the left of Labour in many decades is treated like a private matter, with information being clandestinely shared in WhatsApp groups and/or leaked to the bourgeois press.

We understand that there are (at least) two ‘factions’ involved in the discussions about turning Collective into a party of some sort - and they have serious differences over what to do next. In one corner, we have Len McCluskey, former general secretary of Unite, who is leading what we might call the ‘pro-party faction’. He has, we are told, been pulling strings and set up the September 15 ‘private meeting’ in London to nudge Collective into becoming a party. On his side: his partner, Karie Murphy (Corbyn’s right-hand woman, when he was Labour leader), Pamela Fitzpatrick and Justin Schlosberg, the two directors of Justice Collective PLC.

## Companies

Somewhat as an aside, it is quite worrying that it seems to have become normal practice to register political organisations as companies. First, Jon Lansman did it when he set up Momentum in 2015, making sure that the data of hundreds of thousands of Corbyn supporters became his own personal property. After he suffered defeats on various issues on Momentum’s national council (which decided, crucially, to organise a first ever conference on a delegate basis), he quickly moved to abolish all democratic structures in the organisation. Yes, the now infamous ‘Lansman coup’ of January 10 2017 was based on him stitching up a meeting of the executive committee.<sup>2</sup> But he could have simply done away with it anyway - because he *owned* Momentum.

Nigel Farage too has made sure his Reform Party is registered at Company’s House - no doubt in the hope that its rather eccentric and unreliable membership cannot turn on him and vote him out of office. It is worrying that McCluskey, Fitzpatrick and Schlosberg too do not seem to trust the (future) membership of Collective.

In any case, apparently it was the McCluskey faction that informed *The Guardian* of the private September 15 gathering<sup>3</sup> - in the hope of pushing along the second faction, which we shall call the ‘reluctant localists’. This faction includes



**Vital if anything is going to come of it**

former African National Congress MP Andrew Feinstein, former Tyne mayor Jamie Driscoll and, rather importantly, Jeremy Corbyn. They say they want to focus on building local assemblies first (more on that below).

Turning to the bourgeois press to leak ‘confidential’ information is a tried and tested tactic, when it comes to bourgeois politics and perhaps even trade unions. As a tactic to convince your comrades to set up a new party, however, it seems like an incredibly silly thing to do - which is very likely going to achieve the exact opposite. But perhaps McCluskey and co know that Corbyn was so opposed to the idea that this was something like a last-ditch attempt to get him to change his mind. They clearly do not think they can launch a party without him - and they are probably right.

The kind of party these soft lefts have in mind would in all likelihood be pretty much indistinguishable from the dozens of ‘parties’ and groups that have sprung up since the defeat of the Corbyn movement in 2019 - they are all based on their own version of Corbyn’s *For the many* election manifesto: a lot of motherhood, plenty of apple pie, very little about socialism and nothing about how to get there. They need Corbyn on board. He is, surprisingly, still incredibly popular, and perhaps even more so now: the contrast between the frugal hippie, in his scruffy anoraks, and the unashamedly corrupt Starmer and his cronies, parading about in their fine, billionaire-paid-for clobber, could not be more stark.

McCluskey knows that without Corbyn, Collective would doubtless end up just like all the other recent ‘party’ efforts: small, uninspiring and entirely ineffective. We cannot blame him for his political impatience. Clearly, there is a huge political vacuum to the left of today’s Labour Party. The small rebellions at this year’s Labour conference and the elections to the national executive committee show that the left in Labour has not been *entirely* snuffed out - three candidates from the slate put forward by Momentum and the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance were successful.<sup>4</sup> We would argue that the Labour Party does still constitute what Lenin dubbed

a “bourgeois workers’ party” - with one pole based on the working class through the electoral base and the affiliation of trade unions, while at the other pole are thoroughly corrupt career politicians, ever eager to serve capitalism and its interests. But clearly, Sir Keir Starmer has been leading the party back to the right and, in the process, has considerably reduced the left’s room for manoeuvre.

## Splits

The split between the two Collective ‘factions’ seems, on the surface at least, entirely focused on the *how* rather than the *what*. There are very few, if any, political differences when it comes to the *programme* of any new party they might set up - presumably it would be slightly expanded from its current miserable and minimal offering (the five short points from Corbyn’s Peace and Justice Project, plus Palestine tacked on for good measure) to become yet another variation of *For the many*.

While McCluskey, Murphy, Fitzpatrick and Schlosberg want to launch immediately, Corbyn, Feinstein and Driscoll say that the aim should be, first, to build local assemblies “everywhere” and then, perhaps, form a party down the line, most likely in order to stand joint candidates at the next general election - little more than an electoral alliance, in other words. But there seem to be disagreements within this faction too.

Let us start with Corbyn. As he explained in *The Guardian* a couple of months back, he has launched a “people’s forum” in his constituency of Islington North, which is:

a monthly opportunity for residents to hold me, their elected representative, to account. It will be a chance for local people to ask me anything about the month gone by and give me instructions for the month ahead. It will be a shared, democratic space for local campaigns, trade unions, tenants’ unions, debtors’ unions and national movements to organise, together, for the kind of world we want to live in. Listening to the voices of those who elected me. Discussing the concerns and hopes of our community. Empowering each other to do something about it. That is what real democracy

looks like.<sup>5</sup>

As we have commented before, this is certainly not what “real democracy” looks like. Real democracy would mean the working class running every aspect of society, from top to bottom - what we would call socialism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the transition to communism. To achieve that, our class needs to be organised in a party, around a clear programme that fights to achieve such “democratic control over every sphere of life: the state and politics, work and economy, international relations”, as the CPGB *Draft programme* outlines.<sup>6</sup>

By comparison, Corbyn’s plan is a tame monthly get-together, focused entirely on himself and his position as an MP. This clearly could not, by definition, just be replicated elsewhere - and thank god for that. It will be entirely run by Corbyn’s paid staffers, for a start.

## Labourite

And, even though he has been thrown out of the Labour Party, Corbyn also remains a Labourite, through and through. He is very unlikely to want to break with Labour even now - at least not until some of the unions disaffiliate and join any new endeavour. That currently looks very unlikely, especially considering the pay rises granted to train drivers and resident doctors, which seem to have appeased the unions for the time being. They are also waiting to see what they will get from Angela Rayner’s meagre ‘workers’ rights’ bill.

Then there is Andrew Feinstein, who is trying to organise a local ‘hub’ in his constituency (Holborn and St Pancras), which is supposed to move towards a membership organisation, with an AGM electing an executive committee, which I have seen described by a supporter of Feinstein’s plans as “some kind of embryonic pre-party branch”. Apparently, there are documents floating about outlining this perspective. The idea that you could build a party branch *before* any actual party is, of course, rather odd.

The third naysayer, Jamie Driscoll, has done one better: He has announced - just a few days after the September 15 gathering - that he is launching a different organisation altogether! No wonder he does not

want Collective to turn into a potential rival organisation. ‘Majority UK’ will hold its inaugural conference in Newcastle on September 28.<sup>7</sup> It is based around his own (unsuccessful) mayoral campaign and, while it seems to want to concentrate on the ‘North East’, the ‘UK’ in the name implies that Driscoll has, perhaps, greater ambitions.

The website states:

... political education will be at the heart of our movement. Preparing candidates and activists. The focus will always be on active learning and supportive mentoring. Winning political power is only the first step. Delivering change is the hard part. We want to find and nurture 500 new leaders in the North East who can build coalitions and represent their communities with courage and competency. Sound interesting?<sup>8</sup>

No, it really does not. It sounds very confused.

This is also a very odd, Labourite definition of ‘political education’ - ie, learn how to become a councillor. Clearly Driscoll is not interested in learning any lessons from our rich working class history - or from the many mistakes our movement has made when chasing “power”. “Majority exists to rebuild our democratic institutions to serve the interests of the many. We do this by supporting citizens to become activists and activists to become leaders.” Rebuild which democratic institutions, exactly? To do what precisely? Who knows?

Unsurprisingly, there is no mention of the word ‘socialism’ on the incredibly vacuous website. Majority UK spouts even more banal platitudes than the Peace and Justice Project, rambling on about “fairness and dignity”, “justice and peace”, “tolerance and respect” - it is truly dire stuff and very obviously yet another political dead end.

No doubt Corbyn, Feinstein and Driscoll would have been profoundly affected by the ‘anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism’ witch-hunt in the Labour Party and its aftermath. But they have no hankering for life amongst the confessional sects (well, except when they provide speaking tools). Nice, friendly local assemblies are supposed to be the building blocks of something brand new.

But even if these local assemblies (or Majority UK or Ken Loach’s *For the Many* Network or Roger Hallam’s *Assemble*, etc) should take off in more than four or five areas, all these hubs, pre-party branches and wannabe power centres would, by definition, develop independently of each other, attracting all sorts of flotsam and jetsam, pushing and pulling for different campaigns and different politics, depending on the local situation. How on earth could they be brought together into a coherent party with a coherent programme? ●

## Notes

1. ‘Corbyn’s maybe party’ *Weekly Worker* September 19: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1507/corbyns-maybe-party](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1507/corbyns-maybe-party).
2. See ‘Fight back - but for what?’ *Weekly Worker* February 2 2017: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1140/fight-back-but-for-what](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1140/fight-back-but-for-what).
3. *The Guardian* September 15.
4. [labourlist.org/2024/09/labour-nec-election-results-national-executive-committee-2024](http://labourlist.org/2024/09/labour-nec-election-results-national-executive-committee-2024).
5. *The Guardian* July 12.
6. [communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme](http://communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme).
7. [majorityuk.org](http://majorityuk.org).
8. [www.majorityuk.org/content.aspx?page\\_id=22&club\\_id=611019&module\\_id=690553](http://www.majorityuk.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=611019&module_id=690553).



TECHNOLOGY

# Dark underbelly of the beast

It comes with huge promises and many dangers. Robert James explores how capital seeks to make use of artificial intelligence at the expense of labour

**W**hen we turn on the TV or open the paper, go online or go to work, we are bombarded with messages about the dawning of the new age of technological development - the Age of Artificial Intelligence.

Or so it seemed a few months ago, when the advent of sleek, modern AI systems filtered down from the closed-circuit 'productivity' boosting boardrooms and war cabinets. Then prime minister Rishi Sunak met with Elon Musk to discuss how AI could revolutionise Britain.

Everywhere I looked there seemed to be a litany of AI-related stories, fear-mongering about how it was going to steal our jobs, our identity and put our children's safety at risk. This provoked in me a fervour to learn all I could about these systems, to understand how the thing is made and what makes it tick. What will our world look like when it is integrated into every walk of our life? And, most of all, how much capital has been flocking to it?

Of course, AI systems have been with us for a while now: they are in our pockets, they are on our feeds, they check your face at the airports and thank you for shopping with them. But peek beneath the surface and you begin to see its true face: the fiscal and moral cost of AI is immense, but so are its possibilities.

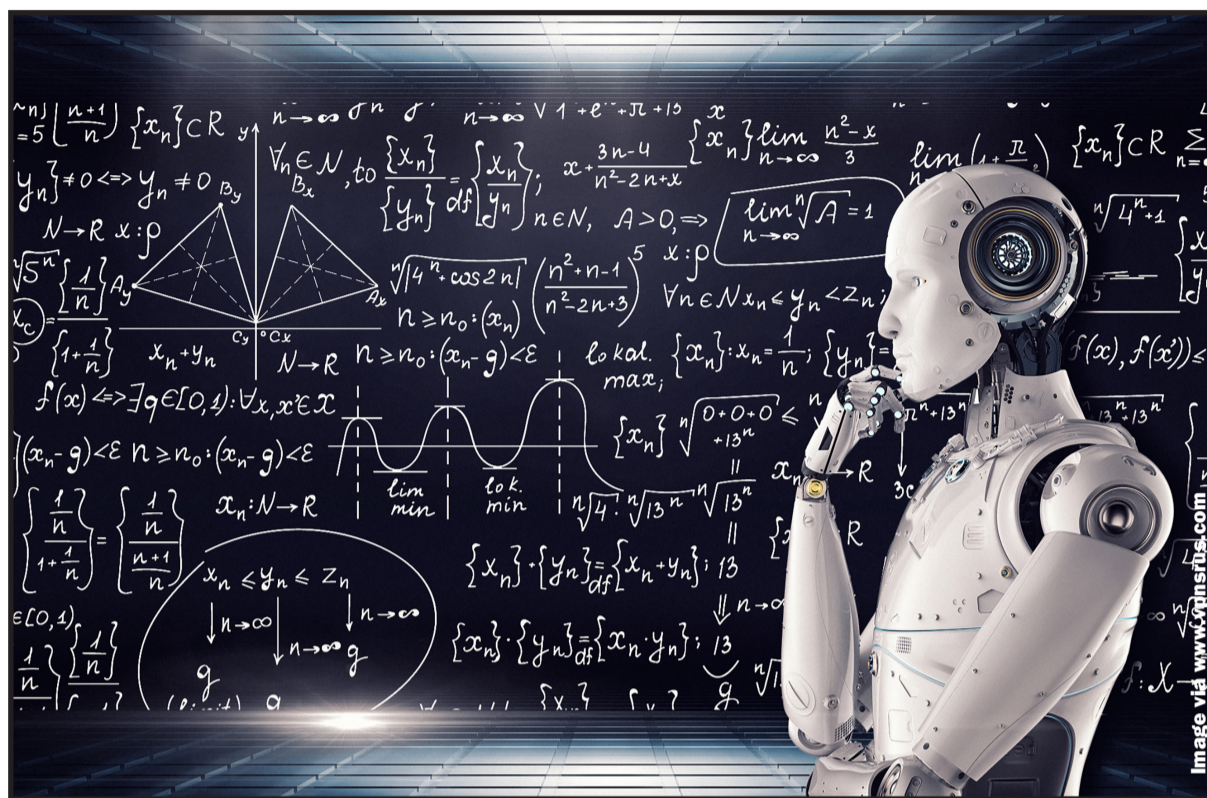
So what is AI? Artificial intelligence refers to the creation of intelligence by human beings. We all know such things have long been in the scope of human imagination, be it *2001: a space odyssey* or *Star trek*. AIs have become familiar to us in both dystopian and utopian forms. Computer science projects from the 1950s have morphed in the furnace of academia and industry into the models of AI we face today.

'Deep learning' models of AI are based on a number of core 'structural tenets'. The first is the architecture of the model, its design based on a neural network called a transformer. This transformer relies on learnt attention mechanisms, which can correctly identify relevant information relating to either specific or general queries. The combination of these components creates the framework for the transmission of information that is the purpose of the modern AI models.

## Structural

Another structural tenet is its training data - data meticulously scraped from a wide variety of avenues. This is fed through the architecture, and human workers help the AI identify relevant data to specified queries. The AI generates a range of the data, starting with a broad brush, gradually refining it through a process of elimination. At present, AIs need a staggeringly large amount of training data to mimic a human's differential capacity.

Seeing my infant daughter begin to recognise 'cat' in abstract forms over the course of a week - as opposed to the months of training with thousands of samples required for an AI to draw similar conclusions - made me realise just how far this technology must develop to truly reflect human intelligence. Once trained, AI can recognise an absolutely vast amount of parameters from human inputs, and output relevant information. ChatGPT (in its already outdated



Consuming huge amounts of energy

form, GPT-3), can recognise some 125 billion parameters relating to the entirety of human knowledge.

So can we really see this form of AI as 'intelligent'? Not really: they cannot reason in the same way as humans; they lack human experience and emotional capacity on any level. They are machines and they know it, as far as they can really 'know' anything. But what they can do is act as vast repositories of information relating to all things known, and quickly identify the parts relevant to the use it has been assigned to. This is what makes them incredibly significant for a capitalist society increasingly reliant on the management of data.

The reaction of the markets to this technology is a significant indicator as to why it has made its way into the heart of successive governments and why there is such fanfare in the mainstream media about its advent. Every major tech company has some stake in AI technology. Goldman Sachs projects a job market impact of 300 million jobs lost to AI and advanced automation that is enabled by it. As jobs related to data handling are at risk, this will mostly come out of white-collar jobs - industries that have formerly been minimally affected by technological advancements.<sup>1</sup> This in turn is projected to cause a productivity boom that will result in a 7% rise in gross domestic product over a decade in relation to savings in labour cost. If corporate investment in AI is to continue at the same rate as investments, it will account for 1% of American GDP by 2030. This flow of investment speaks to an optimistic section of the market that sees AI as a vital resource for increasing productivity.

However, economists are not in agreement about this. Daron Acemoglu is significantly less optimistic about the impact on productivity, estimating a 0.66% increase over 10 years if the technology remains static. The wider impact of new products and services could increase GDP by 2%. However, when you consider some of the social downsides, this will be tapered by a 0.72% drop in welfare.<sup>2</sup> While Acemoglu clearly believes it will be a long time before the market sees the yield of increased

investment in the tech sector, he does not deny that in the future there is real space in the market for AI models that are better suited to the demands of industry - to provide useful data in regard to specific jobs, which would yield better productivity gains.

## Marxism

This puts the market in a position of insecurity about the future, with some sections seeing AI as the definitive future of industry and others as a misleading hoax that over-promises but will under-deliver. Why then, with this risk hanging over it, does AI continue to be heavily pursued by big tech and endorsed by global leaders as the inevitable future of work? Marx has the answers.

Despite being written 150 years ago, Marx's theory of value offers an intriguing perspective on why there is this push for AI integration from the top down into the market and labour relations. It can explain how AI fulfils one of the underlying drivers of capital's economics.

Let us go back to the basic laws of the source of profit from *Capital* volume I. For Marx the production of value in the capitalist mode of production can be broken down into the relation between two types of capital - variable and constant. Variable relates to the role of wage labour, and constant capital relates to the means of production, by which we mean land, tech and infrastructure involved in the production of any given commodity. Combined, these produce commodities of a variable rate of value.

This created value is exclusively measured as a products-exchange value in the capitalist mode of production and is comprised of the sum of labour embodied in a product (necessary labour time) and the surplus labour (that is, labour above the amount provided to the worker to reproduce themselves: ie, wages) extracted in the production cycle.<sup>3</sup> For Marx, the key argument in *Capital* is that value and profit is only created by labour, and that profit is derived from the surplus value added by unpaid labour. That is not to say that only variable capital adds value, but that constant capital already has within it the extracted and realised dead labour of the workers who created the conditions of land, tech and infrastructure required for the

productive process.

AI tries to wriggle out of this relation by defining its properties as 'intangible'. The software and algorithms represent elements of human thought giving AIs abstract properties that are not nominally associated with the tangible properties of constant capital. However, in *Grundrisse* Marx clearly disassociates constant capital from the tangible and states that the development of constant capital is a drive of what he describes as the "general intellect" - a combination of scientific research and the force of investment from capital.

That the worker is unaware of the internal logic of the machines they operate relates significantly to other themes in Marx around the alienation of labour from the productive process - essentially deskilling them and justifying a lower cost of reproduction for the labour they can offer the market. With this in mind, we can see that AI can be categorised as constant capital, as it cannot independently create value: it is reliant on the input of the human to provide a direction and is the sum of dead labour used in the creation of its datasets, as mentioned above.

Why then does this characterisation matter? Because AI represents something much desired by the capitalist: a concrete reduction in necessary labour time, for products that have a high rate of surplus value extraction. In short, less work and more profit.

In *Grundrisse*, Marx makes plain that the development of constant capital is continually driven through mastery of the general intellect to fit the form most adequate for the productive process. You can see this thrust in the course of the history of the tools of labour. From the spinning jenny, through the telegram, to AI, this downward pressure on necessary labour time is blatant. This is infused with the competitive nature of capital, each capitalist trying to get ahead of the curve, to ride the wave, while productivity appears to increase and they gain more profit than competitors, while those that fail to adapt are driven from the market.

However, this belies a fundamental contradiction within the capitalist mode of production: it reduces necessary labour time to a minimum, while also relying on that time to realise

surplus value. As new developments in the means of production fundamentally alter the production process, commodities once requiring a great deal of labour are suddenly superfluous - which at first results in staggering gains in productivity, but eventually leads to profit decline, as the reality of the necessary labour time kicks in. Marxism shows us the reality of AI: it offers the capitalist that magical formula for increased profit and prosperity, but, while at first it appears to shake the world, it will soon settle into the all-too-familiar pattern of low growth and economic downturn we are familiar with.

## Controversy

With this in mind, we turn now to the dark underbelly of the beast. Up to now we have been looking at the AI presented to us by big tech - the clean and faultless system for the translation of information. But behind this facade there sits a significant moral and fiscal cost to modern AI models.

The environmental impact of AIs are significant, the vast sums of computational power required by AI require a huge amount of electrical supply. ChatGPT alone consumes more than 6,000 times the electricity of a European city. When this is combined with the demands on water supply and rare earth metals, you can see that AIs produce a disproportionately large carbon footprint. Also, in the creation of the data sets used to train AIs and the pattern recognition software there are dangerous levels of labour exploitation, with precariat workers in India, Kenya, the Philippines and Mexico completing data labelling jobs for a few cents per job completed.<sup>4</sup> When you consider the vast array of ChatGPT parameters, millions of workers have been short-changed in the production of AI models.

Even when completed, AI models can contain the bias of their training data. When utilised by the police, AIs programmed to find potential offenders utilise previous data, and people were more likely to be targeted based on race and socio-economic background. In its most horrifying application, AI becomes a war criminal: the Lavender AI utilised by the IDF generated 39,000 targets in Gaza in the first months of the conflict.<sup>5</sup>

What is clear is that AI is a machine in the productive cycle, which draws a large amount of speculative interest from large bastions of capital, potentially reducing necessary labour time in a number of vital areas. It is expensive, exploitative and has been weaponised to terrifying effect by the forces of imperialism.

It will be a barrier to class action and something that we Marxists must seek to understand if we are to see plainly the machinations of capital ●

Robert James spoke at *Why Marx?* [www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9QWtRhhOds](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9QWtRhhOds)

## Notes

1. See Michael Roberts, 'AI-GPT - a game-changer?': [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/04/08/ai-gpt-a-game-changer/](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/04/08/ai-gpt-a-game-changer/)
2. D Acemoglu *The simple macroeconomics of AI*: [www.nber.org/papers/w32487](https://www.nber.org/papers/w32487) (National Bureau of Economic Research, May 2024).
3. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, chapters 7 and 9.
4. A Williams, M Miceli and T Gebru, 'The exploited labor behind artificial intelligence' *Noema Magazine* October 13 2022: [www.noemamag.com/the-exploited-labor-behind-artificial-intelligence/](https://www.noemamag.com/the-exploited-labor-behind-artificial-intelligence/)
5. See B McKernan and H Davies "'The machine did it coldly': Israel used AI to identify 37,000 Hamas targets' *The Guardian* April 3.

**LEBANON**

# Third war begins

Despite supposedly working ‘tirelessly’ for peace, the US is doing nothing to hold Israel back. **Yassamine Mather** warns that the war on Lebanon could conceivably see Iran dragged into the conflict

I start by condemning last week’s terrorist act of mass mutilation by the state of Israel. Far from being a clever, audacious cyber hacking, this was a crude method of assassinating and injuring by planting explosives in pagers that had been sold to Hezbollah by a company associated with the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad. These are old-style pagers, bought by Hezbollah following warnings by secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah that mobile phones presented a risk, as they could be hacked.

This was a mass-scale version of the mafia-style car bombings previously seen in Italy, Russia and elsewhere. Had any other country engaged in such a crude form of violence - against victims that included women, children and the elderly - we would have heard no end to US and western condemnation of ‘terrorism’. Any other country would have faced sanctions and even military threats. Yet the only statement on the slaughter so far by the world hegemon and its allies have been calling for Lebanon and Iran to show “restraint”. All this makes a mockery of western claims about defending human rights, etc.

In February 2024 Nasrallah had warned members of his organisation to avoid using mobile phones, stating that Israel tracks people through their phones, monitoring their locations, conversations, data, images and even their families, regardless of whether they are at home, at work or in their vehicles. He claimed Israel can even detect which seat a person occupies in a car. Addressing “brothers” in southern Lebanon, he urged them to stop using mobile phones, which he described as “deadly collaborators”, and advised disabling or burying them for extended periods to safeguard security, lives and dignity. He claimed that, during wartime, Islamic law forbids the use of mobile phones, as it puts lives at risk.

Instead, the organisation bought thousands of old-style pagers, according to *Wall Street Journal* reporters. The initial indications were that a company called Gold Apollo in Taiwan made the devices. However, the company distanced itself from this particular killer batch, adding that a Hungarian company called BAC Consulting had purchased the devices.

BAC Consulting had been registered in 2022 in Hungary to carry out dozens of business activities, ranging from selling telecommunications devices to producing computer games. But, according to the Hungarian media outlet, *Telex.hu*, a Bulgarian company known as Norta Global Ltd sold the pagers to Hezbollah. As Bulgarian authorities looked into its activities, it appeared that Norta had been registered in Sofia by a Norwegian citizen. Norwegian police then got involved, but Rinson Jose, the entrepreneur who registered the company, has since gone missing. Spinning this web of virtual companies and entrepreneurs only plays one role: hiding the obvious culprit, Mossad.

Another hypothesis suggests that the timing of the attacks could be due to the rigged devices’ imminent risk of discovery. According to several reports, Israeli intelligence services originally wanted to detonate the pagers as an opening blow in



**Pager explosion killed, blinded and horribly maimed**

an all-out war against Hezbollah. They chose to act early, however, when a Hezbollah member became suspicious of the devices and planned to alert his superiors. According to the website *Al-Monitor*, days earlier, another Hezbollah member had been killed after he raised suspicions that the devices had been tampered with.

## Israeli aims

The declared aims of the Israeli genocide in Gaza and war in the entire region keep changing, but the latest version includes the following:

1. The complete destruction of Hamas in Gaza, including “uprooting the Hamas regime” and “destroying Hamas’s military and governing infrastructure”.
2. The release of all hostages held by Hamas.
3. Ensuring long-term security for Israel in Gaza and the West Bank.
4. The return of northern residents, who were evacuated due to attacks by Hezbollah in Lebanon. This is a more recent addition to previously existing aims and the Israeli prime minister’s office confirmed that this decision was approved during an overnight meeting of the security cabinet on

September 16.

Irrespective of why last week was chosen as a suitable time for detonating these devices, there is no doubt that, in the words of B Michael, writing in the *Haaretz* opinion column:

Israel is bringing its state terrorism from Gaza and the West Bank to Lebanon ... who came up with the dreadful idea of planting explosives in devices that would maim the bodies of the victims? It’s premeditated. Was the goal to gouge out eyes, castrate people, dismember intestines or sever a hand?²

The Biden administration has so far supported Israeli war efforts, including genocide in Gaza, supplying it with bombs, missiles, fighter planes, etc. The one red line presented by the US is the expansion of the conflict into an all-out war with Lebanon. Faced with this, the Zionist state is making unbelievable propaganda, claiming that 60,000 Israelis have been displaced over the last year. This refers to people who lived within 3.5 kilometres of the border with Lebanon and, according to the same

source, “30 communities have been displaced since October 7 2023” as a result of attacks by Hezbollah. The current claim by the Zionist state is that the fourth aim of the war is as important as the other three and that is why it is attacking Lebanon.

Of course, there is a lot of doubt about this claim, partly because everyone knows that this type of attack - a bit like the killing of Hamas chair Ismail Haniyeh on a visit to Tehran - is to get Hezbollah fully involved, start a full-scale war in Lebanon and then get Iran involved too.

But, despite all this, Hezbollah has shown restraint and Iran, fearful of US retaliations is reluctant to do anything. Nasrallah admitted on September 20 that the pager attack had been a severe blow to his organisation. However, he was emphatic on one issue: “We will not turn this into a regional war.” Yet none of this matters, as Israel is determined to *start* exactly that. Surely we have witnessed the beginning of the third Lebanon war. Israel’s chief-of-staff, major general Herzl Halevi, has already announced the mobilisation of two brigades of reserve troops in preparation for crossing the border. So far more than

550 Lebanese people have been killed as a direct result of Israeli attack - not just in Hezbollah’s stronghold in south Lebanon, but in the north of the country too. The death toll is bound to rise to the many thousands.

Across southern Lebanon, families have been forced to hurriedly gather their belongings and flee north, as the Israeli military launched strikes on targets it claimed were associated with Hezbollah. According to some reports, tens of thousands of residents received warnings from the Israeli military, delivered via text messages and voice recordings in Arabic, urging them to evacuate areas near “Hezbollah positions”. Anyone with any knowledge of south Lebanon will know that the entire region can be considered Hezbollah territory. Whether we like it or not, Hezbollah provides health services, controls schools, mosques and even food distribution. So, just like in Gaza, the population of the southern region has no alternative - leave or die. Roads leading to Beirut and other major cities are still clogged with traffic. However, while 150 schools have become temporary shelters for refugees in the capital, Beirut itself is hardly safe.

There is an even more sinister reason why Israel has chosen to bombard this part of Lebanon. They claim that this would pave the way for the return of 60,000 citizens displaced from northern Israel, but, even if Israel succeeds in defeating Hezbollah in this initial stage of the conflict, it is unlikely that the displaced citizens of northern Israel will feel confident enough to return to their homes in areas so close to the Lebanese border. Even if Hezbollah is weakened, there will be a plentiful supply of volunteers seeking revenge against Israelis. As with other Zionist claims, the idea that war will allow a return of displaced Israeli citizens is a lie.

## Israel’s borders

So we have to consider alternative reasons and paving the way for a military attack on Iran could be one of them. The Zionist state believes that now is the time to neutralise all immediate threats to its border, as a preliminary to long-sought strikes on Iran not least because of its nuclear programme. Tehran has been relying to a certain extent on Hezbollah to act as a deterrent, when it came to Israeli ambitions to destroy its nuclear facilities.

Other Hezbollah commanders who have been victims of recent assassinations include Ibrahim Aqil, who was killed in an IDF airstrike on Beirut on September 20. Aqil has been close to Iran’s Revolutionary Guards and the US state department had accused him of involvement in Hezbollah’s 1984 bombing of the US embassy in Beirut, which killed 63 people, and the attack on the US Marine Corps barracks seven months later, which killed 241 US personnel. In 2013, Washington offered a \$7 million reward for any information that could lead to his location, arrest or conviction.

Forward to the present, on September 23 the Israeli airforce also hit a building in a Beirut suburb in an attempt to assassinate Ali Karaki, who was commander of Hezbollah’s southern front and near the top of

# 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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Hezbollah's chain of command. But Hezbollah released a subsequent statement saying that Karaki was still alive and doing "fine".

According to Jeremy Bowen of the BBC, "Hezbollah is far more powerful, by multiple factors, than Hamas: far better armed; far better trained. They fought for years in Syria for president Assad, so they have plenty of experience."

However, he is right to point out that all this is a gamble for Israel. The group has, up to this point, avoided deploying its most powerful and long-range weapons - with the sole exception of the launch of a Qader 1 ballistic missile on September 25 in the attempt to hit Mossad's headquarters in Tel Aviv. This studied *restraint* falls far short of the "open-ended battle of reckoning" that Hezbollah's deputy leader, Naim Qassem, warned about on September 19. This raises the question: is Hezbollah reluctant to go too far, or simply incapable of unleashing its full arsenal?

Israel's goal in what it calls 'Operation Northern Arrow' in Lebanon is clear. Hezbollah's strategy remains unclear, but it is fundamentally rooted in resistance and survival. Widely regarded as the most powerful non-state military force in the world, Hezbollah is currently struggling after a series of significant setbacks.

No doubt its communications networks have been disrupted, while, of course, several high-ranking commanders have been killed, and its missile stockpile has been diminished by Israeli airstrikes. But, while the group has an array of powerful weapons, its response to Israeli provocations has so far been extraordinarily limited.

In fact, Iran has been urging Hezbollah to hold back, as it relies on the group's arsenal to serve as a deterrent against potential Israeli strikes on its nuclear facilities. In addition, Hezbollah's leadership is well aware that if its attacks on Israel result in significant civilian casualties, Israel would likely retaliate by targeting critical infrastructure, such as Beirut's airport.

Another victim of Israeli-inflicted mass mutilation was the Iranian ambassador to Beirut. He was originally reported to have sustained only minor injuries, but it

later appeared that things were much more serious and he was flown to Tehran.

Iran has claimed it sent a large number of doctors to Lebanon to help with hospitalised victims of the pager attack. Ironically, during the 2022 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protests in Iran the security forces used baton rounds and, according to some reports, the kind of eye injuries they caused were not dissimilar to those in Lebanon.

The pro-government Iranian press is using this as propaganda: we are helping the injured in Beirut, and so on - and, of course, in return, the rightwing opposition, especially the royalists, are saying, 'You never helped the people who were injured in Iran.' That is not quite true either: those who were injured by baton rounds were taken to hospital and treated, irrespective of the state's opposition to the protestors.

## Israel and Iran

Leaving that aside, so far Iran's response to Israeli aggression remains mainly verbal. Of course, the level of attacks on Lebanon in the last few days might change all this. Last week the foreign ministry responded to reporters' questions about the injuries inflicted on the Iranian ambassador in Beirut, saying that the issue was a Lebanese problem and they expect Beirut to deal with the attack!

Masoud Pezeshkian, the new Iranian president, on his arrival in New York for the annual assembly of the United Nations, was very clear: "Lebanon strikes are an Israeli 'trap' to draw us into war - they are dragging us to a point where we do not wish to go. There is no winner in warfare. We are only fooling ourselves if we believe that."

On the assassination of Haniyeh, he told reporters what we already knew. Soon after this incident, the US went out of its way to convince Iran not to retaliate. According to Pezeshkian, "We tried to not respond. They kept telling us we are within reach of peace, perhaps in a week or so," he said. "But we never reached that elusive peace. Every day, Israel is committing more atrocities and killing more and more people - old, young, men, women, children, hospitals, other facilities."

Of course, we all know that talk

about the coming peace was based on another lie by the US and its allies. The Zionist state had no intention of signing a deal and the US state department must have been well aware of the distance between the two sides, making peace impossible. I find it unlikely that the Iranian government believed this nonsense. However, as I have written before, Iran's Islamic Republic is conscious of its weakness and is unlikely to put its survival in danger by providing an excuse for an Israeli/US attack on its military, infrastructure and nuclear facilities.

Further remarks made by Masoud Pezeshkian regarding Iran's willingness to ease tensions with Israel have sparked significant controversy. Both the foreign minister and the head of the Government Information Council reiterated that these statements are "completely false".

Pezeshkian's comments, made during a meeting with senior US media executives, generated widespread reactions both domestically and internationally. An audio recording was released in which he is heard saying: "Iran is ready to lay down its weapons if Israel does the same." On the current conflict, he said: "A terrorist is a terrorist, whether Arab, non-Ajam, Persian, Israeli, or American. If they assassinate, they are terrorists."

A few hours later, foreign minister Abbas Araghchi, who is accompanying Pezeshkian on his New York trip, "strongly denied" reports in certain media that Iran is prepared to reduce tensions with the Israeli regime. Meanwhile, the Government Information Council wrote:

Regarding the false attribution of comments about the Zionist regime, it is clarified that such statements were never made by the esteemed president of the Islamic Republic. On the contrary, during his meeting with American media managers, Dr Pezeshkian firmly condemned the Zionist regime's crimes in Gaza and its invasion of Lebanon, emphasising that these acts violate humanitarian and international standards and must be stopped.

The Government Information Council also wrote that Pezeshkian explicitly stated: "The assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran will not go unanswered, and this response will be delivered at the appropriate time."

All this will make life difficult inside Iran: as always, a president who is trying very hard to be 'a reformist diplomat' will face many enemies within Iran's borders.

In the week when the US tried to convince China to intervene and ask Iran to use its influence on the Houthis to stop attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, Pezeshkian's reply to reporters was very clear: "We do not influence the Houthis."

## Israeli gamble

Over the last few decades in preparation for war with Iran, the Israeli media have done their best to portray a very sinister image of Iran and its population.

However, Ori Goldberg, an Israeli expert on Iran, has long challenged the prevailing perceptions of Iran and its geopolitical behaviour, particularly in Israel. Israeli discourse often frames Iran as a dangerous, extremist enemy, set on Israel's destruction. But Goldberg - no fan of the Islamic Republic - argues that this is a simplistic and inaccurate portrayal.

According to Goldberg, who was quoted on the website of *972 Magazine*, Iran's policies are driven by "pragmatic nationalism" rather than religious fanaticism. Iran does not have a grand plan for Israel's destruction, despite some leaders' inflammatory rhetoric.

Instead, Iran's focus is on securing its national interests by building influence in the region, such as in Lebanon and Iraq, to safeguard its security. Iran's regional behaviour, while confrontational, is seen as defensive and aimed at maintaining the regime's stability rather than pursuing outright dominance or the annihilation of Israel.

Goldberg has been marginalised in the Israeli media, especially after criticising Zionist policies in Gaza, which he called "genocidal". Despite this, his views have gained international attention, particularly for challenging the common narrative that Iran is entirely dedicated to Israel's destruction. He points out that Israel's tactical, isolationist approach contrasts with Iran's strategy of regional engagement. Moreover, he criticises the Israeli assumption that Iran orchestrates all anti-Israel resistance, including Palestinian violence, calling this narrative a deliberate tactic to obscure the realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Goldberg emphasises that Iran's support for groups like Hezbollah and Hamas is not rooted in ideological commitment to Palestinian liberation, but is a means to expand Iranian influence and destabilise its enemies. If a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians were reached, Goldberg argues, Iran would likely not oppose it, as its priority is regional power rather than the Palestinian cause.

Meanwhile, IDF commanders were jubilant about the successes of this week's bombings. According to defence minister Yoav Gallant, "Today was a masterpiece ... This was the worst week Hezbollah has had since its establishment, and the results speak for themselves." However, as BBC international editor Jeremy Bowen reminds us, "Israel's earlier wars with Hezbollah were grinding, attritional and never produced a decisive victory for either side."

The decision to launch a ground offensive into south Lebanon will present many dangers, and in Israel many are reminding the Netanyahu government that, after almost a year of relentless war, Hamas is far from being defeated in Gaza. IDF forces have not even been able to destroy all the tunnels Hamas dug through the rocks under Gaza. As for Hezbollah, it is a far more powerful force, with up to 200,000 missiles and rockets at its disposal. A US think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, estimates that Hezbollah has around 30,000 active fighters and up to 20,000 reserves - many veterans of the Syrian civil war.

The Israeli state's gamble of starting yet another bloody war will no doubt cost the lives of many Palestinians and Lebanese. However, far from bringing about the 'safety' of Israeli border regions, it will make the situation far more dangerous and far worse - not just for Arabs, but also for the Jewish population ●

## Notes

1. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/23/netanyahu-says-war-will-continue-even-if-deal-agreed-with-hamas](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/23/netanyahu-says-war-will-continue-even-if-deal-agreed-with-hamas).
2. [www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-09-24/ty-article-opinion/premium/israel-is-bringing-its-state-terrorism-from-gaza-and-the-west-bank-to-lebanon/00000192-2012-dc3c-a79e-b13e3c1b0000](https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-09-24/ty-article-opinion/premium/israel-is-bringing-its-state-terrorism-from-gaza-and-the-west-bank-to-lebanon/00000192-2012-dc3c-a79e-b13e3c1b0000).

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# weekly WORKER

Craving for  
respectability  
politically  
disarms



Protagonists: Audrey White (left and smiling), Lindsey German (right and frowning)

## Don't mention fake anti-Semitism

Thousands marched in Liverpool to protest against Labour's complicity with Israel, but, writes Ian Spencer, Lindsey German did not come out of things with flying colours

Around 10,000 people - fewer than expected - assembled at Liverpool Lime Street on September 21 to demand a ceasefire and the end of arms sales to Israel. The demonstration consisted of a rather short march to the Pier Head; we were clearly not supposed to upset Sir Keir Starmer with noisy chants about 'genocide' and 'war crimes'. The police kept us well away from the ACC arena, where Labour's conference was happening.

So far, so predictable. It was the rally at the end, however, which did mix things up a bit - and unusually so. But then, Liverpool has always been a bit different. The left remains organised and vocal, as Kim Johnson, MP for Liverpool Riverside, found out to her disadvantage. She clearly wanted to use her appearance at the rally to whitewash her tarnished image - many in Liverpool have not forgiven her for not voting on the November 15 2023 parliamentary motion on a Gaza ceasefire. She released a mealy-mouthed statement afterwards, explaining that she was on a "pre-arranged Commonwealth Parliamentary Association overseas visit", which really sounds super-important - much more important than genocide.

"Had I been present, I would have voted for any amendment calling for an immediate ceasefire on both sides," she wrote. Hold on - both sides? Oh yes, Johnson very much apes the 'bad apples' storyline and in her statement following the parliamentary vote in November 2023 she draws an equals-sign between the October 7 attack by Hamas and the systematic violence doled out against Palestinians by the Israeli state: "I condemn the brutal killings of innocent Israeli men, women and children and the taking of hostages by Hamas. I echo the calls by the international community to release

all hostages immediately. Equally, I condemn the killings of over 11,000 Palestinians in Gaza, 68% of whom are women and children, during the bombardment of the Gaza Strip in recent weeks."

### No friend

Unlike her fellow Liverpool MP, Ian Byrne (who also spoke at the demo), and six other Labour parliamentarians who were subsequently suspended, she also did not have the guts, back in July, to vote in favour of scrapping the two-child benefit cap. And when it came to the winter fuel allowance, she once again chose to abstain - rather than vote in favour of keeping it, as Ian Byrne, Zarah Sultana and the other 'rebel MPs' did.

She is, understandably, deeply unpopular on the left and we must ask, who on earth thought it was a good idea to invite her to address the rally? She is no friend of the Palestinians. It was heartening to see her speech booed by the crowd almost right from the get-go. She was also met with shouts of, "Get out of the Labour Party". But what really raised hackles was when she yet again started to compare October 7 with Israel's violence. She also made a rather pathetic attempt to present the Parliamentary Labour Party in a positive light - and was booed some more.

She responded, "Yes you will boo me, but I am one of the few Labour MPs that has asked for a ceasefire and a return of humanitarian aid." She went on, "I am a black, working class woman from Liverpool, and I have fought racism all my life" - as if this justified being an apologist for a party complicit in genocide.

Ian Byrne MP was the only other Labour MP to appear on the platform and he went down much better, though his speech was not exactly inspiring

stuff. Gaza is a "moral test for the new government and I call on them today to stand up for the implementation of international law and be bold in confronting those who undermine it," he demanded rather lamely.

Byrne should know better than put his trust in "international law" - it can be, and is being, pulled and bent to suit the agenda of the ruling class. The Labour government is fully on board with US support for what Israel is doing in Gaza, so it seems a touch optimistic to call on it to 'confront', well, itself. The UK is one of several countries which manufacture parts for F-35 fighters that are used by Israel, as well as home to companies such as Elbit Systems, which is a major supplier of attack drones for the Israel Defence Forces. The UK government revoking just 30 out of 350 export licenses for weapons to Israel is no more than a token gesture. As Mick Whelan, general secretary of train drivers' union Aslef, told the rally: "We don't want 30 arms licences for Israel cancelled, we want them all cancelled."

### Cats and pigeons

It was, however, the speech by Audrey White, secretary of Merseyside Pensioners Association, that really put the cat among the pigeons. She was expelled from the Labour Party in 2022 after denouncing Keir Starmer's purge of the left, famously confronting him in a Liverpool restaurant. The video clip, in which he looks like a deer caught in the headlights, went viral within hours and has been viewed many millions of times.

Comrade White certainly was not shy about 'speaking truth to power' on Saturday either. She angrily attacked the

dirty, filthy weapon of fake anti-Semitism. It was used to destroy

Jeremy Corbyn, it was used to silence us when they came for our comrades. Where do those lies come from? They come from the Labour Party and the pages of the *Jewish Chronicle*, which has a direct line to Netanyahu and the generals who are carrying out the genocide. This fake anti-Semitism has destroyed our movement. Do not accept the lies!<sup>2</sup>

It was passionate, strong stuff and not something we have ever heard from the platform on the 18 previous national demonstrations.

Her speech was enthusiastically cheered and clapped by the crowd - but went down like a lead balloon among the organisers. The *Morning Star*, for example, noticeably declined to report her remarks.

Comrade White has complained publicly that afterwards she received an angry text from Lindsey German, convenor of the Stop the War Coalition. Comrade German apparently blamed her for being responsible for an unnamed speaker withdrawing from the rally after her speech, because of the "possible reputational damage" to them and their organisation. Comrade German, true to form, has refused to tell Audrey White who the 'shrinking violet' was, unfortunately. But clearly, German's message implies that White should have self-censored and not put VIPs into such an awkward position.

We have not been able to find a full list of advertised speakers that we could cross-reference with the speakers at the rally, but if any readers have more information, please let us have it - the person concerned deserves to be named and shamed. Clearly they are in the wrong, not comrade White.

The plot somewhat thickened

when we heard that the Palestine Solidarity Campaign unsuccessfully tried to get hold of a copy of comrade White's speech from cameraman Carlos Soto, who filmed the event on behalf of *The Crispin Flintoff show* (all speeches are now online anyway, for everybody to see). The PSC has been entirely useless during the witch-hunt and has tried its best not to criticise Zionism.<sup>3</sup>

### Official sponsors

Just like the Stop the War Coalition, the PCS is chiefly concerned with not alienating its official sponsors or getting hammered in the pages of, yes, the *Jewish Chronicle*. This whole sorry episode really exposes the serious political limitations of these so-called 'united fronts'. Lindsey German might have occasionally opposed the witch-hunt when speaking on behalf of her sect, Counterfire. But in the StWC, she kowtows to the witch-hunt by thoroughly disapproving of comrade White - albeit, in what was, to begin with, a private message.

It is absolutely incredible that some people still have not learned the lessons of the last nine years. The 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign was, yes, supposed to get rid of Jeremy Corbyn from the leadership of the Labour Party - but it was also the right's weapon of choice to stop any criticism of what Israel is doing to the Palestinians today. Which is exactly what Saturday's demonstration was supposed to be all about!

You really could not make it up ●

### Notes

1. [www.kimjohnsonmp.uk/latest-news/my-statement-the-vote-on-a-ceasefire-in-gaza](http://www.kimjohnsonmp.uk/latest-news/my-statement-the-vote-on-a-ceasefire-in-gaza).
2. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=PESkVAWBLcQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PESkVAWBLcQ).
3. [azvsas.blogspot.com/2022/04/i-have-resigned-from-palestine.html](https://azvsas.blogspot.com/2022/04/i-have-resigned-from-palestine.html).