

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



We need clear red lines: Zionism is racism, SUtR should stop marching with Zionist racists

- Letters and debate
- Tom May 1940-2024
- Israel wreaks havoc
- 'Revolutionary defeatism'

No 1512 October 24 2024

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10 - free for anti-racism marchers



CRUSH FASCISM IN THE EGG?

LETTERS



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

Not Cliffite

It is always gratifying to see our organisation, Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (RS21), praised in the pages of your eminent publication. However, there are a few points in Jack Conrad's recent article, 'Wrong and right war politics' (October 17), that need correction or clarification.

Firstly, it is a point of pride that all of RS21's official policies and motions passed at our all-member assemblies are available publicly on our website, including the recent motion about Ukraine (revsoc21.uk/motions-and-policies). In RS21, we believe that this kind of transparency and openness about our politics and about the workings of our organisation is very important, but there is always more we can and should do on this front - perhaps the layout of the website ought to be adjusted to make this page easier to find.

Secondly, Conrad refers to RS21 as a "still Cliffite organisation". We are not a Cliffite organisation. If RS21 had been a Cliffite organisation, I would not have joined it a year ago. For many years, I had decided against joining RS21 precisely because I had been under the misapprehension that it was Cliffite. RS21 is a Marxist organisation, it is a revolutionary socialist organisation, and it is "an ecosocialist, feminist, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist organisation" (revsoc21.uk/about).

Within those (rather broad) bounds, it is an extremely pluralistic organisation which fosters and encourages discussions, exchange and comradeship amongst revolutionaries influenced by a wide range of different traditions within Marxism.

It is probably arguable that, strictly speaking, RS21 was never a Cliffite organisation. Even though it was an organisation founded by Cliffites as a split from a Cliffite organisation and was once composed exclusively of Cliffites, I'm not sure that as a matter of official policy there was ever anything that specifically marked RS21 out in this way. Scanning through the website's list of official policies dating back to 2014, I am struggling to find any evidence for the idea that it was ever formally a Cliffite organisation.

While RS21's founding members may have still agreed with much of the substantive politics of the Cliffite tradition, its structure and practices certainly constituted an explicit break from the organisational model of Cliffism (as exemplified by the Socialist Workers Party). This meant that RS21 has usually had very little in the way of centralism, discipline, requirements on members, etc - and it has often functioned as something more like a loose network than a traditional democratic-centralist cadre organisation. It's probable that RS21 overcorrected for some of the problems with the SWP's organisational model, and recently we have been taking some steps to reform the organisation to be more structured and coherent (albeit still, rightly, very distant from the SWP's model).

At any rate, a consequence of this is that in the decade RS21 has existed, many non-Cliffites have joined (as far as I'm aware, the majority of current members were

never in the SWP), and have not been cadre-ised as Cliffites - instead RS21 has built a really interesting and productive melting pot. Yes, we have many brilliant and invaluable comrades who still identify strongly with "the IS tradition" (as 'Cliffites' prefer to call it!), and that heritage is an important part of the organisation's history, but it is just one component of the creative, pluralistic and forward-looking fusion that RS21 has become.

Archie Woodrow
RS21 North London

Anti-Semitism

A number of weeks ago I was admonished by organisers of a pro-Palestine rally in Liverpool for giving a speech I was told made other speakers (likely Labour affiliates in town for the party conference) "uncomfortable", causing several to withdraw from the platform.

The issue: raising how false accusations of anti-Semitism have been weaponised to undermine support for Palestine. I was told my contribution was problematic on the grounds that it's "important our demos reflect the wide range of views within the movement" and yet it is increasingly clear to me that some within our movement are committed to, in effect, censoring activists from talking about the key issue that has undermined the Palestine movement in this country more than any other.

This is something thousands of activists across the country have experienced - being victimised, intimidated, libelled, suspended or expelled from the Labour Party as anti-Semites, largely without evidence or due process - including, disproportionately, Jews. It was used to oust the only pro-Palestine leader of a major political party this country has ever seen and the government is now virtually bereft of pro-Palestine voices because of it. It has indisputably cowed and weakened our movement, with rightwing Labour its chief instigator, and yet it is the advice of some organisers that this shouldn't be spoken of in public. I can only assume that the idea is not to upset those still able to reconcile their support for Palestine with remaining a member of an organisation that embraced this very tactic to purge its own membership and is currently tacitly supporting genocide in Gaza: namely, the Labour Party.

I was told that by raising this issue on stage I wasn't being "helpful". What isn't helpful is brushing such a vicious political instrument under the carpet and characterising it as merely 'a row'. The weaponisation of anti-Semitism is recognised the world over as a key tactic used by Israel and its allies to silence pro-Palestine voices. The need to combat it is openly discussed on the US anti-war left and right, for example (eg, Bernie Sanders), and yet much political leadership in this country is seemingly too brow-beaten or preoccupied with preserving its own status to challenge it.

Even as a strategic calculation this is completely wrongheaded and leaves us open to attack time and time again. If those in a position of leadership within the movement are unwilling to confront these smears head-on, then please don't reprimand (and in effect attempt to gag) other activists with direct experience of such attacks for doing so. I believe, as do many others, that it's vital for Palestinian liberation that we fight back (see

the adjudication I won against the *Jewish Chronicle* for libelling me).

As regards other speakers feeling uncomfortable or "reputationally damaged" by speaking after me, it was rather uncomfortable for me to be sharing a platform with MPs from the incumbent Labour government currently imposing a new raft of Tory-style austerity on pensioners and materially enabling genocide. But, unlike others, I do believe in pluralism and freedom of speech within a mass movement and wouldn't dream of trying to police what others say on a podium (especially when the issue is so pertinent).

There were countless speakers at the rally who chose not to speak on this subject (which was their prerogative) and so I am left wondering why I - as the only speaker who chose to do so - should be admonished (absurdly on the grounds of ensuring a "wide range" of voices). The fact some organisers are showing that their instincts are to defer to the concerns of those in power (yet who do so little with it) - ie, the Labour Party - over the lived experience of embattled activists is both disappointing and revealing.

Audrey White
email

Labour-power

Michael Roberts makes several fundamental errors in his article reviewing the work of Ahmet Tonak and Sungar Savran ('Remains our bedrock', October 17).

He says: "While the classical economists recognised that value in an economy was created by human labour-power..." Firstly, they didn't say that, because they had no category of "labour-power". They recognised that value was created by labour, whilst failing to distinguish that from the value of labour-power, which it was left to Marx to elaborate. If, as Roberts claims, here, value is created by labour-power, then that value of labour-power is equal under capitalism to wages, and so we have to conclude that the value of commodities is determined by wages!

No wonder Roberts got so confused in the past about the nature of inflation. True, he recoiled from that conclusion, which flows from his premise, but only by then putting himself in the same kind of contradiction faced by Adam Smith and David Ricardo, and later by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Eugen Dühring. He could then only explain price rises, if wages are not the cause, by claiming that it was down to monopoly profits, which is essentially the kind of mercantilist argument of James Steuart, but also of Dühring - that the capitalist simply adds an amount of profit onto those wages. Exactly how that is possible is again left a mystery.

From his false claim, Roberts goes on to a false conclusion: "State employees, teachers, social workers, health workers are unproductive for capitalism, as they do not deliver new value and surplus value for capital - indeed their wages are a deduction from overall surplus value. That partly explains why capital is so opposed to state spending and investment and in favour of privatisation."

Not only is this false, but it has thoroughly reactionary implications. Firstly, as set out above, it is not true that state employees do not create new value. If they did not, then there would be no basis for them being

paid wages for the labour they undertake. It is true that not all state employees create new value, but only to the same extent that not all employees of any other capital create new value. In those cases, as Marx describes, the basis of their payment is that the labour is necessary for the realisation of value, rather than its creation. But, it is clearly not true to say that the labour of a teacher or a doctor is not productive of new value.

Arthur Bough
email

Red herrings

The CPGB seems to have gotten itself into an amateurish and unnecessary tizz over the statement, 'Establishing a principled left' (*Weekly Worker* October 3).

The purpose of the statement now seems unclear and, while I agree with much of what Jack Conrad ('Wrong and right war politics', October 17) has said in reply to Carla Roberts (Letters, October 10) - particularly around the right of the elected leadership, the Provisional Central Committee, to issue statements and whether or not such a document must have the words, "main enemy is at home" - much of the reply seems to be obfuscating around the actual purpose of the document.

Comrade Roberts is right to say that this statement "should be short and sharp, and concentrate on the political principles". By indulging in a fatuous discussion about dictionary meanings of the word 'statement', comrade Conrad is throwing dust to distract from the main point: what was the political purpose of the statement in the first place?

Comrade Conrad writes in reply to comrade Roberts: "When comrade Tam Dean Burn asked [at the aggregate] why we would want to issue a statement at this precise moment in time, I did not, however, reply that we wanted to 'seek closer cooperation with others on the left'." Really? What, then, was the point of the statement? The subheading of the published form says the CPGB PCC "calls for others on the left, individuals and organisations, in Britain and internationally, to discuss and

agree this statement with a view to cementing principled unity and furthering the struggle against war and capitalism" (emphasis added).

But comrade Conrad seems to suggest that events are happening too fast for this to have been possible. To quote: "The statement was written and published, knowing full well that it was time-limited, would soon be left behind by fast-moving events." Then clearly the statement as written was not fit for the intended purpose: "cementing principled unity and furthering the struggle against war and capitalism". The form of something must suit its political purpose. A statement aimed at "cementing principled unity" with individuals and organisations must surely focus on the principles around which unity is being sought.

The original statement includes far too much running commentary on the war at this particular juncture, which, as its author admits, meant it was "time-limited and would soon be left behind by fast-moving events". It would be a pity if the original author's pride got in the way of clearing up this mess. But, alas, by throwing many different areas of disagreement into the discussion, the debate seems likely to be full of red herrings.

Time to refocus on the intent of the statement and proceed from there, rather than seek to defend buried pride, real or imagined.

Martin Greenfield
Australia

Privilege

I had the privilege of knowing Tom May for over 30 years, primarily through the Cogers debating society. He was a remarkably knowledgeable individual and an exceptional speaker, known for punctuating his speeches with his signature phrases: "in fact" and "yeah"!

I was also close friends with his son, James, who sadly passed away a decade ago.

My heartfelt condolences go out to his widow, Rosalind, his son, Oliver, his daughter, Harriet, and his grandchildren, Harry and Lilleth.

Philip Holland
email

Fighting fund

More than possible!

With a week still to go to reach the *Weekly Worker's* £2,250 fighting fund target for October, I'm pleased to report that we already have £1,979 in the kitty. In other words we we need £271 in the final week.

Well, considering we received no less than £704 over the last seven days, that's definitely much more than possible! Since last week we've had two three-figure standing orders - thank you, SK and PM - while other SOs/bank transfers came from MM (£75), GB (£50), SO (£35), GR (£20), GD (£15) and TT (£6). Then there was an excellent £50 paid by KS "in memory of Kevin Bean", plus £5 from IS (both via PayPal).

As I reported last week, Kevin was one of two of our comrades who died in the last couple of weeks. We do not yet know the details of his funeral, but the commemoration for the second of those two comrades, Tom May (see the obituary,

opposite), will take place next Monday (October 28) in Guildford.

As Jack Conrad notes in the obituary, Tom passionately hated charities and, undoubtedly, he would rather people make "a donation to the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund". There couldn't be a better time than right now to go along with that! Let's make sure by this time next week that we go shooting past that monthly target, and help to commemorate both Tom and Kevin in that way.

To play your part, please check how to chip in by going to the web address below. Help us meet those soaring printing and postage costs! ●

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

OBITUARY

Four matches and a friend

Tom May, December 4 1940-October 5 2024

First time I met Tom May, I was a very young member of the Young Communist League. I joined as a callow 13-year-old in early 1969 (having applied a year before and hearing nothing back - the branch had apparently suffered a Maoist takeover and split).

Whatever the exact year - maybe 1969, maybe 1970 - the occasion is seared onto my brain. There was I giving an education talk to my fellow Hemel Hempstead YCLers on materialism. What on earth I was going on about has, thankfully, long faded from memory. But I expect it was some dreadfully crude stuff about stuff being just stuff. What I do remember, however, is Tom's entry into our little meeting.

A giant of a man - and, adding to the striking image, he could even have been wearing a bowler hat and a cloak. Anyway, Tom stood there for a couple of minutes listening to my nonsense. Then, instead of condescendingly telling me that I was talking nonsense, he calmly got out his box of matches - Tom smoked a pipe - and proceeded to slowly place on the table four matches arranged into a square. I don't think he said a thing. But I got the point instantly.

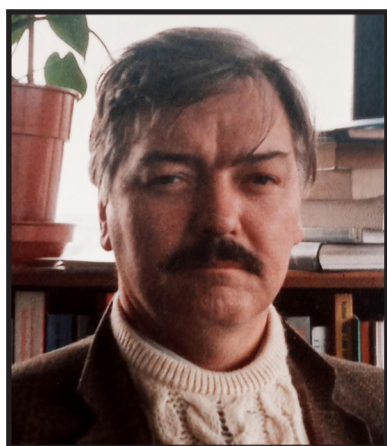
That was Tom. A great teacher. However, Tom had to go through many struggles. Life was not given to him on a platter. He was born and raised in working-class Battersea, his father was a self-employed cobbler ... and by all accounts a Tory bigot. To make matters worse, school was tough. Tom, like myself, was dyslexic. So it is truly remarkable that, having gone from school to do various manual jobs, including a stint in the London docks, Tom was able to succeed in formal education. His particular forte was mathematics. After getting a degree he became a lecturer in further education ... and a leading rank-and-file member in the Natfhe union.

Tom was a committed communist through and through. He joined the YCL and then the CPGB and, not uncritically, remembered mentors such as R Palme Dutt, John Gollan, Jimmy Reid and Harry Pollitt - after whom he named his daughter, Harriet. His other children with his first wife, Rosemary, were James and Oliver - honouring, of course, Connolly and Cromwell.

James died tragically in 2012. He committed suicide. Both Harriet and Oliver did readings at his funeral. His granddaughter, Lilith, paid a moving tribute too. Tom, not surprisingly, was, for once, lost for words.

After migrating from London, Tom went on to become chair of the South East Midlands district of the CPGB - an area stretching from Watford in the south to Corby in the north, but HQed in Luton. Here we had three industrial branches - two in Vauxhall, one in Skefco. There were also two town branches, Luton and Dunstable ... and a Luton college branch founded and built into something of a force by Tom himself. Later he got me in to establish a CPGB student branch.

Tony Chater - future *Morning Star* editor - lectured at Luton too, but made not the least impact. Tom despised him as a bureaucratic nonentity and was glad to see the back of him. Tom was much more in tune with industrial militants such as George Slessor (convenor Dunstable Vauxhall) and Harry Harbottle (convenor Luton Airport). Tom's and Rosemary's house on the Lewsey Farm estate was a chaotic hive of political activity, children and comrades coming and going.



In his prime

Tom was very much a man of his times. Politically he was formed by direct experience of living under the social democratic consensus, on the one hand, and what appeared to be the inexorable forward march of the Soviet Union and the 'socialist camp', on the other. Put another way, his world view relied on rapid economic growth and - as a consequence, or so he thought - inevitable social progress: communist man and woman would colonise the solar system and in time go beyond to the stars. Meanwhile, here on Earth, everything was getting better ... and in the late 1940s, 50s and 60s it demonstrably was. Science, machines, technology ... and rising GDP figures were always a source of optimism for Tom. Doubtless, overoptimism: he was - how shall we put it? - sceptical when it came to human-induced global warming. Climate crisis stood in flat contradiction to his productionist narrative.

Not that he thought everything was automatic. History sometimes needs a nudge. At one point, I would guess in the late 60s or early 70s, he secretly organised comrades for military training - a 'crime' which earned him a brief suspension from CPGB membership. In that context, it is worth mentioning that during one of our long talks - over a glass of wine or two - he won me to accept that old slogan of the physical force wing of Chartism: 'Peacefully if we can, forcefully if we must' (now found in our *Draft programme*). I needed convincing on the 'peacefully'.

Nonetheless, I would call Tom an 'anti-Khrushchev Khrushchevite' - a description, which, when I put it to him, he readily accepted. The collapse of bureaucratic socialism in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union therefore came as a body blow. He had friends and comrades in the German Democratic Republic who in an instant ceased being friends and comrades, and broke off all contact.

Well before that though we had already drawn him towards *The Leninist* - the forerunner of the *Weekly Worker*. In 1981, after a brief sojourn in the Communist Party of Turkey, I systematically approached - and met face-to-face - a long list of contacts in and around the CPGB, with the idea of obtaining financial backing for our proposed factional journal. Whether it was my inability to convince, the political degeneration of those I was trying to convince or the political times themselves, I do not exactly know. Either way, I could only report back, to the three other founding comrades, a complete lack of success ... apart from Tom May. He handed over a £100 cheque (the minimum we would accept). To be honest, though, I think that this owed more to friendship than any conviction that we would make a success in what was, after all, a crazily ambitious venture.

My nearest and dearest says that Tom was a surrogate father for me.

An exaggeration, but with more than a grain of truth. He certainly helped me personally on many levels. A source of advice, inspiration and, when needed, criticism. But sons - if their fathers have done their job - outgrow them. And Tom did his job.

He formally joined our ranks for a brief while. But it was clear that our politics and eagerness to engage with the best available Marxist ideas made him feel uneasy, uncomfortable. We were in the same cell studying István Mészáros's *Marx's theory of alienation*, along with a couple of diehard Stalinites from the *Open Polemic* faction - we took them in and spat them out. Tom instinctively sought shelter under their threadbare comfort blanket in discussions.

That said, Tom helped us till he was no longer able to do so. He turned up week in and week out for collating and mailout. He took charge of doing the stamps. That always meant a higgery-piggery arrangement and sometimes even stamps appearing over the edge or on the wrong side of the envelope. He also brought the whole team fish and chips and kept us entertained in the pub afterwards.

Tom was generous to a fault and always eager to lend a hand. That could, on occasion, extend, though, into what might be considered domineering behaviour. He was not without fault. Nowadays Tom would be branded a male chauvinist by heresy-hunters and that would not be entirely unfair. But many women knew exactly how to deal with him and put an instant stop to any sexist bullshit. First and foremost here I would mention Rosalind Malcolm, Tom's partner till his death. He was very lucky to find her. Something he knew full well.

It should also be understood that Tom liked to be the centre of attention. Any phrase, line or 'innocent' term of endearment that could put up hackles is just what he wanted. He got noticed. However, it was not simply about ego. Tom thrived on getting people to think out of the box. If that meant stirring things up, so be it.

From childhood Tom questioned. He questioned his parents. He questioned his schoolteachers. He questioned friend and foe alike. He questioned official party policy. He questioned the Soviet Union ... and in many ways found it wanting. He questioned everything ... and quite rightly too.

So he would adopt provocative ideas whenever and wherever he found them. Sometimes I know he simply did not believe in them, while other, entirely dubious, ideas I am not so sure about - he could have really been persuaded.

Last time I met Tom May his mind had already gone walkabout. We took him to our regular haunt - the Pembury in Hackney - and bought him pizza and a pint. He could not settle. He wanted to get back home, back to Rosalind. Nonetheless, every time one of us opened our mouths and talked about this or that, he immediately interjected with a "Well, what do you mean?" or a "Are you really sure?" It was not that he could put us right about anything now. It was simply that he was argumentative to the very core of his being.

I am glad I met Tom May ●
Jack Conrad

PS. Tom hated charities with a passion. Rosalind says that she would like people to make donations to the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund in his memory.

ACTION

The arms trade and Israel

Friday October 25, 6pm: Public meeting, Mander Hall, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Demand an arms embargo on Israel. Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn MP and Lindsey German (Stop the War). Registration free.

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

Mixing pop and politics

Friday October 25, 7pm: Book event, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Author Toby Manning introduces *Mixing pop and politics: a Marxist history of popular music*, his radical account of political and social upheavals in the last 70 years, told through the period's most popular music. Entrance £3.50 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: housmans.com/events.

Bargain books

Saturday October 26, 11am: Book sale, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Get your hands on Marxist classics and rare pamphlets. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/485.

Stop Tommy Robinson, stop the far right

Saturday October 26, 11.30am: National demonstration. Assemble Regent Street St James's, London SW1. Tommy Robinson is planning a march to spread racism and Islamophobia. Mobilise to prevent the far right from taking over the streets.

Organised by Stand Up to Racism: standuptoracism.org.uk.

Resisting war, austerity and the far right

Sunday October 27, 12 noon to 5.30pm: Conference, SOAS, University of London, 10 Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Chart the left's next steps, as Israel takes the Middle East into a wider war, Starmer backs imperialism and austerity, and the far right make gains. Speakers include Lindsey German and Clare Daly.

Tickets £15 (£5). Organised by Counterfire: www.facebook.com/events/1760965174648074.

What made us human?

Tuesday October 29, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'BaMbendjele forest people's polyphony practice'. Speaker: Ingrid Lewis. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/911633960786747.

Israel, war and the Labour government

Tuesday October 29, 7pm: Public meeting, Central United Reformed Church, 60 Norfolk Street, Sheffield S1. The UK is deeply implicated in another Middle East war. We need a powerful anti-war movement to halt Israel's genocide. Speaker: Chris Nineham.

Organised by Sheffield Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/STWSheffield.

Fighting for peace

Tuesday October 29, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Friend's Meeting House, 6 The Friar's, Canterbury CT1. As Israel escalates genocide in Palestine by bombing Lebanon, the UK supplies missiles to Ukraine, risking a nuclear war. Speakers include Andrew Feinstein. Organised by Canterbury and Whitstable Stop the War: www.facebook.com/events/1057401245941233.

The Waspi can't wait - compensate

Wednesday October 30, 12 noon: Protest outside Houses of Parliament, London SW1. Demand compensation for the 3.6 million women cheated out of proper pension provision. Organised by Women Against State Pension Inequality: www.waspi.co.uk/the-waspi-cant-wait-compensate-demonstration.

Trick or treat? Eat or heat?

Wednesday October 30, 3pm: Budget day protest, Downing Street, London SW1. Reject another round of austerity - invest in public services, schools, the NHS, transport and communities instead. Organised by The People's Assembly: www.facebook.com/events/3965742613702535.

What is imperialism?

Thursday October 31, 7pm: Online session in the 'ABC of Marxism' course. In part four Mike Macnair speaks on 'Contemporary imperialism and the problem with Lenin'. Registration free.

Organised by Why Marx?: www.facebook.com/whymarxism.

Anatomy of the classic ghost story

Thursday October 31, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Speaker: Edmund Griffiths. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: oxfordccs@aol.com.

End the genocide in Gaza

Saturday November 2, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble central London, venue tbc. End Gaza genocide, hands off Lebanon, don't attack Iran. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Stop US nukes

Saturday November 2, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble outside main gate, RAF Lakenheath, Brandon IP27. Protest against the return of US nuclear weapons to this base. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: cnduk.org/lakenheath.

March for clean water

Sunday November 3, 11am: National demonstration. Assemble Albert Embankment, London SE1. Demand the government stops the poisoning of rivers. Reassert the right to clean water. Organised by River Action UK: riveractionuk.com.

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.

FASCISM

Crushing it in the egg?

'No platform for fascists' and ritual confrontation with the far right have been tested to destruction. As a tactic it clearly does not work. We need a serious alternative, argues **Mike Macnair**

On June 25 1973, standing in the sacked offices of the French Ligue Communiste, which had just been raided by the police in response to the Ligue's attack on a rally of the fascist Ordre Nouveau, LC leader Alain Krivine said:

... you cannot avoid your responsibilities. As long as it is not too late, fascism can be crushed in the egg. We are young, but we have better memories than the older people. We do not want to see a recurrence of what happened a few decades ago. When fascism raises its head, there is always the same reaction: 'They are no threat, there will always be time to act, etc.' And then one fine day it is too late.

No freedom of speech for racists and anti-Semites! And since all the traditional workers and democratic organisations have failed to assume their responsibilities, the revolutionists have had to do it. We carried out the June 21 action as a test, a warning to the nation. We have shown the way.¹

Around 50 years later, the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, the political descendant of the LC, split into two ineffective fragments.² In June 2024, the descendants of French fascism, the Rassemblement National, together with its allies, won 33.34% of the votes in the first round of the National Assembly elections, and only second-round stand-down agreements between the Nouveau Front Populaire and the Ensemble coalition of the bankster-Bonaparte, Emmanuel Macron,³ prevented the RN from obtaining a parliamentary majority.

The RN should probably be categorised like the Italian Fratelli d'Italia or the Austrian Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, as *post-fascist* rather than actually fascist: it does not directly organise a militia or propose the immediate suppression of left political organisations and trade unions. But all these parties could very easily morph into full fascist projects; and their growth illustrates with sharp clarity the failure of the project of crushing fascism in the egg.

Ten blows

On the other side of the Atlantic, the language goes back further. On December 21 1953, *The Militant*, paper of the US Socialist Workers Party (no relation to the British SWP), carried a leader warning about the December 4 1953 speech in Detroit by 1930s US 'Catholic Social' anti-Semitic demagogue Father (Charles) Coughlin: "The fascists, once they get rolling, will quickly take on all the trappings and techniques that are required by an American fascist movement. The danger is to wait until fascism gets rolling in high gear. The task is to crush fascism in the egg."⁴

In January 1954 Murry Weiss wrote in the SWP's journal *Fourth International* about witch-hunter Republican Senator Joe McCarthy (who the SWP characterised as proto-fascist): "Our conception of fighting the fascists is to crush them in the egg. Never give them a chance to become powerful antagonists. For every blow the fascists deliver against any section of the working class or minorities, we propose that



Left illusion that the fascist threat has been stopped time and again

labour strike back with 10 blows."⁵

A common attribution of 'crushing fascism in the egg' is to Leon Trotsky, but without a citation. It seems more likely that the source is Daniel Guérin's 1936 *Fascisme et grand capital* (which the SWP published in translation in 1939), quoting Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels:

If in the beginning, when the Hitler bands were still weak, the workers' parties had answered them blow for blow, there is no doubt their development would have been hampered. On this point we have the testimony of the National Socialist leaders themselves. Hitler confessed in retrospect: "Only one thing could have broken our movement - if the adversary had understood its principle and from the first day had smashed, with the most extreme brutality, the nucleus of our new movement." And Goebbels: "If the enemy had known how weak we were, it would probably have reduced us to jelly ... It would have crushed in blood the very beginning of our work."

But National Socialism was not crushed in the egg; it became a force. And to resist that force, the German socialists could conceive only one tactic: to trust the bourgeois state and ask for its aid and protection. Their *leitmotiv* was: 'State, intervene!'⁶

Hitler and Goebbels were talking rubbish here. The reason they were not crushed by armed force in the early 1920s was not softness of "the adversary" (the communists), but because the Weimar *judiciary and police* chose to protect the Nazis and hand out mild sentences to them, while killing and disarming communists. And if the Nazis had been killed, so that it was not them who headed the German state's armed anti-worker militia auxiliaries, it would have been someone else with a similar, if not identical, ideology.

By 1975, the US SWP had become aware of a danger in the formula, "Crush fascism in the egg". Thus Farrell Dobbs:

The line-up in the preliminary stage is one of the ruling class attempting to mobilise initial fascist forces. The conscious revolutionary vanguard has the task of mobilising the forces that

are going to prevent the fascists from imposing their dictatorship in the crunch. That crunch occurs later when we're at a higher, more intensive stage of struggle, when the capitalist crisis has become far deeper than today.

If you start by attempting to hastily gather together a vanguard force and crush fascism in the egg, you are playing into the hands of the fascists. You are losing ground in the mobilisation of the real class that can do away with fascism, and the fascists are gaining ground as a result. Now that's the problem the ultra-lefts fell into in San Francisco.⁷

'Crushing fascism in the egg' remained the policy of other US Trotskyists and semi-Trotskyists: notably the Spartacists and the Seattle-based Freedom Socialist Party.

In the 1960s-70s, the US SWP had engaged in translating Trotsky's writings of the later 1920s down to his death. Given the sharp debate over the issue, one might expect that, if there actually *was* a Trotsky quote to support the idea, it would have been dug up in the 1970s. It does not seem to have been. I do not exclude the possibility that it exists, but I am not going to hunt for one, since, if Trotsky *did* believe it, he would have been wrong.

Just as the LC and its successors in France failed to crush fascism (meaning the far right) in the egg, so those Trotskyists who cling to the policy in the USA are now more marginal than they were in the 1970s, while fascist-like demagoguery has come to play a major role in the Republican Party. Dobbs was right.

In Britain, 'no platform for fascists' began as 'official communist' activity before the far left had any political significance.⁸ It inherently entails popular frontism, because it denies the right of racist (etc) speech to a specific group which is politically-rhetorically identified with the World War II enemy - while ignoring the much more effective racist incitement operations of the Conservative Party and its press, and of the home office (and of the equivalents in other countries). That is, it inherently asserts a 'broad democratic alliance' against 'fascism'. It became a fetish of the Trotskyist left from the 1970s (probably originally imitating the LC).

In Britain, the episodic rise of far-right parties - the National Front, the British National Party, and so on - has not as yet led to a new *mass* far-right party. The reason is that the Conservative Party *already is* a mass far-right party with antecedents which go back to Jew-baiting in the 1730s, 1750s and 1900s, raising 'church and king' mobs against political opponents in 1711-12, 1714-15 and the 1790s, the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Curragh Mutiny in 1912-14, and so on. Far-right parties grow under Labour governments, but their clothes are invariably stolen when the Tories are in a position to challenge effectively for government office.

Alternative

'No platform for fascists' and ritual confrontation with the far right as a tactic clearly does not work. So what is the alternative?

Fascism as a movement threatens the working class with two different things. One is violence - organised violence by fascist bands, big or small. At the moment we do not have organised fascist bands threatening the workers' movement: merely incitement leading to *disorganised* violence against migrants. The other thing is that the far right threatens us with the spread of extreme nationalist, chauvinist and racist ideology.

What do we do about the threat of violence? The united front is the right answer, but by this I do not mean the united front on the basis of 'No platform for fascists'. It is the united front for *organised self-defence*.

For a while in the USA there existed a small far-right organisation of left origin called the National Caucus of Labour Committees, which set out to break up the public meetings of all the different left groups. In response, the Communist Party of the United States, the American Socialist Workers Party, the Spartacists, etc formed a united front for forcible self-defence against the NCLC - and defeated it.

In Oxford in the 1970s, when the National Front announced it was going to break up a leftist public meeting on Ireland. Ruskin college students union immediately announced that it would host this meeting and provide security for it. The National Front did not show their faces.

The point is that the united front of the workers' movement for organised self-defence against fascist violence, irrespective of the political differences between us, can work. When we had the meeting on Ireland there was sharp disagreement amongst us - there still is sharp disagreement among the left. But it is not a question of shutting up about differences; it is about concrete agreement to defend the ability of the working class to organise by forcible self-defence.

In relation to the ideological aspect, the answer is different: the answer is a fight over ideas. This means a *political* fight against nationalism, against class-collaborationism, against corporatism. It means a political fight to clarify that there is nothing worse about finance capital than there is about industrial capital; that there is no natural or unnatural alliance between the working class and industrial capital against finance capital.

Because this is a political struggle, it is actually directly counterposed to Georgi Dimitrov's conception of the united front or popular front (from the 1935 seventh congress of Comintern), which has subsequently been adopted by most Trotskyists, which calls for self-silencing on disagreements in order to win unity, followed by winning the masses by being the 'best fighters' for the common aims. You cannot actually shut up about your differences in order to get unity for a fight against the ideological aspect of fascism, when in reality the ideological positions of the fascists are shared by the Labour leadership and by the Tory Party.

What we need in order to carry on that fight is a *party* - not a groupuscule the size of the CPGB or even the size of the SWP or the *Morning Star's* CPB, but a Communist Party of the scale, and democratic methods of functioning, to be able in principle to include most of the existing left on the basis of Marxism. It is our inability to unite *as Marxists* which discredits us all - to the point at which it is the far right which today appears as the only mass alternative to capitalist corruption ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/krivine/1973/06/interview.html. On June 28, the Ligue Communiste was banned by the French state for this action, and Krivine and another comrade were jailed.
2. www.workersliberty.org/story/2022-12-12/harmful-split-french-far-left - this has useful information in spite of the scab social-imperialist politics of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.
3. Macron's presidency was originally supposed to be the means of *defeating* the RN by regrouping the political centre around a neoliberal project - hence his original (2016) party name *En Marche!* changed in 2022, as this became fly-blown, to *Renaissance*.
4. www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspaper/themilitant/1953/v17n51-dec-21-1953-mil.pdf.
5. www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/weiss/1954/01/mccarthy.htm. (It should be noted that, contrary to Weiss's analysis, McCarthy was in fact brought down by the Senate in summer-autumn 1954.)
6. D Guérin, *Fascism and big business* F and M Merr (translators) New York 1973, pp152-153 (updated edition of the US SWP's Pioneer Press edition of 1939, translated from *Fascisme et grand capital* Paris 1936).
7. www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/swp-us/education/counter/dobbs02.htm.
8. E Smith *No platform: a history of anti-fascism, universities and their limits of free speech* Abingdon 2020, chapter 2.

MIDDLE EAST

Preparations for what?

Leaked documents give us a hint about what Israel is planning to do against Iran. Meanwhile, almost unbelievably, it is readying northern Gaza for colonisation, writes **Yassamine Mather**

Leaked documents, allegedly from the US department of defence's National Incident Management Systems and Advanced Technologies, provide details of Israel's preparations for a potential military response against Iran, following its October 1 missile attack on Israel.

The documents - originally shared on a pro-Iranian Telegram channel called *Middle East Spectator* - contain findings from surveillance on Israel's military activities, including its preparations at the Hatzetim airbase.¹ These preparations involve arming aircraft with two types of air-launched ballistic missiles, including the 'Rocks' missile developed by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems. Another missile, codenamed 'Golden Horizon', is also mentioned, but remains unidentified publicly, adding to the intrigue.

The documents note Israel's large-scale military exercises, which included refuelling aircraft and a G550 command plane, possibly simulating scenarios for an attack on Iran. This includes signs of fortifying underground bunkers for warplanes and testing missile capabilities designed to strike from long distances, while evading enemy air defences. The Blue Sparrow missile, with a 2,000-kilometre range, is among the other weapons mentioned in the leak.

Although the documents appear authentic - based on their content and the refusal of sources in Washington to deny their validity - their origin and purpose for leaking remain unclear. The leak prompted an apology from the US to Israel, suggesting diplomatic sensitivity around the information.

Timing

The documents hint at Israel's readiness for a strategic military response, with the potential to impact its actions in both Lebanon and Iran. None of this gives any indication of the timing. However, it looks like after Beirut we should expect the bombing of Iranian territory with the full support of the current and future US administrations soon after the November 5 presidential elections.

They say, 'Truth is the first victim of war' and, if you only follow western media, you might get a very distorted view of the current wars in the Middle East. The Israeli paper *Haaretz* is sometimes a source of surprising and reliable information. Amos Harel, writing an analysis on October 21, tells us: "It is clear from the reports that the United States is closely and carefully monitoring the preparations of the Israel airforce and intelligence community concerning the plan to attack Iran, which the Israeli leadership has been threatening to implement since the Iranian ballistic missile attack on October 1."²

The paper's October 21 editorial reminds us in the headline that "Netanyahu's party is clearing the path to settling Gaza", and it states: "Anyone who thinks the idea of permanently occupying the Gaza Strip and building settlements there is the province of only a few messianists should take a look at who signed the invitation to a conference titled 'Preparing for settlement in Gaza'.³ It is signed by Netanyahu's Likud.

Meanwhile, the killing of Hamas chief Yahya Sinwar by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip is a significant blow



IDF Lebanon invasion: multiple-front war

to Hamas. However, his death in combat, accompanied by two other fighters, has already promoted him to the highest ranks of martyrdom and it is very likely that many young Palestinians, despairing of any intervention by the 'international community' to stop this horrendous genocide, will follow in his footsteps.

No-one but the deluded western media, prompted by imperialist governments, has any illusions that his death will bring about a ceasefire. It is Netanyahu and his government who are determined to continue this war until they have cleared northern Gaza of its inhabitants and finalised this second Nakba.

It is difficult to assess the reaction of Palestinians in Gaza to Sinwar's death - the Arab media cannot be trusted on this issue, as they all follow the agenda of their respective paymasters in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar ...

Sections of this media reported that Palestinians were deeply saddened by the loss of a leader they considered a hero, while some Arab news sites, such as *Al-Monitor* found Palestinians who expressed satisfaction that Sinwar had been killed:

Muhannad al-Rais, who was displaced from Gaza City to a camp in Deir el-Balah camp in central Gaza, is relieved that Sinwar was killed. "I can't hide my anger at Yahya Sinwar for the scourge of war he brought upon us. Since the beginning of the war, we have been paying the price. Our children are dying, our homes are being destroyed and our life has become a daily nightmare in tents. Sinwar indeed dealt painful blows to the Israeli occupation, but his extremist decisions brought us more pain and destruction."⁴

Habiba Radwan from Khan Younis expressed the opposite view, telling *Al-Monitor*: "We thought Sinwar was hiding in the tunnels and didn't care about our situation, but his death in combat created great sympathy for him among the people."⁵ Others praised Sinwar as a martyr killed in the most dangerous place: in the Tel al-Sultan neighbourhood in Rafah

apologism for Zionism.

The following is a summary of Moshé Machover's remarks to me in a private discussions - he manages to express some of the ideas I share much better than I could:

It is, in reality, Israel as the colonial entity, not only colonising Palestine, but asserting and reinforcing regional hegemony as US subcontractor - against all the peoples of the region. The liberation of the Palestinians, as well as the historical interest of the region's people, requires the overthrow of Israel's Zionist-colonial regime. All the horrors of the ongoing war, no matter which 'side' commits them, are the consequence and responsibility of the Zionist colonial regime.

The Palestinians have the unconditional right to struggle for their liberation, by all means necessary. *But* they cannot achieve liberation all by themselves. Liberation can only come about by the overthrow of the Zionist regime, which is a regional task.

However, the Zionist regime cannot be overthrown by external forces alone: it requires the consent and participation of the Israeli working class. This can only come about by a socialist transformation of the region, led by its working classes, calling on the Israeli working class to join them based on common class interests. Thus, the Zionist regime can only be overthrown as part of the overthrow of all regional regimes of oppression and exploitation.

If anyone is looking for a 'third way', this is it: the way of socialism, led by the working class.

Obviously, Hamas - at best a blind alley - is incapable of advancing this strategy.

We cannot support Hamas, but we should refuse to denounce it in the current situation. Any atrocities committed by a colonised people are a consequence of the colonial oppression.

When it comes to Iran, yes, I do want the overthrow of the Islamic Republic. However, unlike many among the Iranian exiled left, I do not want regime change from above - and the current Israeli sponsored option is for the *worst kind* of regime change.

Those who mention Iran's role in increasing conflict in the region repeat word for word what the western media tells us every day. They do not read any books or academic papers that outline the contemporary history of Iran, and they fail to realise that Iran wants 'good relations' with the west. It is the US that wants to keep Iran as an enemy - a rogue state. Yes, Iran has paid funds to Hamas, but it has never been the organisation's main source of finance. Iran and Hamas have had a tumultuous relationship and there have been and there are currently some issues in the relationship between the two.

I have previously explained Hezbollah's independent existence in Lebanon, as well as the history of the Houthis. So the idea that Iran and Israel are equally responsible for the current situation in the Middle East is a fiction created by the US and western media. The left should have nothing to do with it.

In the current situation, Iran is being threatened not just by Israel, but by the US and its allies, and is defending itself. Here there is a difference between a big gangster (Israel, backed by the US and its allies), with all its military, political and financial power, and a small gangster - a bankrupt, tinpot dictatorship.

Islands

To add insult to injury, Iran now faces a charge of illegally 'occupying' a few little rocky outcrops in the Red Sea. The United Arab Emirates, supported by countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the European Union are together calling on Iran to give up control of the Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa islands. It looks like a silly joke, but it is probably designed to open a second front against Iran.

The UAE argues that the islands were under the control of the Qasimi sheikhs during the 19th century, with these rights transferred to the UAE in 1971. They came under British control in 1921, but on November 30 1971, Iran's shah sent the Iranian navy to take control of the islands after British forces withdrew. Iranian forces are still stationed there, with Abu Musa being the only one with a civilian population and that being under 2,000.

Of course, it is easy to see why suddenly these tiny islands have gained significance. If Iran is attacked by Israel, one of the Islamic Republic's threats is to close the strait of Hormoz. Such a plan inevitably involves using these strategic outposts. The worrying news for Iran is that Russia and China apparently support the UAE position, leaving Iran more isolated than ever before.

None of this means we should forget the struggles of the millions of Iranians against corrupt clerical rulers. As we fight the many wars US-backed Israel has created in our region, we have to continue exposing the myth that religious fundamentalism and individual or national martyrdom will save the peoples of the Middle East. With all the death and destruction in Gaza, in Lebanon and probably soon in Iran, it is fatuous to claim that Hamas, Hezbollah or Iran's Islamic Republic are winning. Global demonstrations, as large and radical as they are, will not on their own bring an end to these wars either.

Only the unity of the working class beyond artificial colonial borders and the overthrow of capitalism can bring peace. Again this will not happen through wishful thinking and hope that another Arab spring will automatically be led by progressive forces, capable of avoiding the challenges and failures of 2011 ●

Notes

1. See www.haaretz.com/israel-news/security-aviation/2024-10-19/ty-article/premium/leaked-documents-allegedly-reveal-israels-preparations-for-attack-on-iran/00000192-a618-d5ff-ad92-b71f75450000.

2. www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-10-21/ty-article/premium/pentagon-leak-points-to-u-ss-discomfort-over-israels-potential-response-to-iran/00000192-ab96-dace-a9fb-ef9e22e40000.

3. www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/2024-10-21/ty-article/netanyahus-party-is-clearing-the-path-to-settling-gaza/00000192-ab77-d5ff-ad92-bf77a9680000.

4. www.al-monitor.com/originals/2024/10/relief-and-loss-palestinians-gaza-split-over-killing-yahya-sinwar.

5. *Ibid.*

6. 'Leave or starve', October 17: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1511/leave-or-starve](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1511/leave-or-starve).

POLEMIC

Different times, different slogans

Just because the Bolsheviks dropped defeatism, does not mean communists should do so today. That is obvious. But, though the CPGB calls for “turning what is a war between reactionary capitalist powers into a civil war”, **Carla Roberts** says that when engaging with others on the left, it is vital to uphold the phrase ‘revolutionary defeatism’, the ‘main enemy is at home’ slogan and the call for a workers’ militia

It would be easy to be frustrated by Jack Conrad’s lengthy reply (‘Wrong and right war politics’, October 17) to my letter in the previous week’s edition of the *Weekly Worker*. I had mainly criticised the style of the “statement” on the Ukraine war published by the Provisional Central Committee and that it was missing some of the more well-known slogans around the concept of ‘revolutionary defeatism’ (‘Establishing a principled left’, October 3). In my view, it was a long, numbered news article with superfluous points about weapons systems, far too many filler words and phrases, much ‘implied’ politics and little in terms of sharp, principled points. In other words, it does not fulfil its purpose as a statement that seeks “principled unity” with others on the left.

Because it had already been sent out to other groups and because it was me who had proposed that we issue such a statement at the last CPGB aggregate, I wanted to register my disappointment with the execution of this proposal by the PCC and explain what I would have changed, had I been given the chance. I considered my proposals very much as a set of ‘friendly’ amendments that would have helped to tighten and sharpen up the text, so that it would fulfil its stated purpose.

Comrade Conrad states in his reply that there was no time to send it to members: it had to be sent out quickly, because the US elections might change things dramatically. Surely that is another reason why a statement focusing on political principles rather than news items would have been preferable: it would not be quite as ‘out of date’ in a couple of weeks time.

I am not going to get into what I consider a number of irrelevant side issues in comrade Conrad’s reply. Suffice to say, he criticises things I did not say, including that I claimed “property rights” over the statement and that my proposal to delete certain points meant that I must “disagree with them” or “find them boring”. No, they just do not belong in this type of statement. I am also less impressed by this straw man: “Perhaps, though, if we had included the demand for a people’s militia in the statement, comrade Roberts would have objected that this constitutes a barrier to left unity and cosy cooperation. Unfair? Well, maybe.”

It is not a style of debate that I find particularly useful or convincing. I do not believe it helps to create the kind of culture of open debate and discussion that I know comrade Conrad espouses. One which encourage comrades to think for themselves, so that they feel confident enough to ask questions and voice any criticisms they might have.

Principles, tactics

Having said all that, the exchange does have some merits. It points to some issues where we probably do have real disagreements. I say ‘probably’ because, just like the statement, the article lacks clarity.

I do not believe these are disagreements over political principles, but are of a tactical nature - not that this makes them unimportant: It clearly matters *how* we argue for our politics and engage with others in order to achieve “principled left unity”.



Stopped calling himself a ‘defeatist’ in February 1917: has the CPGB’s PCC really proposed to do that with its October 3 2024 statement?

We agree that in the current wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, communists adopt a position of ‘revolutionary defeatism’ - ie, communists strive to turn the reactionary war into a civil war with the aim of overthrowing the international capitalist state system. But there is disagreement on *how* should we do so: should we merely *imply* the concept in our statements or should we openly use the relevant slogans, such as ‘The main enemy is at home’ and ‘Down with the war’? Related to that is the question of how communists make propaganda and agitate against the war and if they should openly argue for the establishment of workers’ defence units (popular militias) to replace the standing army.

I think at the heart of our disagreement is the question of ‘audience’ - who are we actually talking to? The statement is, quite rightly, addressed to “others on the left, individuals and organisations, in Britain and internationally ... with a view to cementing principled unity and furthering the struggle against war and capitalism”. So in reality it is small groups and self-confessed communists, most of whom will be well-versed in discussing political questions and principles. It seems obvious that we should propose a clear and sharp political statement to initiate an overdue discussion with them about where we agree - and where we disagree - so that the project of communist regroupment can be progressed. But neither the original PCC statement nor Conrad’s article do that, in my opinion.

In his reply, Conrad discusses at great length how in 1917, the Bolsheviks dropped slogans around the concept of ‘revolutionary defeatism’ and replaced calls like ‘Down with the war!’ with “popular demands, such as ‘Peace without annexations’ and ‘Publish the secret treaties’.”

If Conrad raises this in order to stress that we should always remain flexible about our tactics and treat no slogan as ‘set in stone’ and valid

at all times, then I certainly agree. If, however, Conrad means that, just like the Bolsheviks in 1917, we too should drop the slogans, then I must disagree. The latter is certainly implied in his article, though he does not state it clearly.

Skims over

Conrad only skims over *why* Lenin and the Bolsheviks dropped those slogans. His fellow PCC member Mike Macnair, however, developed the point in his marvellous book *Revolutionary strategy*. He explains that the concrete circumstances of Russia in 1917 were the reason for the change in tactics. Not because the revolutionary defeatist slogans were necessarily wrong - but because the situation had changed. Macnair, like Conrad, quotes Hal Draper’s seminal book *The myth of Lenin’s ‘revolutionary defeatism’* - but disagrees with Draper’s assessment that “the defeat slogan was simply wrong and always implies that you must positively wish for the victory of the other side”.¹

Macnair explains:

What is missing in Draper’s account is that Bolshevik anti-war agitation and organisation among the soldiers did not disappear after April. But the disappearance of the defeat *slogan*, and the mass defencism, were real. Mass defencism reflected the fact that, as the war had evolved, it had become mainly a war fought on Russian soil, which Russia was losing. The masses could see perfectly well that the liberty they had won in February would not survive German occupation.²

In other words, in Russia in 1917, when the masses heard ‘The main enemy is at home’ or even ‘Down with the war’, they could not help but think that the Bolsheviks campaigned for the (very realistic) victory of the German army - an army that was already inflicting death and destruction on a mass scale on them. The danger of occupation by Germany

was a real possibility. And with it not just the threat that the achievements of the February revolution would be lost, but that the continuing revolutionary situation would be destroyed.

Clearly, the Bolsheviks were right to adjust their tactics and drop some *slogans*, while continuing to fight for the *concept* of revolutionary defeatism in the ranks of the army (ie, turning the imperialist war into a civil war), with the aim of splitting the army and winning large sections over in the fight for a second, socialist revolution.

But it should be obvious that we are in an entirely different situation today - and we are talking to an entirely different audience: we are addressing small groups on the British left, not the mass of the working class in a revolutionary situation, where even ‘moderate’ slogans were able to mobilise the fired up masses.

Obviously, the British army is not fighting in Ukraine. No British soldier has died (yet). Vladimir Putin is not about to occupy Londongrad and take away what is left of our civil and trade union rights. There is no mass defencist sentiment in Britain’s population (unlike in Russia in 1917).

The war in Ukraine is not yet quite as unpopular as the British government’s support for Israel’s campaign of genocide against the Palestinians. But, in Germany at least, the opposition to the war in Ukraine in the population has been growing steadily and finds reflection in the electoral successes of, on the right, the Alternative für Deutschland and, on the left, the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance. This surely is likely to be the trajectory in Britain, too - the longer it goes on, the more unpopular the Ukraine war will become. Rachel Reeves’ forthcoming austerity budget is likely to speed up this development. It is amazing that so far we have heard very little about the fact that we are asked to tighten our belts, because the government has two wars to fight (and finance). This can change quite quickly.

In this situation, the slogans, ‘Down with the war’, ‘The main enemy is at home’ and ‘Disband Nato’, seem to me *exactly* the right ones to use, especially *vis-à-vis* the war in the Middle East, but also in Ukraine. They are not the *only* ones we should use, but they are certainly entirely applicable today.

Of course, ‘revolutionary defeatism’ is *not always* the correct line to take, even in a non-revolutionary situation like today. Say the US invades Cuba - I presume we would in all likelihood take a Cuba-defencist view, despite our knowledge that the system there has absolutely nothing to do with socialism or the self-liberation of the working class (while, of course, continuing to work towards the overthrow of the capitalist state in the US and Britain).

But the opposite is certainly not the case either - that we *have* to drop slogans around revolutionary defeatism, just because Lenin and the Bolsheviks did so in 1917, under entirely different political circumstances.

Popular militia

Comrade Conrad also writes that “no-one on the PCC would have raised the slightest objection” to adding the demand for a “popular militia” - but then goes on to say:

... when it comes to assessing a possible Russia-Nato war and phasing into World War III, the demand for a popular militia is tangential. If the world’s standing armies have been dissolved and replaced by ‘popular militia[s] under democratic control’, then big-power (even small-power) conflicts become much, much more difficult, though not impossible. But, to state the obvious, that is not the case.

In other words, he *does* raise an objection to adding the demand - it is not relevant for today, because there are no militias yet. What an odd argument to make. Clearly, the time to argue for popular militias is precisely when they are not in existence - ie, now. Other members of the PCC have stated that the original statement did not include the demand, because “others on the left would have objected”. So which one is it? Is it (too) controversial on the left, is it tangential or is now not the right time? I think all three arguments are wrong.

It goes without saying that we always have to consider which slogans we put forward to which audience and in which political situation. For example, shouting ‘We need a popular militia!’ at people outside Tesco or putting forward such a motion at a Labour Party branch meeting *today* would clearly be of limited use. People uneducated in our working class history will hear ‘blood’, ‘violence’, ‘nutcase’ or a combination thereof. (As an aside, had there been even the beginning of a rebellion in the British army over the Iraq war, with troops refusing to go and fight - not impossible to imagine - this could have been an entirely different matter.)

Obviously, none of us today have any influence over members of the army. We are unable to convince any battalions to split from the army and join the mass revolutionary movement in fighting to overthrow the state. The workers’ movement remains entirely defeated, politically and ideologically. But we are talking, concretely, to the revolutionary left. We are still in a period of preparation, of getting our politics right, for the time when the working class does start to move again. We are talking about the kind of things we *know need to happen* in order to get from where we are to where we want to be.

That is exactly why in our *Draft programme* we fight for democratic and trade union rights in the existing army - because “every opportunity must be used to take even tentative steps towards this goal [of a popular militia]. As circumstances allow, the working class must equip itself with all weaponry necessary to bring about revolution.”³ This is based on the understanding that, by

Sign up to CPGB news



bit.ly/CPGBbulletin

winning reforms in this direction in the here and now, we will in practice undermine the ability of the armed forces to be used in defence of the capitalist class. The demand for a popular militia is therefore an important weapon in our arsenal - today. An increasingly unpopular war and the threat of World War III seem a very good "opportunity" to discuss the issue.

After all, the international workers' movement, despite its organisation in the Second International, failed abysmally when confronted with World War I. What do communists need to do differently to avoid the workers' parties falling in line again behind their respective nation-states, as they did in 1914? As Macnair warns, "The advocates of 'strategy of patience' could have prepared the workers' movement and the society as a whole for the fact that this question would in future be posed. They chose not to."

Let us not make the same mistake again. We should be bold and forceful about what strategy and tactics the workers' movement needs to adopt if it actually wants to have a chance of 'stopping the war'. 'Implying' this or that in long texts will simply not do. Yes, we should be skilled in how we put forward what might be difficult slogans and demands. But we should not avoid them, because others on the left "might object". For a start, they might very well not object. And, even if they do, let us have the argument with them - ideally in open, public forums where the working class can learn from our disagreements.

How to campaign

The second point is related to the issue of slogans - how do we campaign against the war? Conrad goes to great length to criticise the following half-sentence in my proposed amendments: "Towards this goal [of the fight for a Communist Party

and a workers' movement capable of overthrowing the capitalist state], we support boycotts and strikes against the war."

He writes:

I see myself standing in the tradition of the orthodox Marxism of the Second International, most consistently and effectively upheld throughout World War I by the RSDLP (Bolsheviks). And, of course, as everyone knows, they resolutely opposed the suggestion of organising a 'general strike against the war'. Pacifist nonsense, as far as a blunt-talking Lenin was concerned.

As should be clear from the context, I *did not* argue for a "general strike against the war". Clearly, strikes, boycotts and any other actions against the war effort are a dead end - if that is all you do. A general strike against the war cannot succeed if our movement is not extremely well organised in a party, because it almost immediately poses the question of power, of who runs the country: If we are all on strike, where will we get our food from? Our electricity? Who will run the buses? Etc.

But, clearly, the mass mobilisation of the working class can and should be part of our arsenal when fighting against war and imperialism. A mass Communist Party would surely organise and run demonstrations, strikes, boycotts of weapons shipments and other actions to disrupt the war effort. Without any illusion that these tactics by themselves will succeed - they must always be linked with a strategy for taking power.

Of course, trade unionists and workers often *do* take direct action against war: for example, the Greek dock workers of the Attica metal and shipbuilding union in Piraeus, who just blocked the loading of a container full of bullets and weapons destined for Israel.⁴ I am

sure that comrade Conrad agrees that it is not our job to criticise or condemn them, but celebrate their action and continue to patiently explain what more is needed to actually stop imperialism's wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

A number of members and supporters of the CPGB have worked together to prepare an alternative (or perhaps additional) statement on the Ukraine war and the threat of World War III, which we hope can form part of the ongoing discussion. We believe it is written and presented in a manner that is more appropriate to the task at hand - and, yes, contains some of the 'disputed' slogans. Of

course, the US elections might dramatically change things. But we believe our statement could be easily amended to take that into account - unlike the PCC text. We hope the organisation will take more such initiatives in the near future in order to help bring about the formation of a real, mass Communist Party ●

Notes

1. M Macnair *Revolutionary strategy* London 2009, p72.
2. *Ibid* p74.
3. communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme/3-immediate-demands.
4. See www.902.gr/eidisi/ergazomenoi-symmahia/377035/oi-limenergates-empodizoyn-na-fortosei-container-me-sfaires-gia.

Danger of World War III: the communist response

Motivation: We welcome the PCC's initiative, following a discussion at an aggregate, to issue a "statement with a view to cementing principled unity and furthering the struggle against war and capitalism". We believe that such a statement should focus on political principles and are therefore proposing this alternative document, which incorporates points from the original text, as well as the joint statement agreed with the Dutch Communist Platform in February 2023. Of course, we welcome amendments.

Supported by: Ian Spencer, Bob Paul, Andy Hannah, Paul Cooper, Carla Roberts, Anne McShane.

1. There is a real danger of yet further escalation in Ukraine and the possibility of war between Russia and Nato. With the intensification and spread of Israel's war on Gaza and Lebanon, backed by US-led imperialism and fully supported by the British and other capitalist governments, there is the distinct risk of (a nuclear) World War III. It remains the duty of genuine socialists and communists to urgently cement principled unity.
2. The Ukraine war has antecedents long predating the Russian invasion of February 24 2022. Directed by the CIA, the Maidan coup of 2014 deposed the government of the 'neutral' Viktor Yanukovich. Ukraine was shunted into the western camp with the stated ambition of joining the European Union.
3. It was a clear provocation - and Russia responded. Crimea was annexed, Russian-Ukrainian separatist forces were encouraged and aided and the Putin/FSB regime gave the go-ahead for a full-scale invasion. An invasion that all genuine communists must oppose.
4. Like Iran, India and China, Russia is certainly not anti-imperialist. These countries want to join the top ranks of the imperialist club, not overthrow imperialism. Communists do not foster the illusion that a 'multipolar' world would make imperialism 'more peaceful' - an illusion akin to Karl Kautsky's prediction of 'ultra-imperialism' (a few months before the outbreak of World War I).
5. The US administration is pursuing regime change in Moscow and the break-up of the Russian Federation. The real target, however, is China. It is a proxy war, fought in the strategic interests of a declining US hegemon - which does not face any serious challenge from Russia. Nato's steady eastward expansion is fundamentally directed against China, not Russia. This gives the Ukraine war an inter-imperialist dynamic.
6. Genuine communists support neither side. Both sides in this war are reactionary, both are anti-

working class. While recognising that a victory for Putin would weaken US/Nato imperialism and their attempts to encircle China, this is not grounds for us to call for such a victory. Communists fight for the withdrawal of the UK from Nato and its disbandment.

7. There is confusion among many on the left and we need to speak out clearly against three dangerous trends:

- Those who support the Kremlin, or who see something anti-imperialist in its war with Ukraine - the anti-imperialism of fools.
 - Those on the social-pacifist left who foster the illusion that there can be a peaceful capitalism, as long as governments act reasonably and abide by internationally agreed rules and standards. War and capitalism are inseparable. Peace is only a moment between war, and war is merely the continuation of the same policy previously carried out peacefully through diplomacy, tariffs and sanctions.
 - Those on the social-imperialist 'left' who claim that its support for Ukraine is no different from its support for Palestinian self-determination. Both Ukraine and Israel act as US proxies.
8. In the current situation, communists in the belligerent imperialist and proto-imperialist countries need to take a position of revolutionary defeatism: the main enemy is at home. That does not mean communists simply want their 'own side' to lose or that 'the other side' should win. Communists fight for a Communist Party and a workers' movement capable of overthrowing the capitalist state, necessarily in solidarity and cooperation with the workers' movements and communist parties in other countries.
 9. Our perspective is that the reactionary war should be turned into a civil war led by the working class. While we welcome strikes, boycotts and other actions against the war, we always need to explain that by themselves they cannot succeed. Such actions need to be linked with a strategy of overthrowing the international capitalist state system and for the working class to become the hegemon of society.
 10. We support the democratic republican principle of the replacement of the standing army by democratic and accountable workers' defence units (or a popular militia/citizen army), as part of our strategy of splitting the army and transforming the working class into the ruling class. Towards this goal, communists fight for freedom of political speech within the army, the right of soldiers to organise in trade unions and political parties and other democratic demands ●

What we fight for

- Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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

Subscriptions: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/subscribe

Online Communist Forum



Sunday October 27 5pm
Bookies' favourite: if it happens, what will a second Trump presidency mean for America and the world? - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

Sunday November 3 5pm
Mike Macnair and Roxy Hall discuss Marxism and trans liberation

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

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

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

weekly worker

**A demagogue
with followers,
not comrades**

Nine lives of Manifesto man

From drunken apprentice to EDL street fighting, from apology tour to Cypriot exile. Paul Demarty charts the career of Tommy Robinson and warns that the main danger comes not from this celebrity far-right influencer, but the increasingly reactionary Lab-Con elite

About 15 years ago, many of us on the left started to hear a lot about a rising star of the British far right. His name was Tommy Robinson - well, not really, as the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* discovered in 2010. And, seemingly out of nowhere, he had a small army of football casuals at his disposal. His fortunes have waxed and waned, but he has never since been far from the scene for long.

His current notoriety has to do with his role in kicking off anti-migrant protests, which rapidly became violent urban disorder over the summer. He repeated and amplified rumours that the perpetrator of the Southport stabbings was a Muslim asylum-seeker - rumours that rapidly turned out to be wholly false, but by that point his loyal fans had their blood up. This weekend, Stand Up to Racism, the Socialist Workers Party's anti-racist front, has called a national demonstration to "stop Tommy Robinson, stop the far right". So it seems a good idea to look over his career.

New names

Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, as it says on the passport that got him to his current hidey-hole in Cyprus, hailed from modest beginnings in Luton. He managed to get himself an aerospace engineering apprenticeship as a young man, which might have given us a heart-warming 'working class boy made good' storyline. Alas, he got into a drunken fistfight with an off-duty copper, which landed him in jail, and lost him his job.

Around that time he started showing up in far-right circles. That naturally led him to the British National Party, which was approaching the zenith of its influence at that time. In origin a straightforward neo-fascist outfit, the BNP had come under the sway of a faction of reformers who wanted to remodel it along the lines of what was then the Front National in France, Alleanza Nazionale in Italy, and others. Under leader Nick Griffin - a man with a history in some truly bizarre corners of the neo-fascist scene, who scrubbed himself up to take the BNP mainstream - it did so with considerable success, garnering dozens of councillors and, later, a member of the London Assembly and two seats in the European parliament (one for Griffin himself).

Robinson did not last long in the BNP, however, and made his big-time debut in 2009, when he founded, along with his cousin, Kevin Carroll, the English Defence League - an anti-Muslim street organisation heavily based on the football casual milieu he knew well (the name, 'Tommy Robinson', originally belonged to a particularly fearsome member of the Luton Town 'firm'). It spread from Robinson's south-eastern hunting grounds rapidly to the north-west and north-east of England especially, which were not coincidentally areas where



Tommy Robinson: looking for a Tcommunist street force

the BNP found a lot of success.

The EDL played some role in the downfall of the BNP. Its more confrontational, bovver-boots-on-the-street style proved attractive to many of its members, who were growing impatient with the BNP's fruitless attempts to become more respectable. Griffin banned his members from joining, declaring it a Zionist psy-op, but that did not do him much good - especially after his disastrous *Question time* appearance, as well as subsequent financial disasters and splits.

The EDL had similar problems, however. Despite its habit of physical confrontation, there was one respect in which it wanted to present a sanitised image - precisely that it was *English*. The trouble with the BNP was that every time you turned over a rock you found a Hitlerite in there, and Hitlerism is diametrically opposed to the national myth - fighting them on the beaches, our finest hour, the spirit of the blitz, and all of that. Ructions produced a loose fascistic offshoot, called Infidel.

By 2013, Robinson had had enough, and decamped from the EDL, loudly denouncing its takeover by "extremists". He embarked on a strange apology tour in the company of the Quilliam foundation - a now defunct think tank run by ex-members of the Islamist group, Hizb ut-Tahrir, to reconcile them to the great British pleasures of warm beer

and suburban complacency. The chance to deradicalise Robinson, of all people, at a moment when frankly we had all more or less forgotten Quilliam existed, could not be passed up. Robinson later claimed that Quilliam had paid him a £2,000 monthly stipend for the right to claim credit for his conversion experience, though Quilliam denied it.

Old tricks

Whatever the case may be, it was not long before he was back up to his old tricks, attempting to form a British chapter of the German anti-Muslim outfit, Pegida, in 2015, hurling himself into the controversy over grooming gangs, and along the way finding himself repeatedly on the wrong side of the law - less for violent offences than contempt of court and harassment of the people he covered in his new self-image as a "campaigning journalist". He was briefly an advisor to Gerard Batten, who took over leadership of Ukip after Nigel Farage decamped and took it into more conventional far-right, sectarian territory. Wherever there is a Muslim to be blamed for something, however implausibly, there is Tommy.

His Cypriot exile is in relation to breach of a court order *not* to screen a film he had made, which had already led him to charges of contempt of court. The film concerns a bizarre beef he has with a teenage Syrian refugee, whom he baselessly accused of sexually assaulting two

girls. The increasingly libidinal turn of his anti-Islam ravings has led him, inevitably, to the "great replacement" conspiracy theory, the subject of his latest book, *Manifesto*, with its wide-eyed obsession with birth rates and underlying fear of an impotent west being overwhelmed by ruthless, yet sensual orientals - a tale as old as time.

Griffin and Robinson are alike in many ways - the last two major leaders to be produced by the disreputable, violent end of the British far right. They are both distinctly peripatetic - Griffin had variously been a Strasserite, a Hitlerite, a Third-Positionist, an esotericist, and a ferocious anti-Semite before he stabbed John Tyndall in the back to lead the 'reformists' in the BNP to their greatest successes and farcical collapse. The baton passed by default to Robinson, whose adventures we have already described.

Yet these two men's biographies also encompass a change in the overall picture of the far right. From the 1950s antics of the League of Empire Loyalists, to the 1970s heyday of the National Front, where a teenage Griffin cut his teeth, to the substantial EDL demonstrations of 2009-12, there was a clear political cycle taking place, following the political cycle in mainstream politics. During Labour governments, neo-fascist groups (and far-right elements of the Tories) would gather strength. This strength would be, precisely, expressed in the groups - rising membership, stronger election returns, and the subjection of ordinary non-white citizens to low-level terrorism. They would make inroads into conventional subcultures - most famously skinheads, but also punks and metalheads later on. When Tory governments replaced Labour, they often did so by adopting parts of the far-right message, which ate away at the fascist groups' support; meanwhile, the reality of Tory rule tended to push alienated working class men back in the direction of Labour.

The EDL, in retrospect, was the last of the street-level fascist sects to achieve any kind of breakthrough. Others have appeared, like Britain First and National Action, but have not had much impact. Robinson's subsequent career consists of failed attempts to start some kind of new outfit, but on the contrary *successful* attempts to set himself up as a niche celebrity figure. At this point, he arguably has more in common with Katie Hopkins than John Tyndall. His last political venture, Hearts of Oak, was co-sponsored by Carl Benjamin, aka Sargon of Akkad (probably not a Luton football casual), another of these internet influencers.

Such people have followers rather than comrades. Their reach can be troublingly broad, but it is oddly shallow. That is not to say they cannot do any damage - it would be reductive

to blame Robinson wholesale for the carnage of the summer, when the ground had for so long been prepared by the Westminster parties and the mainstream rightwing media, but he and his ilk certainly lit the match, and if he ever returns to Britain, one expects he will find yet more criminal charges waiting for him. But the point remains that any one of these figures, unless they end up as a serious contender for power in the manner of Donald Trump, is not themself a unique and dangerous threat.

Same ground

The trouble is precisely that the ground was so well prepared for the fake rumour mill of the summer. The old situation of insurrectionary far-right groups at least on first appearance gave some kind of sense to anti-fascist campaigns that targeted those groups - violently or peacefully, as the case may be. They deliberately set themselves apart from official politics, in an often pseudo-revolutionary fashion.

The contemporary ecosystem of far-right celebrities may employ such rhetoric of overturning the old elite, but the border with official politics is markedly more porous. We have only just had a Tory government that happily contained anti-Muslim, ultra-reactionary rabble-rousers quite as *outré* as Robinson. Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary reactionaries happily mingle in the same media outlets, and at the same events like the NatCon conferences. So long as the parliamentary Conservative Party only contained a handful of open racists organised in cranky caucuses like the Monday Club, it was possible to sustain the illusion (though it *was* always an illusion) that these politics are characteristic specifically of fascism. When Robert Jenrick - who may well be leader of the opposition by the end of the month - responds to the riots by claiming that they were over-policed, it is clear that the *cordon sanitaire* no longer holds, if it ever did.

It is clear, from recent events, that anti-racists have a lot of work before them. We need to start talking seriously about forcible self-defence in the case of further disturbances, which in much of the country the police were either unwilling or unable to seriously control. (It is unclear how prepared we are for such work, but you go to war with the army you have.) The political battle, however, is only incidentally to be fought against Tommy Robinson and friends: the real threat is the Tories (and, indeed, as they try to show how tough they are, Labour ...) and the far-right media. It is they who really have the power to spread racist poison.

To draw the poison, we need a principled political alternative to an increasingly reactionary bourgeois elite ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk



We march against them, not with them

We need clear red lines

Fighting fascism and racism by marching with Zionists is an unmistakable example of rank opportunist betrayal. Zionism is racism. To effectively combat today's far right we must, argues **Jack Conrad**, begin with clear definitions, a firm grasp of history and reject the 'broad as possible' approach of popular frontism

Liberal and left opinion has been part horrified, part dumbfounded by the repeated electoral successes of the far right: Giorgia Meloni and Fratelli d'Italia, Alternative für Deutschland, Marine Le Pen and Rassemblement National, Geert Wilders and his PVV, Benjamin Netanyahu's national camp coalition.

In Hungary Viktor Orbán and Fidesz have been ensconced in government ever since winning a supermajority in 2010. Illiberally anti-migrant, anti-communist and anti-gay, Fidesz carries about it more than a whiff of anti-Semitism. Inevitably, there are those still further to the right. Jobbik - represented in the National Assembly - displays a distinct fondness for Miklós Horthy, the pro-Nazi collaborator during World War II. Jobbik also had close relations with the unarmed 'citizen force', Magyar Gárda Mozzgalom.

Nor should we forget India, Russia, Japan, Turkey ... or what is going on here in Britain. The June 2016 Brexit referendum came as a bombshell for the liberal establishment and continues to send out shock waves. Though only

securing five MPs in the July 4 2024 general election, Nigel Farage's Reform accounted for 14.3% of the poll (ahead of the Liberal Democrats). Undoubtedly the immediate driver is anti-migrant suspicions, worries and visceral hatreds. During the summer, pogromist riots erupted in 27 towns and cities across the UK. And, on October 26, Tommy Robinson is, of course, planning to make himself undisputed leader of this formless mob, with a view, one might guess, of fashioning a tightly disciplined, Tommunist, street-fighting force. Meanwhile, whoever wins the Conservative leadership contest on November 2 - Robert Jenrick or Kemi Badenoch - it is clear that, combined together, Brexit, Reform and Robinson have shunted the world's oldest and most successful far-right political party still further to the right.

Above all, however, there was, is and remains Donald J Trump. Although soundly beaten in both the electoral college and the popular vote on November 3 2020, he secured 74 million votes, the highest ever recorded by any incumbent. More to the point, Trump is running neck and neck with Kamala Harris for

November 5 - he is, though, the 4/7 bookies favourite.¹ So it is more than conceivable that Trump will become the 47th president.

Trump has long been accused of being a fascist.² That was most certainly the case in the aftermath of his failed January 6 2021 self-coup. True, there are those who merely reckoned that Trump has "fascist traits".³ However, *The Guardian's* Nick Cohen argued that "If Trump looks like a fascist and acts like a fascist, then maybe he is one."⁴ In that same spirit, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez warns any "senior Democrat" who resigns themselves to a Trump victory and "fascism" to make way for a "true leadership".⁵ Now we have Bob Woodward's latest book, *War*, where he quotes Mark Milley. The former chair of the joint chiefs of staff emphatically declares: Trump is "fascist to the core".⁶

According to the Socialist Workers Party - and also, I would guess, simply because of their antecedents, its Counterfire and RS21 breakaways too - this is the 1930s in "slow motion".⁷ "Fascism is resurgent across Europe. We face a radicalisation of the traditional right,

far-right parties and fascist forces", declares its CC. True, it now admits, the picture today "doesn't exactly mirror the fascist movements of the 1930s". Nonetheless, the answer lies in "attempting to build a united front", which does not just "appeal to much bigger reformist organisations", but "MPs, trade unions, faith groups, sections of the Labour Party, the SNP, Greens, independent politicians and others".⁸ The "others", believe it or not, includes Zionist bigots, provocateurs and camp followers. The presence of these racists on anti-racist demonstrations has, reportedly, created an almighty stink within the SWP, considerable numbers have resigned, not least from Socialist Worker Student Societies.⁹ Pro-Palestine activists are rightly outraged too.

In other words, we are talking about the modus operandi of the SWP's Stand Up to Racism popular front and its standard line: "Racism and Islamophobia in parliament is leading to racism and Islamophobia on the streets ... All those who oppose this must join in a united mass movement powerful enough to drive back the fascists."¹⁰

SUPPLEMENT

For the sake of clarity, historically - that is, from the time of the third and fourth congresses of the Communist International - the *united front* was, in general, designed as a tactic to be employed by *real* communist parties - not small confessional sects - to expose the reformist misleaders before the great mass of the working class. By offering a limited platform, an agreement of some kind, to defend or advance immediate working class interests, the communist parties would seek to become the majority. Naturally then, the communists would *not* refrain from criticising their united front allies: no, on the contrary, they would retain their "freedom in presenting their point of view". We shall come to popular fronts anon.

My intention, in this article, is to try to bring some clarity, when it comes to fascism. Firstly, by insisting upon a definite, logically consistent, historically informed definition. Secondly, by showing why repeatedly crying wolf over the 'fascist' danger and courting the "widest possible" forces to stage the "biggest possible" protests is ultimately self-defeating.¹¹ Thirdly, what might be called the 19th century precursors are discussed. Fourthly, fascism is then put in its proper historical and socio-economic context. Fifthly, we examine fascism through the prism of how it is theorised and explained away by the bourgeois establishment. Sixthly, on the basis of all this, our principles and positions are presented.

Past and present

The term 'fascism' has certainly been subject to all manner of different definitions since it was originally coined (Benito Mussolini adopted the *fasces* - a bundle of sticks with an axe at their centre, the symbol of state power in ancient Rome - as the emblem of his movement). For the record, Mussolini formed the Italian Fascisti of Combat in March 1919, when 54 people - demobilised soldiers, pro-war former syndicalists and extreme social chauvinists - signed up to his programme. Fascism, in the immortal words of *Il Duce*, stood opposed to liberalism, the "exhausted democracies" and the "violently utopian spirit of Bolshevism".¹²

Nowadays, of course - and not only on the left - the word 'fascism' is too often little more than a political swearword. London's Met police are regularly dubbed 'fascist' by overexcited protestors; the guerrillaist left in Turkey describes *all* the country's governments as fascist since the foundation of the modern state by Kemal Atatürk in 1923; fascism is also casually equated with bigoted prejudices, restrictions on civil liberties and any and every manifestation of national chauvinism. So, for many, fascism is not a future danger. It is a past which permeates the present.

The F-word certainly provides emotional catharsis for the user and provokes a rewardingly spluttering response from the target. Yet that hardly helps reveal the true nature of fascism - not least how it emerged historically and functions as an extraordinarily dangerous counterrevolutionary weapon in capitalist society. This is not a matter of pedantry or semantics. Shearing fascism of history, reducing fascism to a cuss word denoting something hateful, regressive or threatening, an object of opprobrium - means one cannot distinguish between the state oppression imposed by fascism during the 1920s, 30s and 40s, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, *normal capitalism*: eg, the 1794 suspension of *habeas corpus*, the banning of the London Corresponding Society and the regular use of yeomanry to suppress 'Jacobinism' by William Pitt's Tory reaction.

Then there is America's late 19th century Jim Crow legislation; Woodrow Wilson's 1918 anti-sedition laws; 1950s McCarthyite witch-hunting; the 1956 Federal Constitutional Court ban on the Communist Party of Germany; the barrage of anti-trade union laws introduced by Margaret Thatcher's government and her defeat of the miners' 1984-85 Great Strike. All, despite their wide variations, normal capitalism.

Needless to say, giving fascism a clear, definite meaning by rooting it in history has nothing to do with any softness towards the Pittite Tories, sympathy for senator Joe McCarthy, admiration of the Turkish state or fond feelings for Thatcherism, etc. On the contrary, labelling fascist what is not fascist muddles, weakens, disorients the workers' movement.

In the late 1920s and early 30s, 'official communism' dogmatically insisted upon

classifying everything and everyone from the Labour left to Ramsay MacDonald's national government, and from German social democracy to Franklin D Roosevelt, under an ever expanding rubric of fascism ... or tendencies towards fascism. Eg, Roosevelt's New Deal was described by R Palme Dutt - Britain's foremost 'official communist' political thinker - as a "transition to fascist forms, especially in the economic and industrial field".¹³ Fascism supposedly grew organically out of bourgeois democracy.

According to Dmitry Manuilsky - a trusted member of Comintern's presidium - in his report to its executive committee, only a liberal "can accept that there is a contradiction between bourgeois democracy and fascism".¹⁴ Stalin summed up the approach by coupling together social democracy and fascism as "twin brothers".¹⁵

This 'third period' theory led the Communist Party of Germany to reject making any serious united front proposals to the "social-fascist" Social Democratic Party. Not that the SPD tops were ever going to willingly accept any offer of uniting in elections, in parliament and in self-defence units on the streets - leaders such as Rudolf Hilferding, Otto Wels and Arthur Crispian wanted an "antagonistic line" towards the communists. They feared that they, that is the communists, were just about to "obliterate" them electorally.¹⁶ Their determination was to defend the Weimar republic and fight the Nazis *and* the communists alike within the bounds of the constitution and established legality. The rank and file *might* have proved to be a different matter. In other words, a united front from below could have forced a change of course above. We will never know. But we do know what actually happened.

Despite the Nazi vote falling by 4%, Adolf Hitler - supposedly not especially dangerous - got himself lifted into power with the reluctant help of president Paul von Hindenburg, the recommendation of conservative chancellor Franz von Papen, a coalition with the German National People's Party and the active backing of a big-industry, big-finance and big-agriculture coalition. The Nazis were generously financed.¹⁷ After January 1933 the Communist Party and the SPD were both subject to eviscerating Nazi terror: firebombing, beatings, assassinations, arrests and killings 'while attempting to escape'. A legal ban on both quickly followed. In March 1933 Hitler was able to pass an enabling bill through the Reichstag - purged of social democratic and communist deputies - which in effect gave him dictatorial powers.

In 1934-35 Stalin's Communist International 'corrected' its analysis of fascism - first at the 13th plenum, and then at the 7th Congress. Georgi Dimitrov delivered a new formulation, which was universally adopted by all 'official communist' parties. Dimitrov redefined fascism as the "open, terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of finance capital".¹⁸ His cure was, though, not much better than the original 'social fascist' disease. Fascism was still viewed as an outgrowth of capitalism. But overcoming fascism was now completely divorced from the revolutionary class struggle against capitalism. It had to be fought as a unique thing in itself - an existential threat which had to be overcome by putting everything else, socialism included, aside.

Besides blessing cooperation with social democrats, the door was held wide open for *popular fronts* in every country - Britain, India, US, France, Spain, Chile, etc - which saw communists attempting to align themselves with all and sundry 'others', including the less terroristic, less chauvinistic and less aggressive representatives of the bourgeoisie.

The clever idea was to rely on simple arithmetic. Together the communists, social democrats, radicals and liberals add up to a greater sum total than the fascists. The popular front, therefore, promised bigger street demonstrations, a higher vote in parliamentary elections and a lot more MPs. After that there would come anti-fascist coalition governments committed to achieving reforms *within* the existing social system ... sold to the rank and file as a 'step in the direction of socialism'. Predictably, those who dared criticise this line of march were not only denounced as ultra-leftist sectarians, but fifth-column agents of fascism.

To keep their real and imagined allies onside, the 'official communists' had to stress unity, had to suspend, forget or disown previous

criticisms and divisive political positions. Broadness became the ruling mantra. However, inevitably, abandoning anything resembling working class political independence led not to stunning success, but defeat - first in Spain and France in the 1930s and then, eventually, on a global scale in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The SWP takes the exact same approach except on a far, far, smaller scale. So, where the 'official communists' had in mind forming governments, the SWP concentrates on single-issue campaigns - that and broad-left alliances, which it hopes will bring it enough recruits, so that one day it can break through into the 'big time': Anti-Nazi League, Stop the War Coalition, Respect, Unite Against Fascism and now Stand Up to Racism. It never happens, but the fundamental problem is exactly the same as with the popular fronts of the 'official communists'.

It is the right which sets the programmatic limits. Neither narcissistic VIPs nor British-Asian businessmen, neither Labourite exiles nor the Muslim Association of Britain will fight capitalism - well, except rhetorically. However, to keep such allies from simply walking, socialist principles and aims are abandoned - that or put on hold: in Respect is was republicanism, international socialism, secularism, free movement ... even woman's abortion rights. Hence the result of the SWP's little popular fronts is not greater strength: rather programmatic liquidation.

During the 1930s Trotsky damned the 'fourth period' as a headlong descent into naked class collaboration. He ranked Comintern's new line on a par with social democracy's abject failure, faced with the challenge of inter-imperialist war in August 1914. In a phrase, *The Marseillaise* is drowning out the *Internationale*. The Communist International was entering the "social patriotic camp", he declared.¹⁹ Instead of abandoning, putting on hold, the struggle for socialism, he was of the view that, on the contrary, only the struggle for socialism, aggressively, confidently pursued - using tactics such as the united workers' front - could bring over wavering social democrats and even those workers who, in desperation, looked to fascism as a solution to their problems.

Trotsky's writings on the rise and triumph of fascism count amongst his best and retain much relevance. Fascism, Trotsky argues, is a product of capitalist crisis and capitalist loss of control over society. Fascism, as a system of government, sees the effective removal of the bourgeoisie from political - not economic - power. Instead of well-educated, good-mannered responsible statemen, strutting thugs, psychopathic murderers and rabble-rousers take over the leading offices of state. True, military dictatorships can see traditional liberal and conservative parties disbanded or reduced to mere decoration. But army generals are unmistakably members of the ruling class. The same cannot be said of Mussolini or Hitler (though it can of Oswald Mosley).

However, for the capitalist class - or at least key sections - the loss of political power is a price worth paying. Fascism organises, militarises and unleashes a mass plebeian force - the crazed petty bourgeoisie, the lumpenproletariat, embittered former soldiers - against the parties and organisations of the working class. This is surely the key defining characteristic of fascism. Not only is the communist vanguard annihilated: the mass of the working class is held in a "state of forced disunity".²⁰

Precursors

Doubtless fascism's intellectual origins lie in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Social Darwinism, the pseudo-science of race, state worship, romantic national history, anti-Semitism, and the vilification of international socialism and the organised working class were the dominant ideas of the European ruling classes prior to the outbreak of World War I. Colonial empires found justification in race theory. Romantic national history bound masses of people at home together in the imagined community of the state. Social Darwinism served to reconcile them to the 'natural' hierarchy.

Nevertheless, although fascist leaders and their cynical publicists freely deployed such ruling ideas, they did so in an entirely demagogic fashion. The intention was to carry out a (counter) revolution. Clearing the path to power always took priority. Any ideological manoeuvre, any pose could be justified. Hence

with fascism there is no logically sustained reasoning of the kind found in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, Hegel and Marx. Read *Mein Kampf*, Mussolini's *My autobiography* or Mosley's *My life*. Leave aside the lies and half-truths, the writing is banal and full of contradictions. In fact, no fascist leader has ever written anything of any worth. Tommy Robinson's *Manifesto* simply underlines the point. It is a long rant against the 1% and their financing of Black Lives Matter, transgender surgery, jihadists and self-proclaimed Nazi militia in Ukraine. The central idea is the elite's 'great conspiracy' to replace the 'white race' in Europe with Muslim migrants.²¹ Dumb, or dumb?

No surprise - according to Franz Neumann - fascist ideology "is constantly shifting": "Every pronouncement springs from the immediate situation and is abandoned as soon as the situation changes."²² Fascism holds to certain vague beliefs - leadership, the force of will, manly discipline, national salvation - but there is no fascist theory systematically linking proposition to practice. Irrationalism is the defining characteristic.

By the same measure, however, I would contend, attempts to brand Marine Le Pen a fascist because of her father's "fascist roots",²³ describing Viktor Orbán's regime as "soft fascism" due to the demonisation of Muslim refugees,²⁴ or claiming that Narendra Modi's BJP government in India is "fascist" because of the "arrest of leftist intellectuals" and the "overturning the country's constitution" is to indulge in more than hyperbole.²⁵ It is irrationalism, albeit of the liberal variety.

It is certainly true that the lineage of many of today's far-right parties can be traced back to fascist organisations operating back in the 1920s and 30s. Yet - and this should matter - hard-core holocaust-deniers, non-state fighting formations and unrepentant Hitler fans are often shunned, cold-shouldered, even suppressed. Marine Le Pen expelled her father in an attempt to cultivate a less toxic image. Modi's split with the paramilitary RSS has "widened to become a deep chasm".²⁶ Orbán's Fidesz government pushed through the state ban on Magyar Gárda Mozgalom. It is similar tale with Reform: "As Nigel Farage has repeatedly made plain, people who belong or used to belong to the BNP are not welcome."²⁷

Not a few Marxists have drawn an analogy between Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's movement and fascism. While perhaps pushing his case too far, August Thalheimer - a former top leader of the Communist Party of Germany - did just that in his 1930 essay, 'On fascism'. Thalheimer took as his "starting point" the profound insights he found in Marx's *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* and *The civil war in France*. There is, in these two works, besides "the analysis of the social and historical class roots of Bonapartism", a recognition of "not only the presence of specific classes in a given society, but also a specific relationship between these classes in a specific historical situation".²⁸

In 1848 the "citizen-king", Louis Philippe, was overthrown. A popular, working class-led revolution restored the republic. However, neither the workers nor the bourgeoisie proved strong enough to establish their rule. The Cavaignac dictatorship could arrest Auguste Blanqui and suppress the workers, but could not establish a stable order. There ensued an inherently unstable revolutionary-counterrevolutionary stand-off between the two classes. Under these circumstances the French bourgeoisie surrendered "its political existence in order to save its social existence and abandons itself to the dictatorship of an adventurer and his gang".

Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte - nephew of emperor Napoleon I - and his henchmen gathered together an amorphous layer of decayed elements: those whom the French call *la bohème*. Backed by this volatile but manipulatable social base, he skilfully constructed a grand coalition. Before the proletariat and the lumpenproletariat he spun out well-crafted revolutionary phrases; he won over the peasants with traditional family values and grand promises of renewed national glory. Meanwhile, he quietly aligned himself to high finance. Clearly Charles Louis was no "grotesque mediocrity". In December 1851 he seized power with the help of the French army in a self-coup. The Bonapartist state, thereby, decisively raised itself above society and made itself into an "independent power". Yet, while bourgeois political power had been destroyed, bourgeois economic power had been saved.

Trotsky, it should be added, likewise thought that there “is an element of Bonapartism in fascism”. State power rises above society in both cases. However, for Trotsky, “pure Bonapartism” is associated with the “epoch” of the rising bourgeoisie; fascism with “imperialist decline”. Therefore, to say that fascism is a mere “repetition of Bonapartism” would, he said, be “very muddled and stupid”, to say the least.²⁹

The Boulangist movement was also something of a prefiguration. General Georges Boulanger was the model of the man on horseback appearing before a society which longed for a saviour. A social demagogue controlled by the reactionary right, he could, though, appeal to the working classes. He shot to a fleeting fame during the late 1880s. Mixing strident nationalism with mass agitation against parliamentary corruption, influential members of the French Workers’ Party - including Marx’s son-in-law, Paul Lafargue - succumbed to the illusion that the Boulangist third way represented a “genuine mass movement”, which could, if encouraged, develop a socialistic character. Like so many impatient leftists, Lafargue tried to hitch a ride.

We see the exact same phenomenon today. Championing petty nationalism - Scottish, Irish, Catalan and Québécois - immediately spring to mind. But there is just about every other ‘ism’ though. From feminism to pacifism, the soft, the broad, the impatient left adapts to and in the final analysis adopts politics which are those of the bourgeoisie. Working class political independence is abandoned for all practical purposes, that is for sure. ‘After them, us’ is the unacknowledged slogan. Friedrich Engels, for his part, would have none of it. He urged the French comrades to “fight under their own flag” - against both the bourgeois political establishment and the Boulangists.³⁰

Action Française, established in 1899, has for good reason been called the “thesis” of fascism (Ernst Nolte).³¹ It combined anti-Semitism with nationalism and dynastic royalism. Of key importance, though, we have the first ‘shirt movement’: ie, rightwing fighting squads. The Camelots du Roi began as Action Française’s street goons and in 1917 became a full-blown mass, counterrevolutionary militia.

In February 1934 it was part of a royalist-fascist bloc - armed with revolvers, clubs and razors - which invaded the parliament building in Paris and put “the smiling, somewhat senile” Gaston Doumergue into power as prime minister.³² Financed by big capital - including tycoons such as Ernest Mercier, director of one of France’s biggest electrical and oil trusts - the Camelots du Roi fought to end the third republic in the name of ‘France for the French’.

The Union of Russian People, formed in 1905, likewise mobilised declassed elements into fighting squads - assisted by tsarist officialdom. In the name of tsar, god and country, the Black Hundreds launched vicious pogroms against striking workers, revolutionaries and Jews - “Beat the Yids, save Russia” ran their “famous slogan”. Russia’s ‘pre-fascist fascists’ wanted to “encourage” Jews to “emigrate to Palestine”.³³

Turning point

World War I marked an epochal turning point. Capitalism morphs into state monopoly capitalism. The law of value, competition and other essential laws decline and can only be sustained through organisational measures, such as state intervention and the arms economy. Market forces are partially demystified. They are exposed as political. Socialism is imminent. When it must do, collective capital puts off the transition by elevating state power above the immediate interests of profit.

Official Europe, especially in the defeated countries, emerged from the mayhem of World War I thoroughly discredited, weakened and riven with internal divisions. Our class was presented with an unprecedented historic opportunity. Bolshevism brilliantly led the way. Tragically, elsewhere the organisations of the working class either proved inadequate or wretchedly backed away from the task and sought to reconcile themselves with capitalism. Bourgeois society was exhausted and chronically split, but the working class lacked the necessary leadership with which to deliver the final, revolutionary blow. Fascism erupts as a counterrevolutionary movement under these conditions.

Following World War I, virtually every country in Europe spawned its clutch of fascist groups and grouplets. At first they were entirely

marginal. Mussolini secured not a single MP in the 1919 elections. Polite society looked down on them with barely concealed contempt. Hitler was dismissed as a crank. However, the unresolved class struggle and economic crises produced a constitutional disjuncture. The malign aura of fascism vanished. Mussolini’s Blackshirts and Hitler’s Brownshirts appeared before the ruling class as saviours ... albeit not riding on a horse.

Mussolini took power in 1922 at the invitation of king Victor Emmanuel III - with the active encouragement of big capital and the benign neutrality of the army assured. The famed March on Rome was pure theatre. Mussolini knew beforehand that the establishment would give him a hero’s welcome. A decade later, in the aftermath of the 1929 crash, Hitler formed his coalition government with the conservative right.

Not surprisingly, the initial response from Marxists was somewhat confused. At the 4th Congress of the Communist International in 1922 - the last attended by Lenin - the victory of fascism in Italy was blamed in part on the inability of the communists to resolve the revolutionary situation positively - which had in 1919 seen the widespread seizure of factories by workers. “Primarily”, however, fascism served “as a weapon” in the “hands of the big landowners”, or so went the argument. Italy presumably was going backwards down a fixed evolutionary ladder from capitalism to feudalism. The bourgeoisie escaped blame in this clumsy schema. They were said to be horrified by Mussolini’s “black Bolshevism”. Crucially though, Comintern failed to come to terms with the fact that, with fascism’s triumph, the working class had suffered a strategic defeat. Fascism was dismissed as a passing terror, a revenge exacted upon the working class, and, as such, could not hold for long. A renewed rising by the working class must occur - and very soon at that.

Inevitably there were those who merely imitated Mussolini and his cod dramatics - eg, the National Romanian Fascia founded in 1923 by Titus Panaitescu Vifor, and Rotha Lintorn-Orman’s British Fascisti of 1924. However, the global failure of the working class to continue and extend the revolution begun in Russia, plus the continued grip of a deep capitalist crisis, stimulated the growth of *serious* fascist movements. These fascisms were deeply rooted in the national chauvinist ideologies of *their own* countries and involved “broad social strata, great masses which reach down into the proletariat” and, therefore, argued Clara Zetkin, will not be quickly vanquished “merely by military means”. No, “we must also overcome it politically and ideologically”.³⁴

So, Hitler’s National Socialist German Workers Party was no mere clone of Mussolini’s fascism. The same goes for the Austrian Heimwehr, Hungary’s Arrow Cross, Spain’s Falangists, the ABC and Falanga in Poland, and the Croix de Feu and Solidarité Française.

Naturally the German conquest of much of continental Europe after 1939 created not only a clutch of quisling collaborators, but an allure for Nazification amongst fascist groups. Only in Poland did the native fascists resist for any time. In general, however, the Germans did not elevate their fascist impersonators into governing satraps. They preferred to deracinate them. Many were packed off to serve on the eastern front with units such as the Waffen SS.

A vague anti-capitalism was sometimes advocated. Gregor Strasser’s wing of the Nazi Party dreamt of a return to pre-monopolistic conditions and a kind of feudal national socialism. Suffice to say, the organised working class - trade unions and leftwing political parties - along with the ideas of Marxism and international socialism, were always the real enemy, not capital.

Having obtained power, fascism is obliged to restrain or even silence its mass base. Capital has no fondness for unofficial armies. The Blackshirts were therefore incorporated into the state by Mussolini. Hitler massacred untrustworthy Brownshirts. Gregor Strasser was murdered during the Night of the Long Knives on June 30 1934. Fascism is thereby bureaucratised and becomes what Trotsky calls “Bonapartism of fascist origin”.³⁵

But, if you think about it, this definition is inadequate. There is more to fascism *in power* than its origins. Fascism in power surely needs to be categorically distinguished from

Bonapartism in power. Though Napoleon III imposed rigorous press censorship, suppressed socialist newspapers, imprisoned large numbers of red republicans and sent thousands more into exile, nonetheless he presided over what has rather generously been called a regime of “reasonable freedom”: eg, he introduced the constitutional right to strike, re-established universal male suffrage and allowed opposition parties to run in elections, albeit to an emasculated national assembly.³⁶

Fascism in power has shown itself to be qualitatively different. Communist and social democratic activists were ruthlessly hunted down, strikes banned and trade unions dissolved. Nor is oppression eased with the consolidation of the regime. The iron heel is never removed. The whole unmediated power of the state machine remains directed against any manifestation of working class independence. Those found circulating communist or social democratic literature found themselves in concentration camps. Even telling the wrong type of joke could lead to the same dreadful fate.

Simultaneously, fascism suppresses contradictions within the ruling class - if need be, using state force too. Property is usually left untouched, but the traditional parties of the bourgeoisie are turned into mere husks, dissolved or absorbed into the body of the fascist movement. Elections, when they took place, were mere referendums/plebiscites designed to legitimise the fascist regime and its leader. Moreover, when German fascism was combined with total war, it organised an elaborate system of racist exterminationism within the borders of its newly acquired empire: Poles, Russians, Roma - and, above all, Jews in the ‘final solution’. Fascism then was a terroristic, absolutist and, in Germany, a deranged form of counterrevolution.

Explaining away

Not surprisingly, once fascism moved from the obscure fringes to the storm centre of big-power politics and world conflict, it had to be explained - and urgently. A wide range of theories have been produced - most of which are deeply flawed and deserve to be dismissed out of hand.

Christian apologists see fascism as the direct result of secularisation. By rejecting god, humanity is visited by evil. The antidote is obvious - take up the cross and restore religion. Conservative aristocrats paint fascism as a revolt by immature masses - the common herd, who have been freed from the constraints and responsibilities of a properly ordered agrarian society. Forlornly they yearn for the days when they constituted the natural class of governance.

Liberal-leaning evolutionary biologists put fascism down to the aggression and pack instincts supposedly hard-wired into the male brain by the harsh conditions of a largely imagined African Palaeolithic some 1.5 million years ago - a viewpoint shared by some radical feminists.

Psychologists have sought to locate the rise of fascism either at the level of some mass psychosis or in the warped personalities of its leaders. Wilhelm Reich argued that humanity is “biologically sick” and should free itself by discarding sexual repression.³⁷ Most Freudians disagreed. They insisted on entirely speculative clinical examinations of fascism’s leaders - Mussolini, but most of all Hitler. Raymond de Saussure believed Hitler exhibited a strong Oedipus complex and needed to channel his sexual energies in order to conceal his impotence from the public: the German Reich was a penis substitute. Obvious crap and nonsense.

An altogether more insightful, semi-Marxist, psychological approach is to be found in Erich Fromm’s *Escape from freedom* (1941). Fromm sought to understand how millions of Germans were captivated by Hitler. Capitalist alienation and the reduction of the human subject to a mere cog in the production process is blamed. Fascism answers the need in the human soul for a sense of belonging. The fact that the working class in Germany never reconciled itself to Nazism seems to run counter to the thesis. Worse, Fromm can offer no effective solution, no escape from the dilemma.

Theodor Adorno, amongst others in the so-called Frankfurt school, claimed to have discovered the ‘authoritarian personality’, which was apparently rife amongst all classes in Germany. This was an integral part of a

general theory of the period. Liberalism was in decay. Capitalism and mass culture were producing an overarching totalitarian society. The Soviet Union was essentially no different. Herbert Marcuse believed that fascism was the almost inevitable result of monopoly capitalism - a view he subsequently modified by claiming that, although post-World War II western capitalism still maintained a democratic outer shell, the tendency was towards a grey conformity and complete subordination of the personality to the needs of capital: ie, a totalitarian society. New Left radicals in the 1960s US gleefully denounced ‘fascist Amerikka’!

Establishment figures such as Hannah Arendt and Zbigniew Brzezinski readily adopted totalitarian theory. Its great virtue lay in the fact that it directly linked Nazism and Stalinism. However, they gave the theory a none too subtle twist by disaggregating capitalism from totalitarianism. Capitalism, in this rightwing version of the totalitarian theory, is equated definitionally with freedom, democracy, choice and personal liberty. That capitalism flourished under Mussolini and Hitler is guiltily ignored.

As readers will know, mainstream bourgeois society now propagates this intellectually barren explanation for fascism over the electronic and print media and in schools and colleges. What began as a leftist critique of existing conditions has been thoroughly colonised by the right and turned into its opposite.

Joining together fascism and bureaucratic socialism into a single phenomenon admirably suited the needs of the cold war. Capitalism was excused of all blame and the Soviet Union was made into a culprit. In the hands of Karl Popper, totalitarianism became truly superhistorical. Sparta, Ch’in China, the empire of Diocletian and Calvin’s Geneva are all classified under that heading, of course, along with Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Plato, Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche form a totalitarian human chain that joins the periodic culling of the helots to the gas chambers.

Such a philosophy was vital for the capitalist system, above all in Europe. Fascism was beaten not only by the armies of the Soviet Union, the USA and Britain: there were communist partisan movements and popular risings throughout the German empire, Yugoslavia, Greece, Albania, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Poland, France, etc. Equally to the point, the capitalist class was deeply compromised. Almost without exception, the bourgeoisie collaborated with fascism, often with great enthusiasm. For example, in France it welcomed the German invasion. Since 1936 the working class had made huge gains at the expense of capital. The forces of the left were feared and hated, but could not be crushed by the upper classes - the Nazi jackboot would do that job for them though.

The situation in other countries was substantially the same. After 1945 bourgeois Europe was forced, therefore, to reinvent itself. Hence totalitarian theory, the holocaust industry and the anti-racist, anti-fascist declarations of Unesco - such as the July 1950 declaration on race, which scientifically supported the “ethic of universal brotherhood” and the warning that “men and nations alike” can “fall ill”.³⁸ World War II became Britain’s our finest hour - a crusade for freedom. The motive was to save the Jews, not the British empire.

Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni, Viktor Orbán and Nigel Farage are reactionary rebels against the carefully constructed post-World War II consensus ideology. The mainstream bourgeois establishment reacts with such hostility, because their crude chauvinism, rejection of liberal multiculturalism, demonisation of migrants, etc, reminds capitalist society of its shameful, pre-1945 past. Few establishment historians or other paid persuaders care to recall how mainstream bourgeois opinion promoted social Darwinism, race theory, anti-Semitism and arrogantly upheld their ‘civilised’ rule over their ‘immature’ colonial subjects. And how these ideas were blessed from the pulpit and enforced using police batons, salvoes of army bullets and judges imposing stiff prison sentences.

At this present juncture, we have neither a revolutionary nor counterrevolutionary situation. There is no working class threat, no rising working class movement ... no,

SUPPLEMENT

not even in “slow motion”. Sad to say, the working class exists as little more than a slave class. Yes, Trump, Le Pen, Meloni, Orbán and Farage have definite sympathies for fascists and have fascist admirers, allies and outliers. However - well, at least for the moment - their prime focus is on elections. Fascist fighting formations are not assuming anything like a mass scale, let alone being unleashed to crush the organised working class. Tomorrow, of course, all that might change.

A necessary aside. The 1920s and 30s show that fascism does not originate from the far right alone. Mussolini adhered to a Sorelian direct-action socialism and general strikism. He edited the Socialist Party's paper *Avanti*. In Britain Oswald Mosley served as a Labour minister - one of the first recruits to his New Party being AJ Cook, the famed miners' leader. Józef Piłsudski made a similar journey: he went from Polish left nationalism to carrying out his “revolution without revolutionary consequences” rightwing coup.³⁹

Today, doubtless, we have similar candidates, but none are at all obvious. The Socialist Labour Party, the former Revolutionary Communist Party/*Spiked*, the various British red-brown ‘national Bolsheviks’ and the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty could all be mentioned. However, each appears, in their own unique way, to be at an evolutionary dead end. Extinction, not glory, beckons. George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain comes to mind as a possibility. He does, after all, talk of a corporate alliance between managers and workers, how the WPB are “patriots” and the “globalists” are “traitors”.⁴⁰ But there are a thousand different ways Galloway could go. So to call him “a wannabe fascist” is premature, to say the least.⁴¹ It was, for example, right to back him in the February 29 2024 Rochdale by-election in the name of solidarity with Palestine. Rishi Sunak took to his Downing Street podium to denounce the stunning result.

As for Trump, he did indeed summon, fire up and unleash gangs of boogallos on January 6 2021. Not that we should categorise him as a fascist either. No, he was an aspiring Bonaparte who was willing to flatter, promote and use America's third-rate fascist grouplets. None of the Proud Boys, the Three Percenters,

the Oath Takers, etc, etc, were about to come to power on January 6. No, the storming of the Capitol was about Donald Trump remaining the US president, presumably through imposing a state of emergency and the willingness of key sections of the army, the police, the secret state to back him. An unlikely scenario.

Naturally, in America Bonapartism would take a strictly American form. Donald Trump is a blue-blooded redneck who uses his millions of followers and billions of dollars in a self-promotional culture war against ‘cat-eating’ Haitian migrants, BLM ‘thugs’, women's rights and trans people ... as already mentioned, the working class threat is noticeably absent. There is no mass left party, no crippling strike wave, no danger of the class struggle running out of control.

Much, however, is lost in translation. Although an alumni of the New York Military Academy, Trump is no Napoleon. Whereas the first Bonaparte was a military genius and fought 60 (still much studied) battles, Trump dodged the Vietnam draft five times - once pleading bad feet, four times pleading college studies. Yet through sheer chutzpah and an almost instinctive ability to articulate popular grievances, resentments and phobias - and offer easy solutions - Trump became the uncrowned emperor of the GOP and a saviour hero-worshipped by a whole swathe of the US electorate.

History has already judged: Mar-a-Lago has proved not to be his St Helena, but his Elba. November 5 could be his Waterloo ... or it could be his Austerlitz.

Either way, the well that Trump drew on for three successive election campaigns - 2016, 2020 and 2024 - is deep and will not evaporate, if - and it is a big if - there is, on January 20 2025, Kamala Harris with her hand on the inauguration Bible.

There exists a profound disenchantment with the old order. For millions the American dream has long turned into an American nightmare: insecure gig contracts, massive social inequality, squeezed incomes, student debt, opiate addiction and above all fear ... fear of ill health, fear of unemployment, fear of crime, fear of homelessness, fear of competition from migrant labour, fear of uppity women, fear of elite conspiracies, fear of national failure:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.
WB Yeats *The second coming* (1919)

The centre-ground - Joe Biden, Emmanuel Macron, Olaf Scholz and now Keir Starmer - finds itself ineffective, vulnerable, easily swept away. Factor in prolonged economic stagnation, unstoppable mass migration, the danger of proxy war phasing into World War III and the eminently predictable failure of the market to tackle the climate crisis, then the choice before humanity could not be starker ●

Notes

1. www.telegraph.co.uk/us/politics/2024/10/18/betting-markets-presidential-election-odds-trump-harris.
2. See T Snyder *The road to unfreedom* London 2018; CR Sunstein (ed) *Can it happen here?* Cambridge MA 2018; M Albright *Fascism: a warning* New York NY 2018; J Stanley *How fascism works* New York NY 2018.
3. D Lazare, ‘Assault on democracy’ *Weekly Worker* May 20 2021: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1348/assault-on-democracy.
4. *The Guardian* January 16 2021.
5. X, July 15 2024.
6. Quoted in *The Independent* October 11 2024.
7. A phrase repeatedly used by Tony Cliff, the SWP's founder-leader, since the early 1990s. He writes: “The 1930s were a decade of extremes. Anyone sitting on the fence was only helping the reactionary forces. The fact that the film of the 1930s returns, but in slow motion, means there is much greater opportunity to stop the film and direct it in the way we want” (T Cliff *Marxism at the millennium* London 2000 - see www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/2000/millennium/chap14.htm).
8. SWP *Pre-conference Bulletin* October 2024, pp8,10,12.
9. This has, unusually, caused something of a debate in SWP ranks: see the contributions of Rob (Dorset), Alex and James (Glasgow), Mike (Walthamstow) and Candy (Dorset). As for the CC, it seems to be sticking to the ‘Zionist racists are welcome’ line. Its formulation is that “SUtR is right not to make anti-Zionism a ticket of entry into the movement” (*Pre-conference Bulletin* October 2024, p12). Incidentally, because the SWP tries to keep its internal disputes hidden away, it would be a great service to the left if our web editors put the whole of the *Pre-conference Bulletin* No1 up online (there is, I can assure you, no security risk involved).
10. standuptoracism.org.uk/statement-unite-against-tommy-robinson.
11. Both phrases taken from the SWP's *Pre-conference Bulletin*: the first from Candy (Dorset), the second from

- the Central Committee itself.
12. B Mussolini *My autobiography* London 1938, p65.
13. R Palme Dutt *Fascism and the social revolution* London 1934, p251.
14. Quoted in M Kitchen *Fascism* London 1983, p5.
15. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_fascism.
16. D Harsch *German social democracy and the rise of Nazism* Chapel Hill NC 1993, p219.
17. See D Guerin *Fascism and big business* New York NY 1973.
18. G Dimitrov *The working class against fascism* London 1935, p10.
19. L Trotsky *Writings 1935-36* New York NY 1977, p129.
20. L Trotsky *The struggle against fascism in Germany* New York NY 1971, p144.
21. *Manifesto: free speech, real democracy, peaceful disobedience* is written jointly with Peter McLoughlin. Published in October 2024, and despite costing just a tad under £25, the ‘Tommunist manifesto’ briefly became Amazon's No1 best-selling publication - before, that is, being withdrawn by the transnational retailer (serving, of course, to confirm charges of suppressing ‘free speech’).
22. F Neumann *Behemoth* London 1942, pp39-40.
23. J Orr ‘The many faces of Marine Le Pen’ *International Socialism* 2020.
24. vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/9/13/17823488/hungary-democracy-authoritarianism-trump.
25. Arundhati Roy interview: dw.com/en/arundhati-roy-were-up-against-a-fascist-regime-in-india/a-45332070.
26. *National Herald* June 1 2024.
27. Reform statement quoted in *The Guardian* June 24 2024.
28. www.marxists.org/archive/thalheimer/works/fascism.htm.
29. L Trotsky *The struggle against fascism in Germany* New York NY 1971, p444.
30. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 48 London 2001, p197.
31. E Nolte *The three faces of fascism* London 1965.
32. W Shirer *The collapse of the Third Republic* London 1970, p254.
33. SD Shenfield *Russian fascism: traditions, tendencies, movements* Armonk NY 2001, p32.
34. M Jones and B Lewis (eds), ‘Clara Zetkin: letters and writings’ *Revolutionary History* No1 (new series), London 2015, p89.
35. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1934/340715.htm.
36. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleon_III.
37. W Reich *The mass psychology of fascism* New York NY 1946, p273.
38. Unesco, Paris 1952.
39. web.archive.org/web/20080503141011/http://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo.php?id=3957301.
40. Interview with Russell Brand - www.youtube.com/watch?v=nze_y9SNfWo.
41. H Kennedy ‘Gruesome George Galloway and the Paris Olympics: medalling in red/brown transphobia’ *Tempest* August 26 2024. The US-Canadian *Tempest* collective is remarkably coy, like so many left groups, about making known its *real* political origins. *Tempest* seems, though, to be one of the many fragments that came out from the 2019 terminal blow-up of the Clifft International Socialist Organisation. If I am wrong, readers might put me right.

Fifteen theses on fascism and fighting fascism

1. Besides garbled populist propaganda denigrating foreigners, corrupt establishment politicians, migrants, communists, greedy capitalists, religious, ethnic and other minorities, etc, fascism launches physical force, primarily against the organised working class.
2. Fascist groups, movements and parties form counterrevolutionary fighting squads separate from the state - this is the *essential and defining characteristic* of fascism, a characteristic that distinguishes it from other forms of counterrevolution.
3. Fascism objectively acts in the interests of the capitalist class. Fascist organisations are often manipulated, financed and directed by sections of the state and the monopoly bourgeoisie.
4. Fascism grows into mass proportions when capitalist society is mired deep in crisis, but the working class lacks the necessary organisation, determination or leadership with which to deliver the final revolutionary blow.
5. Fascism clears its own path. But, once in power, fascist parties and fighting formations inevitably undergo a process of bureaucratisation. The upper layers merge with the ruling class. The lower elements are simply merged into the state machine or, failing that, are mercilessly crushed.
6. Under present circumstances in Britain, there is no immediate danger of a mass fascist movement, let alone such a movement coming to power. There is no revolutionary situation.
7. It is essential to distinguish between individual fascists and fascist organisations. People may openly or privately admire and/or seek to emulate Nazi Germany, Mussolini Italy or Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts. But what makes a fascist organisation is the intention, or reality, of forming counterrevolutionary fighting formations.
8. The theory of killing fascism ‘in the egg’ is completely illusory. When it comes to the far right, it is a diversion and has led either to the leftist futility of squadism or the quagmire of popular frontism.



Benito Mussolini: fighting squads to crush working class organisations

9. Destroying the extreme right using force and attempting to silence it through terror has patently failed. Ditto popular fronts, which join the left organisationally and politically

- with the bourgeois establishment.
10. Unlike social democrats and anarchists, communists do not view any tactic as a matter of principle. Eg, parliamentarianism or anti-

parliamentarianism. Indeed, when it comes to tactics, the only principle we recognise is that nothing is automatically ruled in and nothing automatically ruled out.

11. Tactics employed to counter organisations such as the BNP, National Front, Britain First, National Action, etc have to be concrete. Therefore they have to be flexible and constantly changing.

12. We consider the tactic of no-platforming opponents perfectly legitimate. Ditto force and violence. Against fascist fighting formations it is absolutely correct to defend ourselves, using whatever means are necessary.

13. By the same measure, peaceful tactics, debate and persuasion are also legitimate under other circumstances. We do not seek a ‘civilised’ relationship with the extreme right (or with the mainstream bourgeois parties, for that matter). But communists are determined to take away from the extreme right what popular base it might possess. That primarily means a battle for hearts and minds. Not that we consider those who vote BNP, Britain First, Ukip or Reform as our ‘natural’ constituency.

14. At all times we recognise that it is the capitalist state and the capitalist class which is our main enemy. It is the failures, the malfunctioning of declining capitalism which give both ammunition and sustenance to the extreme right.

15. Communists are champions of democracy and free speech. We are against state bans on political parties, including outright fascist parties. State restrictions on what can and what cannot be said in political debate must also be vigorously opposed. Any such bans or restrictions would inevitably first and foremost affect the advanced part of the working class. Free speech and the widest democracy provide the best conditions for Marxism to grow and flourish, and for the formation of the working class into a future ruling class ●