



weekly
worker



Though Reform UK is riding high in the polls, Robert Lowe has plunged it into a profound crisis

- Letters and debate
- Italy's 'official communists'
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- Iran's royalist personality cult

No 1529 March 13 2025 Towards a mass Communist Party £1/£1.10 - free to Palestine marchers



**DONALD TRUMP
GREENLIGHTS
ETHNIC CLEANSING
AND GENOCIDE**

LETTERS



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

Words, words ...

Moshé Machover wants to remind me that “Everything changes, including language” (Letters, March 6). Yes, comrade, I already know that.

Take this nice story about that nice word, ‘nice’. It begins as a negative term, derived from the Latin *nescius*, meaning “unaware, ignorant”. That is how it was carried over into the English language in the early 1300s. However, starting in the late 1300s, the meaning starts to shift. ‘Nice’ increasingly refers to “conduct, a person, or clothing that was considered excessively luxurious or lascivious”. Not a few years later a much more neutral sense emerged: “a person who is finely dressed, someone who is scrupulous, or something that was precise or fussy”. By the late 1500s, ‘nice’ was further softening, describing something as “refined, culture” - especially used of polite society. Over 200 years later, ‘nice’ served as a catch-all for someone or something “pleasant” or “agreeable”. Nonetheless, by the 1980s the word starts to once again take on negative connotations: that is, when given an ironic edge.

Of course, what we are arguing about is not ‘nice’, or words in general, but specifically the terms, ‘democracy’ and ‘dictatorship’. This in the context of a proposal from Talking About Socialism about an *agreementist* approach to programme. The comrades wanted us to *agree* with communism being ‘democratic’ and not supporting any kind of ‘dictatorship’.

Speaking in the name of orthodox Marxism - and I know comrade Machover prides himself in being an unorthodox Marxist - I simply cannot *agree*. In my ‘Programmatic starting point’ article (February 27), I made the unarguable point that orthodox Marxists take democracy not just as a nice word, but a form of the state. Therefore we expect democracy - not debate, not voting - to wither away with the transition to full communism. We do not stop at “mere democracy” (Engels). Extreme democracy negating democracy is a dialectical law.

Then there is that thoroughly not

nice word, ‘dictatorship’. If we say we oppose all ‘forms of dictatorship’, we are surely obliged to say that we oppose Marx, Engels, Lenin, etc, given their militant statements in favour of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. That I am not going to do.

Words, concepts, ideas are as much the subject of the class struggle as wages, terms and conditions.

I call myself a communist. I refuse to let the Stalinites have that word unchallenged. In fact, they really are not communists. When the ideologues of the bourgeoisie define ‘communism’ - in their mass media, in their schools and in their approved academic studies, even in their dictionaries - as “totalitarianism” and a “self-perpetuating one-party state”, I refuse to go along with that usage.

Nonetheless, because we operate in an ideologically bourgeois-dominated society, when referring to Marx, Engels and Lenin using the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ phrase, I *always* explain that what they meant by it was the ‘decisive rule of the working class’ (or words to that effect). When talking about democracy withering away, I *always* explain that this is the paradoxical result of the *extreme democracy* we advocate.

Either way, thankfully, during the course of our fusion talks the TAS comrades have given ground on this question. So I’m not expected to agree with what I cannot agree to.

Jack Conrad
London

Dictatorship

In reply to Moshé Machover, the term, ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, was always from the beginning an incorrect term to describe working class rule. The term is not to be found in the *Communist manifesto*. It was first popularised by Louis Blanqui, who wanted to appear more leftwing than Marx. Marx adopted the term to thwart Blanqui’s pretensions, and since that time every communist leader has repeated Blanqui’s and Marx’s mistake.

It is not a question of the term changing its meaning, and now rendered obsolete. It was wrong for Blanqui to use this term to describe working class rule, and it was wrong for Marx to adopt this Blanquist mistake - with the absurd proviso that

for him ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ refers to the whole class and not just the leadership, or vanguard.

Lenin recognised that ‘dictatorship’ means ‘rule unrestrained by any law’, and yet he used this to describe working class rule. The collapse of Leninism in the Soviet Union has not led communists to re-examine this term as it applies to working class socialist rule. The essence of dictatorship is that it is unaccountable to any elected body, and is above the law. So how can working class, socialist rule be unaccountable and lawless - in other words, be ‘dictatorship’ - outside an emergency situation?

By adopting Blanqui’s mistake Marx placed himself, albeit unconsciously, in opposition to democratic socialism. It is time for communists to correct this mistake of Marx. The agenda of the elite is ultimately based on a totalitarianism underpinned by artificial intelligence, with every person microchipped and under control, which goes far beyond Orwell’s *1984*. They want to lock us down. Communists who repeat Marx’s mistake and say that socialism is a dictatorship are simply aiding the elite’s deep-state totalitarian agenda for a post-democratic society.

So, in reply to comrade Machover’s question, “Is it wise to give hostages to fortune by inviting the accusation that we are advocating a dictatorship and the demise of democracy?” My reply is that ever since Marx adopted Blanqui’s error Marxists have been advocating the demise of democracy in favour of dictatorship - not as a temporary measure in an emergency situation, but as a form of working class rule.

At the political level the left must choose between democratic socialism or totalitarianism.

Tony Clark
For Democratic Socialism

Lucy Letby

It is becoming clearer every day that Lucy Letby, the nurse convicted of the murder of seven babies who died in hospital, was scapegoated for the failings of the crumbling health services. Her trial was not based on any actual evidence that showed she or anyone else deliberately harmed children. Dr Shoo Lee’s February press conference blew apart the entire basis for the frame-up and asserted that no murders had taken place. And now a number of mainstream publications which previously vilified Letby have changed their tune and acknowledged she might be innocent.

Let’s be clear: Letby’s conviction sent a strong message to all workers - and especially those in healthcare - that this can happen to anyone. Letby was hounded and convicted to make an example of her for the failures of an NHS that is chronically understaffed and underfunded. That’s why defending her is part of the fight for better healthcare for all, for better working conditions for nurses and all staff. But to build a campaign to demand justice for Lucy Letby requires defying the existing union leadership, which time and again has bowed to the bullying NHS bosses.

This innocent nurse should not be languishing in prison one more day for something she simply didn’t do. But, as we all know, the British establishment will fight to the bitter end to uphold the honour of its ‘justice’ system rather than admit it locks up innocent people. The freeing of the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four - innocent Irish people who were framed by the cops for bombings - took years of tenacious legal battles, as well as public campaigns. That is why, in parallel to the efforts of her legal team, it is urgently necessary that the left and trade union movement take up this fight and build a broad campaign

to free Lucy Letby. Defending this dedicated nurse against this frame-up is an elementary act in defence of the interests of all workers against the relentless attacks by the bosses on our livelihoods and working conditions.

The silence of the left on this question is ceding the ground to the right wing, some of whom for their own reasons have taken up this cause. But defending Letby is not a left-right issue: it’s a working class issue - the British state has framed up a worker who was doing her job under horrendous conditions. It is time to take a clear stand against this.

We urge you to endorse and build for the Partisan Defence Committee’s protest on March 17 in Liverpool and to take this campaign into the trade union movement.

Kate Klein
Partisan Defence Committee

Mighty fallen

I read with interest Jack Conrad’s excellent article about the Socialist Workers Party’s travails over the ‘programme’ question (‘Operating on a hunch’, March 6).

One of the many points that stood out was the issue of as to why leading SWP activist Maxine Bowler stood as a “community activist and independent socialist” at the July 2024 general election and not under the name, ‘Socialist Workers Party’. Comrade Conrad makes the perfectly reasonable inference that the SWP isn’t an illegal organisation, so why not stand as SWP?

The reason, in my opinion, is that it would have to register with the Electoral Commission as a party if it did so. This brings with it a host of obligations and responsibilities, including financial disclosures. Some wag once quipped: “Forget politics - the quickest way to get expelled from the SWP is to ask where the money comes from and where it goes!” It is obvious the party would want to avoid that, hence no EC registration.

Carla Roberts in her article, ‘New year, new left party?’ (January 9) reveals that the SWP were told in

no uncertain terms to ‘go forth and multiply’ when they inquired to join the latest embryonic Corbynist lash-up, the Collective Party. Fifteen years ago such an application would have been a shoo-in for the SWP. Now Comrade Roberts reveals that the party may be admitted under a “front group” cover name that seems to have been quickly created to facilitate this.

Oh, how the mighty have fallen!

Paul O’Keeffe
email

Home truths

Perhaps I might be so impertinent as to offer our friendly visitor, Alien John (Letters, March 6), some pointers about the nature of our species.

Homo sapiens has not evolved the ability to universally communicate to all other members of the species simultaneously - perhaps that is different on John’s home planet. As such, all communications have a necessarily limited reach. For journals such as this one, the audience is largely self-selecting. The *Weekly Worker* is read by fellow participants in the struggle for socialism; the occasional confused extra-terrestrial; and - just possibly - a single guy in a basement office in MI5 who has been forgotten by everyone, including his wife.

It is not necessary, on this understanding, for me to argue, from first principles, that Jordan Peterson is a weepy charlatan. It is part of the assumed common knowledge of everyone who might be tempted to read our paper - perhaps even the fellow at MI5. Moreover, we deliberately pursue such a limited audience - though, of course, we wish it were larger than it is. We believe that, in pursuit of our project, we will first have to cohere the left in some kind of fighting order - then our battles with the likes of Dr Peterson over the meaning of slipperily-defined psychological archetypes will have the kind of stakes that will make them worthwhile.

We wish him every success in his ethnological studies.

Paul Demarty
Earth

Fighting fund

Increase in subs!

Last week I mentioned that this will be the last month when the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund target is £2,250. And now we have agreed that the monthly target, beginning in April, will be £2,750 - in other words, an increase of £500.

But I’m afraid to say that something else will be increased from April 1: the subscription charge, which will be raised from £5 to £8 per month for UK readers and £10.90 to £14 for overseas subscribers.

Both these measures are necessitated by the huge increase we have faced in printing costs, not to mention the year-on-year rise in postage charges. But I’m sure all subscribers will be happy to pay a larger charge - especially since the price for UK subscribers has not been raised for two decades!

If you currently pay by PayPal or standing order, please increase your payment to £8 per month, £24 per quarter or £96 per year. If your paper is delivered to you overseas, the new charge will be £14 per month or £168 per year. Please make arrangements now to pay the new rate from the date your next payment is due, starting on or after April 1. We will shortly be sending you a letter outlining the details.

We would be grateful if you can afford to pay more than the basic subs charge, which would count towards our fighting fund target, of course. As for this month’s fund, £349 came our way over the last seven days. Thanks go to PB (£70), BO (£35), DV and NH (£30 each), GD (£25), MA (£15), RD (£12), plus a tenner each from CS, IS, SM, PM, CC and BH. All the above came via bank transfer or standing order. Then we had PM (£50), MH (£10) and PE (£7), who each made their donations via PayPal, and finally comrade Hassan, who handed his usual banknote (this time a fiver) to one of our team.

All that means that our running total for March stands at £876 - just a little behind the going rate with 12 days of the month already gone, as I write. Let’s make sure we get there once again this month - and help us reach the new £2,750 target starting in April! ●

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

Online Communist Forum



Sunday March 16 5pm
Tariff wars - political report from CPGB’s Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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

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

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

ITALY

What's in a name?

Toby Abse reports on Rifondazione Comunista's desperate attempts to re-enter parliament and the illusions it is fostering in the Bric countries as a source of peace

The Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC - Party of Communist Refoundation) remains a relatively large organisation by the standards of the European far left, with nearly 10,000 members. Rifondazione's cadre are real, dues-paying members and not people who once expressed some interest in the party on a demonstration, as is the case with the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, for example.

It is larger than any other Italian communist organisation, such as what now calls itself the Partito Comunista Italiano (previously known as the Partito dei Comunisti Italiani - PCI) or Marco Rizzo's Partito Comunista. Rifondazione has 446 *circoli* (territorial branches) scattered all over Italy. They are grouped into 97 federations covering somewhat larger geographical areas - generally provinces, but sometimes cities or municipalities in areas where it is stronger.

In the run-up to the latest, 12th national congress in February, there were 97 federation congresses, in which members voted in person at the end of serious political discussion. 5,308 members attended one of these local debates, in which they chose between two motions - one proposed by the outgoing secretary, Maurizio Acerbo, and another by the previous secretary, Paolo Ferrero. Acerbo's motion obtained 2,689 votes and Ferrero's 2,619, according to the *Il Manifesto* report published on February 11 - and Acerbo was also re-elected as party secretary. Although Ferrero's minority still have reservations about the legitimacy of the vote, they agreed to accept it and remain in the party out of a sense of 'responsibility'. The danger of a split, which would have done massive damage, appears to have been averted, for the time being at least.

What is the essence of this fierce debate, which resulted in a change to the line that the party adopted after the August 2008 split at the Chianciano congress, when Ferrero's supporters managed to sabotage Nichi Vendola's plan to liquidate the party into a broader, non-communist formation? Vendola's supporters were forced to leave and form what was then called Left Ecology Freedom (Sinistra Ecologia Libertà - SEL). Whilst Vendola's followers did eventually return to the Italian parliament, Rifondazione has never done so.

Between 2008 and February 2025, Rifondazione's general line has been to attempt to create a 'third pole' in opposition to both the right and the neoliberal 'centre-left' (ie, successive Partito Democratico-led coalitions). In practice, this has involved building alliances at every election, in a bid to exceed the threshold for parliamentary representation (3%). Therefore Rifondazione has never stood under its own name in any general election since 2006.

Arguably, this tactic might have had some merit if the name under which it stood had been consistent from one election to another, giving it brand recognition. However, standing under different umbrellas in three successive general elections meant that less informed and committed voters may not always have grasped that the driving force behind all these electoral cartels was Rifondazione, especially since none of these labels included the word 'communist', and the hammer and sickle was never used as an electoral



Rifondazione Comunista: no brand recognition

symbol on the ballot paper.

Apart from the brand recognition problem, which is serious for a party without a parliamentary presence and the mainstream media presence that flows from this, there was another, more political one: namely that most of these projects involved an alliance with forces to Rifondazione's right - often left-populist outfits led by rather unreliable celebrities, who relished a figurehead role and sought to tone down the cartel's political programme. It is probably not accidental that the only time Rifondazione crossed the parliamentary threshold was in the 2014 European election, when its coalition with SEL and a few independents was called the 'Lista Tsipras'. Whilst this identification with the Greek left premier (2015-19) may have been naive, it meant Rifondazione was not beholden to any Italian celebrity.

Acerbo's justification for calling for a move away from the 'third pole' strategy is twofold. Firstly, the dominant force on the Italian right is now much *further* to the right - and much more determined to undermine the 1948 constitution born of the World War II resistance, as opposed to merely lowering taxes on the wealthy and cutting services and benefits to the poor (although, of course, the Meloni government has also done the latter, with some gusto). Secondly, the dismissal of the PD as a purely neoliberal and anti-working class party no longer makes sense, given Elly Schlein's leadership over the last two years, with its closer relationship with the CGIL union confederation and rejection of former prime minister Matteo Renzi's anti-union legacy.

Quite what Acerbo has in mind in terms of electoral strategy is not altogether clear. Ferrero and his supporters accuse Acerbo of trying to incorporate Rifondazione into the 'centre left'. Given that when Fausto Bertinotti adopted this strategy it destroyed Rifondazione as a mass party between 2006 and 2008, it seems more likely that what Acerbo may be considering is the sort of arrangement that the former PD culture minister, Dario Franceschini, recently proposed, with reference to Giuseppe Conte's Five Star Movement (M5S) and the small centrist parties of Matteo Renzi and Carlo Callenda: namely that each party stands separate lists for the proportional seats, but agrees a common candidate in 'first past the post' constituencies. This, after all, is more or less what Rifondazione did back in the 1994 and 96 elections.

Acerbo has tried to reassure his critics by stating that any choice of electoral strategy will be subject to a vote by all party members before

being implemented, so that there would still be the possibility of what is currently the minority gaining a majority on this particular issue. Acerbo has called his new line 'the Electric Turn', in what seems to be an unfortunate analogy with the career of Bob Dylan - older readers may remember that Dylan's disillusioned folkie fans yelled 'Judas' at him when he abandoned the acoustic guitar!

More to the point, Acerbo has described the new line as an expression of "democratic, libertarian and intersectionalist" communism - which some might see as a watering down of class politics. To be fair, his plan in the coming year seems to involve Rifondazione campaigning vigorously alongside the CGIL for a 'yes' vote in four referenda that would repeal various aspects of Renzi's Jobs Act, and campaigning alongside the neoliberal, but anti-racist, Piu Europa for a 'yes' vote in a referendum to change the qualification for requesting Italian citizenship from 10 to five years legal residency.

Given that Ferrero, in a letter to *Il Manifesto* published on February 13, challenged the accuracy of the account of the conclusion of the congress offered by the newspaper, it seems best to summarise some of the contents. Ferrero argues that 'No to war and military spending' is the key point in constructing political alliances. He proposes constructing a "popular coalition" against such war and military spending - "a political pole alternative to the supporters of war and Nato, like the PD".

He argues: "To defeat the fascists it is necessary to construct both social protagonism and a political alternative - not the electoral convergence with the neoliberal and warmongering anti-fascists who gave rise to popular consensus for the right". He goes on to state:

Secondly, the breaking of US imperialist dominance is the principal objective for those who want peace. The emergence of the Brics is not simply a manifestation of inter-capitalist contradictions, but also opens a space for our struggle for a multipolar and cooperative world of peace. The Brics are therefore a very positive development, to be sustained and enlarged, regardless of the judgement we make of every single component of this same alliance.

Despite the qualifications, this view of Ferrero's seems to risk substituting some rather dubious governments for the international workers' movement as the best brake on US imperialism ●

ACTION

Freedom for Palestine - no to ethnic cleansing

Saturday March 15, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Piccadilly, London W1 (Green Park end), march to Whitehall. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/national-palestine-demonstration.

Stop the racist hate march in Portsmouth

Saturday March 15, 12 noon: Counter-protest. Assemble Guildhall Square, Portsmouth PO1. Ukip leader Nick Tenconi is planning an anti-immigration march calling for mass deportations. Organised by Stand Up to Racism Portsmouth: www.facebook.com/events/1135610431674963.

How to stop the racist Reform UK

Saturday March 15, 2pm: North-west summit, Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1. Plenary followed by workshops. Organise to ensure that Reform UK and the far right do not set the political agenda. Tickets £5 (free). Organised by Stand Up to Racism Manchester: x.com/Manchester_SUTR/status/1899043582943645782.

Censoring Palestine

Monday March 17, 7.15pm: Film screening, Friends Meeting House, Hill Street, Coventry CV1. This new documentary reveals how speaking out on Palestine is being suppressed and criminalised. Admission free. Organised by Coventry Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/censoring-palestine-film-showing.

Perspectives on human origins

Tuesday March 18, 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: 'Primate mating systems and the evolution of language'. Speaker: Kit Opie. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/1247289629861060.

Homes for people, not profit

Wednesday March 19, 6pm: Protest, Southwark council office, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1. Taking the call for urgent action on housing to the full Southwark council meeting. Organised by Southwark Housing and Planning Emergency: www.ayleshamcommunityaction.co.uk/SHAPE.

Marx, the Crimean war and the Ottoman empire

Thursday March 20, 6.30pm: Online discussion in the series, 'Communist Culture Club'. Speaker: Geoff Barr. Organised by Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

Free Palestine! defend the right to protest!

Thursday March 20, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Chalkhill Community Centre, 113 Chalkhill Road, Wembley Park HA9. Defend the 70-plus arrested on January 18, defend the right to protest and demand that the repressive Public Order Act is repealed. Organised by Brent and Harrow Stop the War: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Ford Dagenham women

Thursday March 20, 7pm: Online lecture with professor Mary Davis. The Ford sewing machinists strike of 1968 was a landmark dispute in the fight for equal pay for women. Registration free. Organised by General Federation of Trade Unions: www.facebook.com/events/501087052496370.

Strengthening the employment rights bill

Saturday March 22, 11am to 3.45pm: Rally, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Union officials, academics and legal experts will debate improvements to the bill to ensure workers and trade unions are protected. Registration free. Organised by Campaign For Trade Union Freedom: www.tradeunionfreedom.co.uk.

Battle lines

Saturday March 22, 7pm: Banner Theatre performance, Theatre Porto, Whitby Hall, Ellesmere Port CH65. A celebration of the 40th anniversary of the miners' strike and many other working class battles up to today. Tickets £8 (£5 or £3). Organised by West Cheshire Trades Union Council: www.facebook.com/events/1040769624457561.

Stop Farage and Reform UK

Friday March 28, 6pm: Protest, Utilita Arena, Birmingham B1. 7pm: March to rally in Centenary Square. Farage is bringing toxic politics to Birmingham - stand up, speak out and fight back! Organised by Stand Up to Racism Birmingham: www.facebook.com/events/545776201959372.

We demand change

Saturday March 29, 11am to 5.30pm: Rally, central London, venue to be announced. Build a network of activists across campaigns and unions to turn the tide on despair. Registration £11.55 (£6.13). Organised by We Demand Change: wedemandchange.uk.

Renters unite!

Saturday March 29, 6.45pm: Book launch, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Author Jacob Stringer introduces *Renters unite: how tenant unions are fighting the housing crisis*, taking readers to the frontlines in fighting criminal landlords. Tickets £3 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: housmans.com/event/book-launch-renters-unite-by-jacob-stringer.

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.

FUSION

Getting down to details

Our first face-to-face meeting took place on March 8. The aim was to find out where we agreed and where we disagreed. **Mike Macnair** reports on Forging Communist Unity

We have met more than once online. But these meetings have been short, and online meetings in general flow less well and are less productive than when we are face-to-face. So on March 8 Manchester comrades came down to London for an all-day meeting of two delegates from the CPGB (Jack Conrad and myself), two from Talking About Socialism (Nick Wrack and Ed Potts), and two from the wing of the *Prometheus* editorial board which has agreed to participate in the talks (Cat Rylance and Archie Woodrow). Comrade Farzad Kamangar was present, not as a delegate, but having organised the room, and agreed to take minutes.

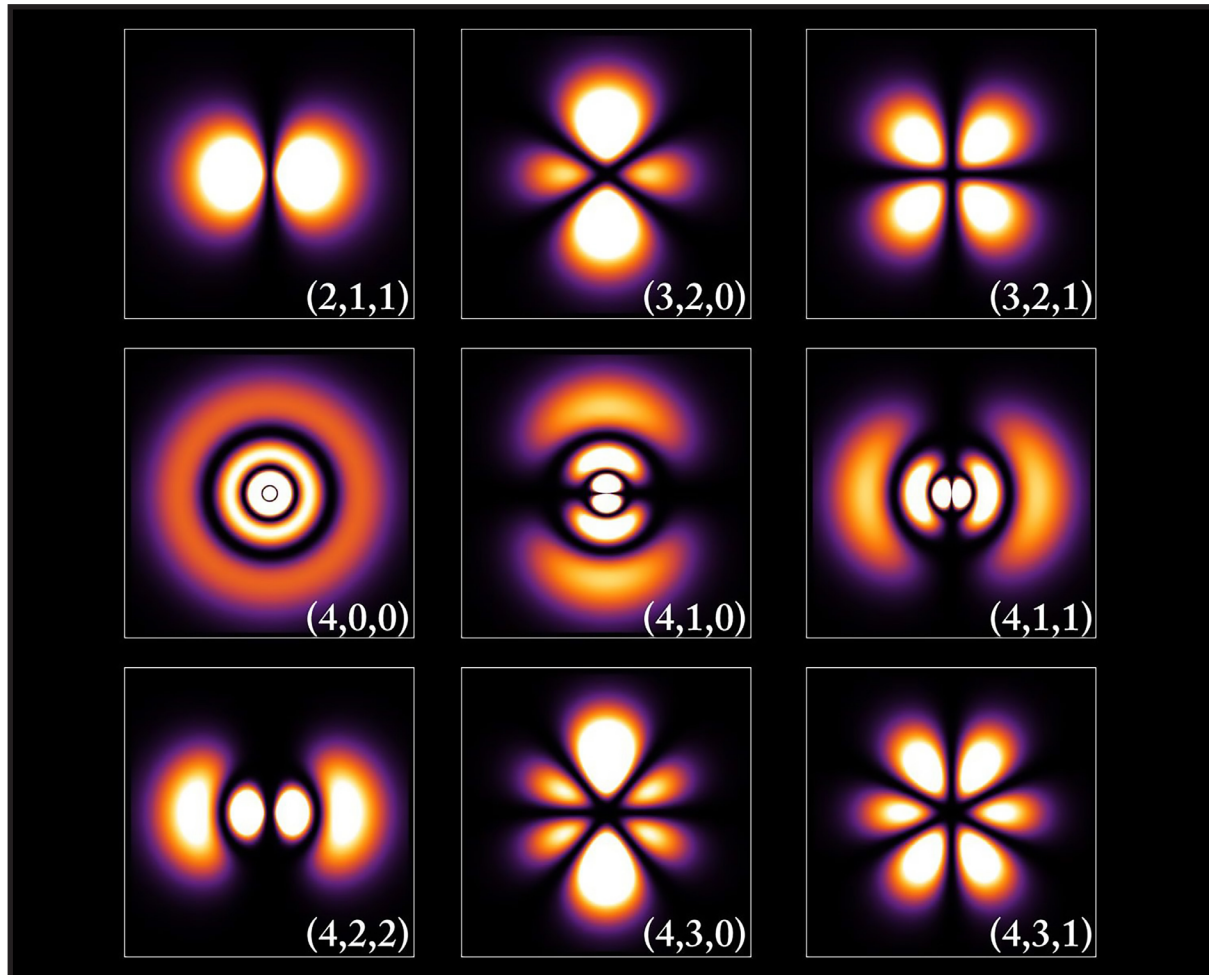
We began the day with a position paper from the 'pro-talks faction' of *Prometheus* (to give it a name for convenience), which had resulted from a meeting of theirs and had just been circulated. Comrade Rylance introduced the text. The *Prometheus* pro-talks faction agrees with TAS that the Forging Communist Unity process should develop its own programme, rather than attempting to amend the CPGB's *Draft programme*, though a unity conference might wind up considering competing drafts. It needed to be short and tightly focussed. FCU should also - but not in the programme - draft a strategy document about the next steps for a unified group, analogous to the discussions of the existing left in the CPGB's 1994 text.¹ On the TAS 'Heads of agreement', comrades from the *Prometheus* pro-talks faction do not agree with point xiv on the USSR, which is insufficiently nuanced. Comrade Archie added to this point: the question of a strategy document was important; the CPGB *Draft programme* is too much like that of a mass party; what we produce should be more abstract; for the same reason, point xiv on the USSR was too narrow.

This gave rise to a significant discussion, in which everyone participated. It is fairly clear that there is still a difference about the *nature* of the sort of programme we need: CPGB comrades still think, though others seem to disagree, that it needs to be a clearly maximum-minimum design and that, in the light of the 20th century, both the maximum and the minimum need more elaboration than was present in the *Erfurt programme* or the 1903 RSDLP programme. We also continue to think that the programme should *try* to chart a path to the revolution, rather than responding to the immediate needs of a small group. There is also a disagreement about the *present* need for a 'strategy document' - in this case one which divides the *Prometheus* pro-talks faction from both CPGB and TAS comrades; though we are agreed on the need to aim to win the existing organised left.

Principles

Most of our day was spent focussed on this 'programme question'. We started out with setting on one side the idea contained in TAS's document² that general principles include matters which have to be *agreed* for unity - as opposed to *accepted as the basis for common action*. We will come back to that issue later. However, we did start with looking at what we agreed to.

The reason for this is that,



Quantum: wave function of electron

where we are all in agreement, there is no immediate need for further discussion. Where there is disagreement, we might be able to clear it up quickly; or might need further discussion; or might end up with something which would have to be voted on in an actual fusion conference.

We took TAS's 'Heads of agreement' (paragraph 9, subparagraphs i-xvii) as the starting point for the sake of convenience. We agreed at the outset to look at the parallel principles in the CPGB's *Draft programme* together with them, but about three points in, when we reached our first disagreement, we got derailed from this practice (my individual fault, since I had proposed the method of looking at parallels, but did not keep bringing the meeting back to it.)

The TAS comrades have usefully summarised the actual decisions in their report of the meeting.³ It is enough here to say that we all agreed generally and without significant discussion to points i-ii, iv-vi, viii-ix, xi and xvi-xvii - that is, 10 of the 17 points. It is worth reporting a little further on the points where more needed to be said.

Point iii is: "This requires a fundamental break with capitalism." The following point iv is: "Our party does not aim to manage capitalism, but to abolish it." I argued that point iii is unclear and should be dropped. The issue, as it rapidly appeared in the discussion, is the difference between the CPGB and TAS, identified in earlier discussions, on the extent of a "transition period" between the overthrow of capitalist rule and communism, and the meaning of 'socialism' - which the CPGB uses (following the later Second International practice) for the transition period.

Related to this, for the CPGB the overthrow of capitalist rule is the overthrow of the capitalist *state* and the creation of "extreme democracy",

which then creates the conditions for a transition period - as comrade Conrad put it, "as short as possible, as long as necessary". We reject - as I said at one point in the discussion - the argument of Parvus in *der Staat, die Industrie und der Sozialismus* (1910) that the workers' movement should downgrade the question of political democracy in order to focus on 'socialisation' issues.

Terminological

I think comrades recognised that the *terminological* question is in itself not critical, but what lies behind it are real questions of practical politics. One is whether the political strength the working class would need to develop in order to *take* power would be so great that any period of transition would be so short that we would not need a minimum programme, or programmatic slogans in relation to the middle classes, at all. A second is the question of the USSR - which the *Prometheus* comrades had raised as a problem in relation to point xiv. Should we call the USSR and similar countries any form of "socialism"? CPGB has used "bureaucratic socialism" as an analogue to Marx's and Engels' use of "feudal socialism" in the *Communist manifesto*.

A related issue is how far it is possible for the working class to *take power* in a single country. I raised the point that continental-scale action was needed to avoid starvation by way of 'sanctions'-type siege warfare; but that this implied the involvement of subsisting peasant and artisan classes in continental Europe - again posing the transition period and the minimum programme. Comrade Wrack agreed with the need for continental scale; comrade Woodrow thought that there was more of a case for the Socialist Workers Party's view that national revolutions could not be simultaneous. It was clear that this issue needed further discussion.

On points v-vii, there was a discussion about the "ownership"

formula (the problem, in my view, is that "public ownership" is not "the collective ownership of the majority working class" without working class *democratic control* of the assets in question). What we agreed was a more limited change to point vii: "It requires the abolition of the exploitation of labour to make a profit" - which we agreed (as a maximum programme aim), but on the basis of amending the text to refer to control over the surplus product, rather than to "profit" *per se*. The point of this change is that the *Soviet bureaucracy* did not make profits, but did exclude the working class from control over the surplus product.

Point x is: "The working class in power will establish new forms of democracy at all levels of society, which will enable everyone to participate in the running of society." We had some discussion of this, since it is in my opinion at risk of committing to the fetishism of the soviet form, but in the end agreed it unamended.

Point xii, "Our party stands for the unity of the working class. We fight against all divisions that weaken that unity" gave rise to some discussion, because, while it is aimed against sectionalism, it can be read as rejecting open disagreements (and was so read at the 7th Congress of Comintern in 1935). It was not clear that there was an actual political difference on the issue, but we agreed that this point needed at least further discussion with a view to reformulation.

Point xiii - "We reject nationalism. There is no national road to communism" - also gave rise to substantive discussion. The second sentence was generally agreed, but in relation to the first sentence comrade Conrad made the point that we needed to distinguish the nationalism of the oppressed from the nationalism of the oppressor. Comrade Woodrow agreed - perhaps more strongly - with this, asserting the need for

willingness to create developmental regimes in the colonial world rather than wait for the imperialist working class to move. There was further discussion, but it was clear that this formulation was not, as yet, agreed.

Democracy

Point xiv - "Communism is democratic. We reject the idea that what existed in the former Soviet Union and similar states, or what exists today in China or North Korea, was or is in any way communist or a transition to communism. We oppose all forms of dictatorial rule" - had already been flagged by the *Prometheus* pro-talks faction as a point of difference. Comrade Conrad added two points: the first was that the *early* Soviet regime did indeed have an aspect of transition towards communism. The second was that the last sentence, "We oppose all forms of dictatorial rule", seemed to amount to a disavowal of Marx's and subsequent socialists' use of the idea of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", meaning the political rule of the working class over other classes in the transition to communism. Comrade Potts argued that the formulation was necessary to draw a clear line against the Soviet and similar bureaucratic regimes. Comrade Rylance made the point - which I think is correct - that even if we never use the expression, 'dictatorship of the proletariat', the political agents of capital will use it against us, and we have to be able to explain its true meaning. Again, there was further discussion, but it was clear that we did not yet have an agreed view on the issue.

Point xv is: "In the struggle to end the present system our party bases itself on the working class, the only force in society that has the size, strength and potential power to change the system." I made the point that this formulation is mistaken. It is not the *strength and power* of the working class which gives it the potential to change the system. (This is the mistaken idea of the general-strikists.) It is the fact that - being separated from the means of production - the working class is forced to cooperate in trade unions, coops, collectivist political parties, and so on - and hence *points towards* communism. We agreed a redraft in principle, but here there is still a difference with TAS's note, which is "Should be redrafted to make clear that the working class being the bearer of socialism is due to both its interest in doing so (as a result of being separated from the means of production), *as well as* its strength" (emphasis added).

We ended the day with a brief discussion of Communist University, currently planned for early August. The CPGB has agreed to invite TAS and *Prometheus* to co-organise this school, in a stronger sense than just sponsoring it - meaning the creation of a joint committee to discuss topics, invitations and so on. The TAS comrades agreed to this proposal; the *Prometheus* comrades need to take it back to their faction and to the full editorial board ●

Notes

1. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/75/supplement-party-non-ideology-and-faction.
2. talkingaboutsocialism.org/tas-contribution-to-the-forging-communist-unity-process-23-february.
3. talkingaboutsocialism.org/forging-communist-unity-in-person-report.

CHINA

Still riding high

Despite all the mainstream expectations, China has not sunk into recession. The reason, argues **Michael Roberts**, is the economic plan, which guides both state and private enterprises. But what can it do about those US tariffs?

The Chinese government is just completing its annual 'two sessions' or *lianghui*, where China's political elite approves the economic policy agenda for the coming year. The 'two sessions' refers to two major political gatherings: the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a political advisory committee; and the National People's Congress (NPC), China's top legislative body.

These are ostensibly not meetings of the Communist Party, but of the Chinese state. The consultative meeting is largely symbolic, with leading business and local leaders appearing for pre-arranged discussions. The real focus is the NPC, which officially decides economic policy (in reality, it merely approves what the leading CP elite has already decided in advance). With around two-thirds of its members belonging to the Communist Party, the NPC has never rejected a bill proposed by the party.

Premier Li Qiang presented the government work report, outlining key economic targets and strategies for the year ahead. This year's NPC was also monitoring the final year of the decade-long economic plan, 'Made in China 2025', which aimed at making the country self-reliant in key industrial sectors. 2025 is also the last year of the current (14th) five-year plan that state bodies and private industry are supposed to follow to meet economic objectives. The next plan (2026-30) will be outlined at next year's NPC.

How has China been doing in meeting the targets set in Made in China and the 14th five-year plan? Well, according to the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* (often a strong critic of China's success), 86% of the 250 targets set have been met or exceeded. Measured in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms, China's aggregate real gross domestic product surpassed that of the US back in 2018.

PPP and GDP

However, the PPP measure of GDP estimates the value of goods and services that can be purchased with dollars within China. If we measure real GDP in international market dollars, then China's GDP is still behind that of the US - but the gap is closing. It is closing because, although China's annual real GDP growth is no longer in double-digits, it is still growing nearly twice as fast as the US economy.

China was the only major economy that avoided a recession during the pandemic slump of 2020 and managed to grow by 5% last year, compared to the US, the fastest growing G7 economy, at 2.8%. Moreover, US real GDP grew by as much as 2.8% last year partly because net immigration raised the size of the workforce - more people, more output.¹ US real GDP growth per person was much less.

Ah, China's western critics say, but if you compare nominal GDP growth, which includes inflation, then US GDP rose 5.3%, while China's rose only 4.2%. So in nominal terms China's economy reached \$18.6 trillion in 2024, compared to \$29 trillion in the US, two-thirds below the US, compared



China's National People's Congress

to 75% in 2021. But this is a bogus comparison. The GDP gap in nominal terms widened partly because the dollar strengthened in world markets against the yuan and so boosted the US nominal GDP in dollar terms - mainly because US inflation was much higher than in China.

Many western mainstream economists argue that 'moderate' inflation is good for an economy. You see, if there is deflation (falling prices), then consumers may spend less on goods and services, and save their money in the hope that prices will fall further and so economic growth will slow. Sure, hyper- or accelerating inflation is bad news because people's living standards will dive, the argument goes. But what is good is 'moderate and steady' inflation for capitalist enterprises to give them room to raise prices to maintain profits.

This is another ludicrous argument to justify the inability of western monetary authorities to control price inflation.² In no way is inflation good for working people. As one recent visitor to China put it, "Yes, it was absolutely horrible while I was in China - I only had to pay \$13 for a meal for two people at a nice restaurant, \$2.30 for 30 large eggs and \$4 for a 30-minute taxi ride." Another commented: "Everyone in the west is enjoying the rising cost of living. It's a shame that the Chinese don't have the chance to enjoy this."

Growth

In reviewing China's economy for the 'two sessions', western economists bang on about the impending economic crisis in China from 'deflation', 'rising debt', 'property market collapse', 'under-consumption and over-capacity', etc. These supposed problems are not only lowering China's growth prospects, but could even cause a crash and an outright slump. These arguments have been bandied about for decades and I have discussed their (in)validity in numerous posts.³

But let us deal yet again with the argument that China's growth success

is totally dependent on investment in manufacturing for export and not on domestic consumption; and unless China reduces its investment to avoid 'overcapacity' and instead develops a western-style consumer economy, then it is destined for stagnation - so-called 'Japanification'.⁴

First, it is not true that China's economy is growing at the expense of household consumption. Private consumption growth in China has been much faster than in the major economies. That is because faster economic growth is driven by faster investment growth. I repeat from previous posts: investment leads consumption over time - not vice versa, as mainstream economists think (here the mainstream is even going against Keynes).

As for 'Japanification' - China is not stagnating like Japan. Take productivity growth. Even though China's growth in labour productivity has slowed in the last two decades, it is still more than four times higher than in the US and six times higher than in Japan.

Total factor productivity (TFP) is a measure of how efficiently labour and capital are used to generate output. According to the US Conference Board, China's TFP growth has been three times higher than in the US and six times higher than in Japan in the last decade or so.

Liu Qiao, dean of Peking University's Guanghua School of Management, reckons that China's average annual TFP growth has declined from 4% to 1.8% between 2010 and 2019. But, even based on this, TFP growth is still higher than the US - at 0.5% per year for the past two decades. If labour productivity growth stays at about 4%-5% a year and TFP growth stays around 2%-3% a year from hereon, then 5% real GDP growth is achievable over the rest of this decade and through the next five-year plan, even as the working population declines.

China has had the world's largest manufacturing sector by output for 15 years running, reaching \$5.58 trillion last year

and contributing 36% of GDP. By contrast, US manufacturing accounts for just 10% of GDP, or \$2.93 trillion. China's economy is now driven by technological investments - no longer by unproductive investment in real estate (what the Chinese economic strategists call the "new quality productive forces"). More electric vehicles are on the road in China than in the US, and Beijing's roll-out of 5G telecommunications networks has been much faster. Its home-grown airliner, the C919, is on the cusp of mass production and appears ready to enter a market currently dominated by Boeing and Airbus. The BeiDou satellite navigation system is on a par with that of the US Global Positioning System in coverage and precision.

Industrial robots

China also beats the US in industrial robot density, with 470 robots installed per 10,000 employees in 2023, compared with 295 in the US. It is also about to match the US in patents, with its global share rising from 4% in 2000 to 26% in 2023, while the US share dropped by more than 8%. And China's semiconductor production is one-quarter of global output, compared to 16% in the US and 7% in Europe.

Since 2012, the Chinese Academy of Engineering (CAE) has compiled rankings for nine major manufacturing economies - including China and the US - in terms of scale, quality, structural optimisation, innovation and sustainability. In 2012, China scored 89 points, lagging behind the US (156), Japan (126) and Germany (119). In 2023, however, while China was still in fourth place, it had significantly narrowed the gap; the US, Germany, Japan and China scored respectively 189, 136, 128 and 125. The US may still lead in new ideas, but China is leading in applying them effectively, as the Deep Seek AI story shows.⁵

At the NPC, the Chinese leaders set the 2025 GDP growth target at "around 5%", keeping the same pace as the prior year. Li Qiang announced

plans to boost domestic demand by expanding fiscal spending. The central government will increase borrowing to do so, with the official government deficit rising to 4% of GDP - the highest ratio in 30 years.

Also defence spending will rise by 7.2%, matching last year's growth. So the overall budget deficit will increase to near 10% of GDP. Regarding inflation, China is lowering its annual target to around 2% for the first time in over two decades. With wages rising at more than double that rate, average real incomes will continue to rise.

New challenge

Why has China succeeded in avoiding slumps including the great recession and during the pandemic? Why has it motored ahead with unprecedented growth rates in such a large economy, while other large so-called emerging economies like Brazil or even India have failed to close the gap with the major advanced capitalist economies?

It is because, although China has a large capitalist sector, mainly based in the consumer goods and services sectors, it also has the largest state sector in any major economy, covering finance and key manufacturing and industrial sectors, with a national plan guiding and directing both state enterprises and the private sector on where to invest and what to produce. Any slump in its private sector is compensated for by increased investment and production in the state sector - profit does not rule; social objectives do.

Now there is a new challenge for the Chinese economy. The government is gearing up for Donald Trump's trade war. Trump's increased tariffs on Chinese exports to the US and sanctions on Chinese technology are major threats to its growth targets. China is diversifying its trading partners, but the US is still China's largest export market (15%).

JPMorgan reckons that the contraction in China's exports to the US from Trump's tariffs will reduce GDP growth by 0.6 percentage points over 2025-27, with the majority of the impact being felt in 2026-27. As US companies look for domestic production to substitute for more costly imports, this could dampen China's GDP growth further over 2028-29.

China could combat the rise in the prices of its goods sold to the US by devaluing the yuan, but that could lead to an inflation shock. So instead the NPC is going for fiscal and monetary stimulus worth about 3% of GDP. It remains to be seen if that will boost domestic production and consumption enough to compensate for any GDP losses from trade ●

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thenextrecession.wordpress.com

Notes

1. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/03/13/us-economy-saved-by-immigrants.
2. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/08/01/the-fed-fails.
3. For example, thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/04/10/chinas-unfair-overcapacity; and thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2025/01/14/the-exceptional-economy.
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5. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2025/01/28/ai-going-deepseek.

IRAN

A century of illusions

Royalist fortunes hinge on Donald Trump, but also on promoting the personality cult of Reza Khan. **Yassamine Mather** looks at the rise and fall of a mountebank

Donald Trump signed an executive order on January 20 2025 suspending US foreign development aid for 90 days to reassess its alignment with his 'America First' agenda. The state department promptly froze most foreign aid programmes.

However, leaked documents from September 2024 suggest that US aid was deeply tied to efforts to engineer regime change in Iran. The documents, obtained by *The Grayzone* reveal a covert initiative led by Carl Gershman, former director of the National Endowment for Democracy, to form an Iran Freedom Coalition, comprising key opposition figures such as Reza Pahlavi, son of the former shah.¹ The NED, historically linked to US intelligence operations, has been involved in funding opposition movements globally under the guise of the promotion of democracy.

Trump's aid freeze disrupted this longstanding strategy, and the panicked response from some of those parading as human rights activists and defenders of press freedom suggests complete dependence on US financial support, raising questions about the true nature of these groups. As Trump's review continues, the various contenders of 'regime change from above' are witnessing nasty battles between royalists and the supporters of Mojahedin-e-Khalq over who will remain the 'favourite' group for regime change.

I have already written about MEK,² but this article deals with Iran's royalists, who unfortunately have made some progress in the last few years by presenting a completely distorted history of the Pahlavi era. Two TV stations, both paid by Zionists, have used 24/7 broadcasts of old film reels to create a level of nostalgia for the *ancien régime*. These mainly show the upper middle classes and the aristocracy enjoying a relaxed western lifestyle - one alien to the majority of the population in urban and rural areas who lived in poverty and destitution.

Of course, the abysmal failure of the Islamic Republic to live up to any of the slogans of the 1979 revolution has created a ready audience. The regime is widely hated, not only because of political repression, but runaway inflation, falling living standards and the harsh laws designed to ensure strict observance of Shia religious norms - an interference in the private lives of Iranians widely detested. Meanwhile, the gap between the rich and the poor is wider than before the revolution. It is therefore not surprising that some have illusions about the Pahlavi era and in particular Reza Shah (the ex-shah's father) as a 'moderniser'.

In many ways, given the number of memoirs and diaries of ministers and aides close to Mohammad Reza Shah, destroying any illusions about his character, it would not have been easy to present him as a hero of the nation. Notable among these books is the one written by former prime minister Asadollah Alam, *The shah and I: the confidential diary of Iran's Royal Court, 1969-1977*. It vividly depicts a daily routine of misogynist debauchery and plotting against close relatives. According to *The New York Times* review, Alam shows the ex-shah as a megalomaniac, with a foul temper and contempt for



Reza Shah in his Green Palace office in 1941

almost everyone apart from himself.³

That is why it is easier to create a myth about Reza Khan (later Reza Shah), the mountebank founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, and give him credit for modernisation and progress. So who was Reza Khan? How did he come to power? What did he do during his rule? And why did the Allies dismiss him unceremoniously during World War II?

Coup of 1921

The fall of the Qajar dynasty (1789-1925) was a result of political instability, foreign interference and internal corruption. By the early 20th century, the Qajars had lost much of their authority, with Iran suffering from economic decline and constant interventions by Russia and Britain. The dynasty officially ended in 1925, but its *effective* end came with the 1921 coup that brought Reza Khan to power.

Before talking about the coup of 1921, it is important to briefly summarise the plight of the Communist Party of Iran and its relations with Russia's new Soviet Republic.

Based on research by Cosroe Chakeri⁴ and others, we know that during the early 20th century Iranian

social democracy was divided into two factions. The left wing moved towards forming the CPI, while the right wing played a key role in establishing the Democratic Party of Iran. The DPI, which had some ties with Tehran's only known trade union at the time (printing workers), quickly declined due to the constitutionalist revolution's crisis and was dissolved by the 1921 pro-British coup, which also involved a certain Reza Khan.

Despite years of revolution and political upheaval, leftist groups failed to build strong grassroots organisations. Chakeri attributes this to their reliance on western organisational models, but another key issue was their belief that Iran needed a bourgeois revolution before socialist leadership could emerge. This theoretical position resurfaced soon after the CPI's formation, following the declaration of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran in the Gilan province.

Internal debates within the CPI led to a split between the 'national-revolutionary' faction and what was referred to as the 'pure communists'. The former supported alliances with landowners, if they were deemed useful against British imperialism,

but this approach distanced them from real class struggles and left them vulnerable to co-option. They also opposed anti-landlord demonstrations, further alienating the poor. Meanwhile, the 'pure communists' advocated Iran's 'sovietisation' by expelling the British and overthrowing the Qajar monarchy through a struggle against large landowners.

Soon after the October 1917 revolution, the Bolsheviks renounced tsarist-era arrangements with Britain, cancelled Iran's debts, and made a commitment of non-intervention in Iranian affairs. However, in May 1920, the Red Navy landed in Gilan - officially to target White Russian forces, but also to support the establishment of the SSR of Iran in collaboration with Mirza Kuchik Khan's Jangali movement. Despite ideological frictions, the SSRI played a crucial role in shaping Iran's leftist landscape, contributing to the formation of both the CPI and the Socialist Party of Iran.

Chakeri highlights land redistribution as the central issue for the Soviet Republic in Gilan. Delays in addressing this led to a coup by the communists and leftwing Jangalis. While this may

have been the only viable strategy to mobilise poor peasants and expand the revolution across Iran, internal divisions among the communists kept the situation unstable, ultimately causing the revolutionary coalition to collapse. Chakeri attributes much of the failure to harmful Russian interference, allegedly directed by Stalin. Regardless of who was most responsible, the Jangali movement was crushed in 1921, paving the way for Iran's shift toward military dictatorship.

In many ways, early Soviet policy toward Iran reflected the broader contradictions within the Soviet state - caught between revolutionary ideals and the pragmatic need to secure the survival of the world's first socialist regime. By 1921, leftist groups in Iran had been defeated and demoralised, leaving them with little political influence.⁵

The coup of 1921 was not aimed at the Qajar monarchy itself, but at the cabinet of Sepahbod Azam Fath-Allah-e Akbar and the oligarchy of landowners and bureaucratic officials dominating the regime. It was orchestrated by Sayyed Zia-al-Din Tabatabai and Colonel Reza Khan Mir Panj - later known as Reza Shah Pahlavi.

Sayyed Zia-al-Din - a young reformist journalist sympathetic to Alexander Kerensky's ideals - enjoyed the trust of British military and diplomatic personnel in Tehran and maintained semi-official government ties. Meanwhile, Reza Khan, a Cossack officer of modest origins,⁶ had risen through military prowess and was chosen by Major General Edmund Ironside, head of Norper (North Persia) Force, to lead the reorganised Cossack unit near Qazvin under Lieutenant Colonel Henry Smyth. Also involved was Brigadier General Ahmad Aqa (Amir-Ahmadi), a senior Cossack officer who fought alongside Reza Khan in Gilan.

Britain's role

During the Constitutional Revolution and World War I, provincial leaders and foreign powers had gained influence in Persia, while the Qajar state lacked the resources to assert sovereignty. The 1919 Anglo-Persian agreement aimed to strengthen the central government under British tutelage, but its implementation faced strong opposition, and Russian intervention in the north created instability. Many, including British officials, feared a Bolshevik-backed attack on Tehran after British troop withdrawal and sought preventive measures. Others hoped the pending Perso-Soviet treaty would mitigate the threat.

It was during this period of uncertainty that on February 18 1921 2,200 Cossacks and 100 gendarmes, led by Reza Khan, marched from Qazvin to Tehran, ignoring royal orders to return to barracks. Near Tehran, Reza Khan informed the cabinet, the shah and the British legation that the Cossacks aimed to install a strong government to pre-empt a Bolshevik assault. He pledged allegiance to the shah, but accused the ruling elite of ruining the country. The nearly bloodless capture of Tehran on February 21 sparked debate over whether the Tehran government, advised by the British legation, chose not to resist or if its soldiers refused to fight.

Post-coup, many political activists and oligarchs were arrested to prevent opposition and extract funds. Martial law was imposed: gatherings banned, the press suspended, government departments reorganised, and bars, gambling clubs, and theatres closed. Military governors replaced uncooperative provincial leaders. The shah appointed Zia-al-Din as prime minister with full powers and confirmed Reza Khan as Sardar-e Sepah (army commander). Zia-al-Din's cabinet, although considered 'honest', was largely inexperienced.

Zia-al-Din's reform programme prioritised a military build-up and included abrogating the Anglo-Russian Treaty and signing the Perso-Soviet treaty. While popular among reformers and common people, many observers, including foreigners, suspected British involvement in the coup and policy formulation. The coup was seen as an attempt to enforce the Anglo-Russian agreement's spirit, with British financial and logistical support in Qazvin cited as crucial (Cossacks even boasted of British backing). Zia-al-Din sought British aid for reforms, but the foreign office was unresponsive. His failure to build a strong base led to his cabinet's collapse within three months, leaving Reza Khan in full control.

Details of the coup's planning remain unclear. Zia-al-Din and Reza Khan each later claimed sole credit, though both played key roles. Both were concerned about Persia's fate and what they considered the "Bolshevik threat". Zia-al-Din was busy drafting proposals to counter this "threat".

Despite Zia-al-Din's claims that the British were unaware of the coup, British military involvement is evident. Accounts denying their role lack any substantiation. British concerns over Bolshevik influence in Tehran and the military led Smyth to push for using troops based in Qazvin against opposition forces. The British minister in Tehran, Herman Norman, approved a plan to replace Tehran's Cossacks with Reza Khan's men from Qazvin. The shah and prime minister likely agreed, hoping to strengthen the government. Lieutenant-Colonels Smyth and WG Grey later admitted their involvement in the coup. Ironside, though not directly involved, had supported the coup led by Reza Khan.

The British Indian government encouraged the coup, aligning with its opposition to the 1919 Anglo-Persian agreement, which it saw as 'harmful to regional interests'. Ardeshir-Ji Reporter, India's chief adviser in Tehran, supported a strong government and had had ties to Reza Khan since 1917, claiming to have introduced him to Ironside.

In July 1921, nearly all remaining Red Army soldiers stationed in the northern Iranian province of Gilan crossed the Caspian Sea to return to Soviet territory. This retreat marked the definitive end of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran - a revolutionary enclave that collapsed due to ideological rifts between its Bolshevik and nationalist factions. The withdrawal also signalled the normalisation of Soviet-Iranian relations and, more abstractly, the decline of the fervour for global revolution and Soviet expansion southward.

In the following years, the Soviet People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs (NKID) not only fostered cooperation with Reza Khan's government, but also turned against the nascent Iranian left, except when it aligned with Soviet interests against British influence, tribal forces or the clergy. This

shift marked a new era of state-to-state relations, with the Soviets leveraging their partnership to secure economic agreements and counter British ambitions in Iranian oil.

Reza Shah's rule

As for Reza Khan (later Reza Shah), he was very much a product of British imperialism, as were many of the policies he pursued during his reign:

■ Suppression of political freedom: Reza Shah's regime was marked by authoritarianism, which stifled political dissent. Leftist movements, including socialist, communist and trade unionist organisations, faced systematic repression. His government dismantled worker-led movements and socialist groups, imprisoning or executing their leaders.

The suppression of independent trade unions denied workers the ability to negotiate better wages and conditions, enabling industrial elites and foreign investors, including the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later British Petroleum) to superexploit Iranian labour.

■ Modernisation at the expense of the working class and peasantry: In essence, while modernisation was pursued, it came with severe political repression, particularly targeting socialist and communist ideologies, which were gaining popularity among industrial workers and students.

Reza Shah's modernisation initiatives - such as legal and educational reforms, infrastructure development and industrial expansion - were primarily designed to strengthen the central state and military rather than improve the lives of ordinary Iranians.

■ Agricultural reforms and the peasantry: Reza Shah sought to weaken large feudal landlords by nationalising some estates, but much of the land was redistributed to his political and military allies rather than poor peasants. Peasants, hoping for genuine land reform, remained dependent on landlords or were forced into urban slums as cheap factory labour.

■ Industrialisation without worker protection: While industrialisation was promoted, factory workers were denied the right to organise or demand better wages and conditions. Rapid urbanisation led to expanding slums, increased poverty and exploitation without any government support for workers.

His modernisation, hailed now as 'progressive', was elitist and exploitative, benefiting the ruling class, bureaucrats and military, while ignoring the needs of workers and peasants. Reza Shah's approach subjugated the working masses under a new capitalist elite.

■ Plundering Iran's historical and cultural treasures: In 1931, Reza Shah permitted foreign archaeologists to excavate Persepolis, the ancient capital of the Achaemenid empire established by Darius the Great in the 6th century BCE. His government turned a blind eye, as these archaeologists removed countless priceless artefacts from the country.

■ Foreign economic dependence and oil concessions: A major critique of Reza Shah's rule was his handling of Iran's oil resources. Despite attempts to renegotiate oil concessions with the British, he failed to secure full control.

The Anglo-Persian Oil Company retained its grip over Iran's oilfields, with revenues disproportionately benefiting the British government rather than the Iranian people. The British significantly boosted oil production, rising from approximately 5 million tons (equivalent to 37 million barrels) in 1932 to 10 million tons (over 74 million barrels) in 1938. However,

only a small fraction of the revenue reached the treasury in Tehran, with oil revenues accounting for just 10% of the national budget.

■ Lack of national economic independence: Reza Shah merely adjusted the terms of exploitation, leaving Iran's economy dependent on foreign capital and resource extraction.

■ Growing discontent: Many nationalist and leftwing activists viewed Reza Shah's failure to nationalise oil as a betrayal of national sovereignty, perpetuating western exploitation. He confronted opposition from the tribes in Lorestan with brute force, with the army killing large numbers,

■ Forced cultural and social reforms: While Reza Shah introduced western-style legal and educational reforms, his approach was coercive and dismissive of grassroots cultural change.

■ Kashf-e Hijab (Mandatory unveiling of women): Though banning the veil was framed as progressive, leftist and feminist, critics view it as an authoritarian imposition rather than a women-led movement. Many working class and rural women, for whom veiling was a personal and traditional practice, saw this as forced westernisation rather than liberation. It also became a class issue, as middle class and upper class women used the term '*chadori*' as an insult against women who continued wearing the *chador* (the traditional long hijab). As we know, the backlash came decades later, when the Islamic Republic took power.

■ Education reforms favouring the elite: While secular education expanded, it primarily benefited urban elites, leaving rural populations and the children of workers and peasants with limited access, perpetuating social inequality.

■ State-controlled secularism: The weakening of religious courts improved some legal aspects (eg, women's rights). However, Reza Shah's secularisation was authoritarian, aimed at centralising power rather than fostering a democratic society. Social progress requires grassroots mobilisation and worker empowerment, not top-down decrees by an autocratic ruler.

■ Capitulation: Confronted with widespread anti-British protests and striving to project greater independence, he demanded that foreign advisors be directly employed by the government to ensure they were accountable to the local authorities rather than foreign powers. As part of his broader campaign to reduce foreign influence, he abolished the 19th-century capitulations granted to Europeans in 1928. These capitulations allowed Europeans to be tried under their consular courts instead of the Iranian legal system. He also transferred the authority to print money from the British Imperial Bank to the National Bank of Iran (Bank Melli Iran), shifted the administration of the telegraph system from the Indo-European Telegraph Company to the Iranian government, and ended the collection of customs by Belgian officials. He imposed restrictions on foreigners, barring them from running schools, owning land or travelling in the provinces without police authorisation (even though such authorisation was rarely denied).

Nazi Germany

Another key critique is Reza Shah's growing ties with Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Leftist historians argue that his trade with Germany was driven by authoritarian and militaristic ambitions rather than a genuine pursuit of economic independence. However, there is no reason to believe he held actual fascist views.

But Reza Shah's alignment with Nazi Germany made Iran vulnerable to Allied invasion during World War II, as they sought control of Iranian oil and supply routes. In August 1941, two Allied powers - Britain and the Soviet Union - launched a massive air, land and naval invasion of neutral Iran without a declaration of war. By late August, the Iranian military was in disarray, with the Allies controlling the skies and large portions of the country. Major cities like Tehran faced repeated air raids and, despite light casualties, Soviet leaflets warned of impending destruction, causing panic.

Food and water shortages worsened, and soldiers fled, fearing execution by Soviet forces. The royal family, except the shah and crown prince, fled to Isfahan, as the army Reza Shah had built collapsed. Many commanders acted incompetently or sympathised with the British, sabotaging resistance efforts. When Reza Shah discovered generals discussing surrender, he publicly humiliated and stripped the armed forces chief of his rank, threatening to execute him.

Reza Shah replaced pro-British prime minister Ali Mansur with Mohammad Ali Foroughi and ordered the military to cease resistance. Foroughi, resentful of the shah, negotiated with the Allies, implying Iran desired liberation from Reza Shah's rule. The Allies demanded the expulsion of German nationals and the closure of their legations, but Reza Shah secretly helped Germans to escape. In response, the Red Army advanced on Tehran, prompting mass evacuations. Reza Shah abdicated on September 17 1941, and the Allies, unwilling to restore the Qajar dynasty, installed Crown Prince Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as the new shah.

The invasion had been driven by Reza Shah's refusal to expel Germans and grant the Allies use of Iran's railway, which was strategically vital for the war effort - Winston Churchill later called Iran the 'Bridge of Victory'. Reza Shah had been forced to abdicate (marking the beginning of his son's reign). His crackdown on socialist and communist groups, combined with his trade relations with fascist regimes, reflected reactionary, anti-left policies - very much appreciated by Nazi Germany.

Reza Shah's reign was not about genuine 'modernisation', but a militarised capitalist project that prioritised state power, industrial elites and foreign interests, while systematically oppressing workers, peasants and political opponents. His reforms, though some were seemingly 'progressive', were exclusionary, failing to benefit the majority of Iran's population ●

Notes

1. thegrayzone.com/tag/carl-gershman.
2. See 'Mek's strange journey' *Weekly Worker* July 6 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1450/meks-strange-journey.
3. *The New York Times* April 26 1992: www.nytimes.com/1992/04/26/books/the-shah-was-in-a-foul-mood.html.
4. See, for example, C Chakeri *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920-21* Pittsburgh PA 1995.
5. *Ibid* pp38-40.
6. See www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cossack-brigade.

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**SWP acts as
auxiliaries
for bourgeois
mainstream**

Big trouble in Little England

Though riding high in the polls, Reform UK has been plunged into recriminations. Paul Demarty assesses the party's prospects after the Rupert Lowe affair

You would think it was a good time to be a supporter of Reform UK.

Reform is riding high in the polls - consistently neck-and-neck with the Tories and Labour. The Tories are still bruised from their rout last summer, with the new leadership largely anonymous. It may irk a little that the electoral system punished Reform so badly, but even that, I think, is a blessing. It has enough MPs to be unignorable, but not enough to have any actual responsibilities, which means that Nigel Farage can effectively continue his real career as a rightwing media personality.

Yet all is not well in the Reform camp. Farage is now in open conflict with one of his parliamentary colleagues, Rupert Lowe, the oh-so-honourable member for Great Yarmouth. Over the weekend, Reform initiated disciplinary proceedings against Lowe for alleged bullying of female members of staff (he strenuously denies all such allegations, of course). Meanwhile, Farage and his cronies - Lee Anderson and Richard Tice among them - reject *any* implication that this is in any way due to a power struggle between the two men.

Leaving aside the disciplinary allegations, it is scarcely credible that Farage and co are acting purely out of a high-minded concern for standards in public office, never mind any sensitivity to workplace bullying. The basic outline of the dispute has been visible for a while. Lowe has set himself up on the hard right of Reform, openly and repeatedly demanding mass deportations of migrants, while Farage is more cautious. Problems really began when a certain Elon Musk seemed to disagree with that caution, and clumsily attempted to initiate a coup, with Lowe as his favoured alternative. Shortly before the disciplinary action commenced, Lowe made pointed comments to the *Daily Mail* about Reform's over-dependence on its "messiah", Farage.

Skullduggery

All told, this looks very much like a political dispute being conducted via bureaucratic means; it is hard to stifle a laugh, given how familiar this sort of skullduggery is to us on the left these days. If it is good enough for the Socialist Workers Party, apparently it is good enough for Nigel. Explaining the matter to reporters from *The Daily Telegraph* - well-connected in Reform circles - Farage could point to Lowe's unpredictability. In one particular incident, parliamentary questioning of the transport minister ended in a near-altercation. As Farage put it,

Lowe ... asked Mike Kane, the transport minister, a question about the MV Ruby - a damaged cargo ship which had docked in his constituency, while carrying hundreds of tonnes of the potentially explosive fertiliser, ammonium nitrate. Mr Lowe was



Rupert Lowe (far right) with (left to right) James McMurdock, Richard Tice and Nigel Farage

unhappy with the answer that he received from Mr Kane and, at the end of the debate, he crossed the floor to make his feelings known. A confrontation ensued. Heated language was heard. The minister's shoulder was pushed. In the end, the Serjeant at Arms had to step in to calm things down between the two parliamentarians.¹

While he is undoubtedly the pre-eminent leader of the British far right in this era, Farage is a cannier figure than he may first appear. The periodic stories of stone-cold nutters showing up in his various parties have been used to make him look foolish, but he did, after all, get rid of them in general. His game was, for many years, triangulating between the Tory leadership and their rabid base - appeals to disaffected Labour voters came and went, but were largely *pro forma*. His game was to capture the energy of these largely older, largely suburban *enragés* without getting tumbled into the outer darkness of the British National Party, English Defence League and friends. He was a populist rebel, but a *respectable* populist rebel.

It is very noticeable that his departure from the Ukip saw the latter immediately collapse into extremely-online fringe rightism, with second place on the South West England list in the 2019 Euro elections being taken by someone best known as 'Sargon of Akkad' (Carl Benjamin to his mum). Farage has always kept a polite distance from such ranters. His overall project would seem to be to build up an organisation so threatening to the Tories that the latter will be compelled to seek terms with him. It has never looked more likely than it does now.

After the Brexit-powered 'red wall' landslide victory for Boris Johnson in 2019, things changed a little in his approach. When the Tories inevitably betrayed their new supporters, these votes would be in play again, and in no way guaranteed to flood immediately back into Labour. Reform has downplayed the rigorous Thatcherism that is, in the end, Farage's true north star. But he

cannot, for exactly that reason, offer them some Blue Labour/Red Tory Keynesian hybrid, and Brexit is not much use, since it has now taken place; he is pushed more and more into immigration scaremongering. That makes his dance with the online-right ranters all the more delicate, and renders him vulnerable to the whims of an Elon Musk.

Tricky

The Lowe affair is a tricky matter for him. It is the first real bump in the road for Reform, with the result surely being the permanent loss of one of his handful of MPs. Lowe will no doubt find some formal organisation to back him, from the fissile post-Ukip swamp or suchlike, and be defeated next time out. Four Reform MPs remain, including Farage. To lose one, as Oscar Wilde said, may be regarded as misfortune; to lose two begins to look like carelessness. A period of calm is surely necessary for Reform to regain its air of menace.

Can Farage deliver it? That is not guaranteed. His various political vehicles have been prone to fallings-out and squabbles. Reform - like the Brexit Party before it - is still formally structured as a limited company. The directors are largely allies of Farage. It is his show. This works up to a point, since he has succeeded in becoming a prominent media-political personality. For one of the *Telegraph's* sources, part of the problem for Lowe is that he was starting to obtain an independent profile of his own, threatening Farage's ability to impose an absolute message discipline.

As Henry Hill, an editor at *ConservativeHome*, wrote for *Unherd*, this presents problems for Reform as a long-term project. After all, Farage will not be around for ever - not with the quantity of ale he drinks, at any rate: "To have any hope of seriously challenging the Tories in the medium term, let alone replacing them outright, Reform needs to grow bigger than its leader. A thousand tall poppies need to bloom, but they can only do that if Farage learns to let them."²

None of that matters, of course, if Reform is *not* a long-term project; and it certainly is not if the overall goal is not replacement, but realignment, of the Tories. There is good sense in taking the latter course. Nothing demonstrates it quite like Reform's performance in last year's election; it won a lot of votes, but almost all from the Tories, and in so doing handed a huge number of marginal constituencies - some very newly marginal - to Labour and the Liberal Democrats, by rendering the Tory candidates uncompetitive. Reform UK got roughly the same number of votes as the Lib Dems, but only five seats, compared to the Lib Dems' 72. Electoral reform seems as far away as ever, so the way forward is very plausibly back into a new-model Faragist Tory party.

Should such a fusion be achieved, Farage would be a very competitive leadership candidate at the next time of asking, to say the least. There is a great deal of huffing about how unseriously he takes his job as an MP, but that did not do Boris Johnson any harm. The reality is that we have a quasi-presidential system of government, which via the royal prerogative gives considerable discretion to the prime minister; when people trot out to vote in a general election, they do not usually do so on the basis of localism, but to get in the candidate who supports the government they want to see in power. This rewards people who play to the media, be it the 'traditional' or internet media. Farage is incontestably superior, on this point, to all the candidates in the last Tory leadership poll put together.

Riding the wave

The likelihood of such a scenario seems, on the surface, to be a matter of British contingencies - the historic weakness of the Tories after the endless disasters of the last parliament, the bitterness which the Brexit referendum and protracted negotiations left in their wake, the very particular political neuroses of our petty bourgeoisie. Yet, having mentioned Musk and Trump, we cannot leave things there.

Britain is, after all, merely one minor stop on the global victory tour of the revanchist right. The German *Brandmauer*³ holds for now, but keeping *Alternativ für Deutschland* at bay seems like a losing proposition in the long term. Marine le Pen inches closer to the Elysée. Giorgia Meloni is happily running Italy. That is just western Europe - add in Trump, Modi, Netanyahu, Putin and all the rest, many of whom have been in power for years, and the picture is unmistakable.

The previous regime of pervasive official liberalism - what the rightwing populists call 'globalism' - in the end lasted roughly from 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, to 2008, which saw the global financial crash, the curdling of the global war on terror into a series of intractable quagmires, and the first piece of military resistance on Russia's part to the expansion of Nato, in the South Ossetia war. The governments of Barack Obama and Joe Biden failed to restore American poise on any of these matters, with the result that the US state apparatus was entirely incapable of resisting the rise of Trump.

Now his government plainly backs the far right in countries where it has yet to take power; whether this turns into an enduring global policy - like the shift in the 1970s and 1980s from support for rightwing social democracy to neoliberal conservatism - remains to be seen. But Trump, Musk and friends are by all appearances riding the wave of history.

Paralysed left

The left has largely been paralysed in the face of these developments by its incurable addiction to popular frontism. In the name of fighting back against the right, innumerable political compromises have been made - up to and including open social-imperialism with respect to the Ukraine war, sold to progressive-minded people as a noble crusade against the world headquarters of this wave of reaction. On a smaller scale, British leftists - especially the SWP - have expended no end of energy on borderline-apolitical campaigns against the far right, including Farage's various outfits, that have left them completely unable to meaningfully distinguish themselves from the increasingly shrill official liberalism of the times.

By such means, we have hooked ourselves onto a dying political trend. The reactionary wave was never a great conspiracy of Putin against the liberal west: the call was coming from inside the house. Until we learn the lessons, expect that Farage will have many successes ahead of him - regardless of the fate of Rupert Lowe.

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Notes

1. www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2025/03/08/inside-battle-engulfing-reform-nigel-farage-rupert-lowe.
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SUPPLEMENT

TRUMP GREENLIGHTS ETHNIC CLEANSING

As Zionists triumphantly talk of Palestine being on the ‘threshold of the gates of hell’ and ‘absolute victory’, **Jack Conrad** presents the communist strategy for winning the Israeli-Jewish working class

Israel appears set on territorial expansion on four fronts: Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. In Lebanon and Syria the pattern follows the classic ‘defensive imperialism’ of ‘buffer zones’. In the case of southern Syria the new ‘buffer zone’ is there to defend the already annexed Golan Heights ‘buffer zone’ (seized in 1967).

However, when it comes to the West Bank and Gaza, the main drive is ideological, not military. Zionism as a settler-colonial project is at the very least committed to incorporating, in its entirety, mandate Palestine. On the West Bank, Israel has already displaced around 40,000 and killed around 1,000 Palestinians during the still ongoing Operation Iron Wall. Meantime, Gaza stands on the edge of genocide - what with supplies of food, water, medicine and electricity repeatedly being cut off - and/or ethnic cleansing, ie, a second nakba.

Bezalel Smotrich, finance minister and leader of the far-right Religious Zionism Party, triumphantly describes the situation as being the “threshold of the gates of hell”. “Now”, he expectantly adds, “we need to open those gates as quickly and lethally as possible on the cruel enemy, until absolute victory.”¹ No wonder there have been calls for the International Criminal Court to issue an arrest warrant on him too ... along with the one already in place on Benjamin Netanyahu.

Strangely, given the 64,000 death toll² and the comprehensive devastation of Gaza, there are those panglossians who claim that Israel “cannot win” in Gaza, that Israel is “unequivocally losing” its war in Gaza, or that Israel has already “lost in Gaza”.³ All true ... if Israel’s war aims were really about destroying Hamas militarily and bringing home all war captives (dead and alive). However, that was never the intention.

Netanyahu is many things, but he is no fool. His war aims were never about destroying Hamas, not even militarily. Its social roots are far too deep for that. Certainly the war captives are little more than a nuisance for Netanyahu, when it comes to Israeli domestic politics. He knows it and so do the tens of thousands of relatives, friends and supporters, who have time and again demonstrated in Tel Aviv’s Hostage Square.

If you really want the war captives back from the tunnels, tents and bomb shelters of Gaza, then direct negotiations with Hamas would be an absolute priority. And destroying Hamas and negotiating with Hamas are, to put it mildly, mutually incompatible.

No, the *real* war aim of Netanyahu, his war cabinet and his Likud-led coalition is to uproot the entire Palestinian population in Gaza in what is yet another carefully calculated step towards realising the Zionist dream of a Greater Israel. When the opportunity arises, that means expelling as many Palestinians



as possible - a second nakba - the obvious route being a forced exodus into Egypt’s Sinai. Israel, of course, still controls the Philadelphi Corridor ... otherwise known, in Israel, as the Philadelphi Route.

And, whereas Joe Biden and his administration was unwilling to give Israel the green light - because of Arab-American voters, because of the fear of destabilising the Egyptian and Jordanian regimes, because of worldwide democratic opinion - Donald Trump is gung-ho.

His ‘Riviera plan’, unveiled at a White House press conference on February 4, alongside a beaming Netanyahu, proposes that the US would “take over” and “own” Gaza. There has been some confusion about whether or

In return for imperial sponsorship Israel acts as a US “strategic asset” in the Middle East - a region which, it just so happens, possesses something like 50% of the world’s readily accessible oil reserves

not US troops might be involved. The same goes for US tax dollars. But what is crystal-clear is that the Gazan population would be removed in its entirety before redevelopment work begins ... and they will never return, because, in Trump’s words, “they’re going to have much better housing ... a permanent place for them”.⁴

Bizarrely, Trump shared an AI-generated video on his Truth Social page, showing a ghastly, glitzy, garish ‘Trump Gaza’, featuring Dubai-style skyscrapers, golden Trump statues, bearded belly dancers, and Trump himself lounging in the sun alongside Netanyahu. All set to upbeat music and these lyrics: “Donald’s coming to set you free, bringing the light for all to see. No more tunnels, no more fear: Trump

Gaza’s finally here.”

Trump’s plan has been warmly welcomed across the board by Zionist opinion in Israel, especially by the right and far right. Why? Because it has nothing, absolutely nothing, to do with the US stationing troops, nothing to do with a US “takeover”. No, what is being welcomed is the green light to the forcible removal of the 2.1 million Gazan population ... and an *Israeli* “takeover”. What applies to Gaza applies to the West Bank too. Israel wants to push, drive, stampede its 3.4 million Palestinian population over the other side of the Jordan river.

Seen in this light, while it is true that Israel has not achieved its *real* war aims yet, it stands on the “threshold” of achieving them. A joint Israeli-US strike against Iran’s nuclear sites would provide the perfect cover (a “likely” prospect “this year”, according to *The Telegraph*⁵).

True, a second nakba risks the collapse of the Egyptian and Jordanian regimes: their peace treaties with Israel would certainly be “thrown into the abyss”.⁶ But Israel cares little about that. Perhaps the same goes for the Trump administration ... we shall see.

October 7

The part-desperate, part-audacious Operation al-Aqsa Flood prison break on October 7 2023, carried out by Hamas and other sections of the Joint Room resistance movement, caught the Israeli high command altogether unprepared. A “complete failure” now openly acknowledged by its military.⁷

Not surprisingly there has been speculation that Netanyahu and his cronies were in some way “deliberately” complicit in allowing the whole thing to happen.⁸ It was, after all, a year in preparation. Yet warnings were consistently ignored. Hamas military commanders were themselves surprised by the ability of their al-Qassam fighters to go way beyond what had been originally planned as a suicide operation. Expectations were of something like an 80% casualty rate. Military targets, Israel Defence Forces outposts, police stations, etc thereby gave way to what Hamas itself calls “some faults” in the operation: the totally pointless killing of innocent civilians ... and baseless stories of beheading babies and mass rapes.⁹

October 7 did, though, provide the political excuse needed for the IDF to pulverise its way into Gaza (and upping settler terrorism in the West Bank). True, Israeli public opinion has subsequently become deeply divided between what we might call the ‘peace party’ and the ‘war party’. Nonetheless, the war party commands a Knesset majority and Netanyahu himself has every reason to keep the war going on and on ... after all, not only does he want to keep his coalition together and stay out of jail. He wants a Greater Israel.

Zionists typically claim that Jews have a right to the whole

SUPPLEMENT

of mandate Palestine either because of the approval of the Balfour declaration by the League of Nations in July 1922 or Yahweh’s promise to Abraham in *Genesis*. True, there are profound differences over the constitutional set-up in this Greater Israel. Liberal, or General, Zionism says it is committed to market capitalism, secularism, democratic values and the rule of law (which can, of course, see unelected judges overrule Knesset votes). However, there are those - ie, the religious Zionists - who envisage Greater Israel as a theocracy. Fringe elements even want Jerusalem’s al-Aqsa mosque demolished and replaced by a Third Temple - the prelude for the second coming of Jesus for messianic Christians. While secular Jews are viewed as heretics, there is a call for non-Jews, the Children of Noah (*Bnei Noach*), to observe god’s laws and support his chosen people - perhaps a future source for urgently needed new settlers.¹⁰

Some religious Zionists even hanker after a *greater* Greater Israel - based on various biblical passages: *Genesis*, *Numbers*, *Ezekiel*. At its largest extent their Eretz Israel stretches from the Nile to the Euphrates.¹¹ Of course, any such Israel would come with a poisoned chalice: an oppressed Arab *supermajority*. The Zionist conquistadors would have to permanently deny them elementary rights. The newly acquired Arab population would be far too big to do much else.

Either way, Israel results from and is predicated on expansion. The *aliyah* (Hebrew for ‘ascent’ - or migration to Israel) constitutes a fundamental part of the Zionist project and is enshrined in Israel’s ‘law of return’ (enacted by the Knesset in July 1950). Any Jew, no matter where they live, no matter how dubious their Jewish antecedence, has the legal right to assisted settlement in Israel, as well as automatic citizenship.

A heterogeneous mixture of the genuinely desperate, the cruelly duped, secular dreamers, religious fanatics and cheap adventurers have come to the promised land over the years. Between 1948 and 1992 Israel took in 2,242,500 Jewish migrants. The bulk were from eastern Europe - displaced by World War II - and the centres of Jewry in the Arab world and the Soviet Union. Some 85% of Ethiopia’s 170,000 Jewish population, the Falasha or Habashim, have gone to Israel under the law of return too. Before October 7, however, the flow of migrants had been reduced to a mere trickle. With October 7 that inward trickle became a 470,000 outward flood ... but, predictably, all but a few soon returned.¹²

Israel needs people. Or, put more accurately, Israel needs *Jewish* people. Even a little Israel relies on long-term net Jewish immigration ... net Jewish *emigration*, if it were sustained, would indeed mean that the “collapse of Israel has become foreseeable”.¹³

Today Israel has a record population of just over 10 million.¹⁴ However, some 20% of them are Palestinian Arabs. They are, of course, treated as second-class citizens in what is rightly regarded as an apartheid state. Officially, after all, Israel was founded as and continues to be a Jewish state for Jewish people. Meanwhile, there are some 5.9 million UN-registered Palestinian refugees - in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.¹⁵ There is also a Palestinian diaspora

living in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, the US, Britain, Germany, Chile, Argentina and many other countries besides.

Nation-in-arms

Following the 1967 Six Day War, Israel’s main arms supplier has been the US (before that it was France). Not that there was an instant love affair between the two countries. George Marshall, president Harry S Truman’s secretary of state, was more than cool about recognising Israel in May 1948. Nor was John Foster Dulles, Dwight Eisenhower’s secretary of state, pro-Israel. It was the rise of Arab nationalism, and the turn towards the Soviet Union instigated by Egypt’s Gamal Abdul Nasser, that led to a US shift. From 1958 the US-Israel alliance slowly expanded in scope and took its present form after the Yom Kippur War of 1973.¹⁶ Noam Chomsky, it should be noted, dates US support for the Greater Israel position to 1970, when Henry Kissinger succeeded in “taking over Middle East affairs”.¹⁷

By any measure, US economic and military aid to Israel has been considerable. In the 1946-2024 period it amounted to well over \$310 billion (in constant 2022 dollars). Today Washington’s largesse mainly goes to support the Zionist state’s already potent military machine: Israel is on a short list of “major non-Nato allies” and has privileged access to the most advanced US military platforms and technologies. There is an agreement to supply it with a military package worth some \$3.8 billion annually till 2028.¹⁸ In return for imperial sponsorship, Israel acts as a US “strategic asset” in the Middle East (a region which, it just so happens, possesses something like 50% of the world’s readily accessible oil reserves).¹⁹

There were those on the left who foolishly welcomed the election of Barack Obama in 2008 - the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain, George Galloway, Stop the War Coalition - because they hoped he would chart a fundamentally different, peaceful, more even-handed course in the Middle East. As we predicted at the time, they were bound to be “sadly disappointed”.²⁰ Whatever the skin colour of the president, America is in relative decline and that means that big-power antagonisms become ever more acute. Indeed, Obama and his secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, undertook the “pivot to Asia” in 2016: the main aim clearly being to block the rise of China - a policy seamlessly continued by the Biden and Trump administrations.²¹

As for Israel, there has, of course, been no change: unwavering US support is combined with a prolonged economic and diplomatic campaign to reduce, to hem in Iran and stop it acquiring nuclear weapons. This makes Israel the regional superpower in the Middle East. Even without the ‘special relationship’ with the US, Israel has repeatedly fought, invaded and defeated its Arab neighbours: 1948, 1956 and 1967. After that there followed the 1973 war with Egypt and Syria and the four wars in Lebanon (1978, 1982, 2006 and 2023).

Israel’s armed forces are vastly superior, compared with any Arab country or any conceivable combination of them. It is not a matter of total numbers under arms or the percentage of GDP spent on arms. Israel’s armed forces are better led, better trained and better equipped, that is for sure. Moreover, culturally Israel is a

highly militarised society. It is a “nation-in-arms” (Ben-Gurion). Military service - for both sexes - starts in the late-teenage years and goes on, in the reserves, well into adulthood (40 for regular soldiers, 45 for officers). That now includes those from the million-strong Haredi community - after a supreme court decision revoking their exemption. Even before being conscripted, there is, from the age of 14, the Gadna (youth brigades). This prepares young people not only in the handling of weapons, but psychologically too ... for wars of aggression.

Haim Bresheeth-Žabner calls the IDF “an army like no other”.²² The IDF constitutes the spinal cord of Israel’s national identity. Not country of origin, not religious sect, not political affiliation. The IDF forged the “new Jew” envisaged by Theodor Herzl from the “base elements” coming from middle Europe, the Soviet Union, the Arab countries, Ethiopia and America. Israel has thereby become a modern-day Sparta. Not surprisingly, armchair generals rank the country as militarily amongst the most powerful states on the face of the planet. Underlying the point, Israel reportedly possesses between 90 and 400 nuclear warheads ... and certainly has the means of delivering them from land, sea and sky.

Divide and rule

Territorially, economically and politically Palestine is cleaved between Hamas in a shattered Gaza and Fatah on the diced and sliced West Bank - two statelets for one people. Uncompromisingly, the 1988 Hamas charter demands an end to the Zionist state of Israel and its replacement by a single Islamic state of Palestine. True, Hamas doggedly refuses to recognise Israel, yet it has offered a “long-term truce” in return for Israel withdrawing from all territories it has occupied since 1967: in effect a two-state ‘solution’.

Though Israel encouraged the formation and growth of Hamas from the mid-1980s onwards in order to weaken Fatah, after its landslide victory in the January 2006 elections and the Fatah June coup in the West Bank, Israel imposed its asphyxiating blockade on Gaza. That said, since 2018 Netanyahu’s government allowed Hamas to receive “infusions” of Qatari cash and granted tens of thousands of work permits to Gazan residents. The idea was to keep the Palestinians divided and thereby render any Israel-Palestine two-state ‘solution’ practically inoperable. Hence the Palestinian Authority on the West Bank was treated as a “burden”, while Hamas in Gaza was treated as an “asset”.²³ That is, until October 7 2023 - what has been called Israel’s Pearl Harbour.

Leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organisation - dominated by Fatah - preside over a series of disconnected Arab reservations on the West Bank, euphemistically called the Palestinian Authority. Its president, Mahmoud Abbas, pleas for a two-state ‘solution’ and roundly condemns Israel’s invasion of Gaza. He is, however, to all intents and purposes a creature of Israel, a collaborator, a quisling. To put it mildly, he is widely hated.

The PLO’s present line dates back to 1988, when the demand for a return to the *status quo ante* 1948 was formally abandoned. Fatah had been steadily moving in this direction since the mid-70s; however, the final turning point was the US-brokered Oslo

accord, signed in August 1993 by PLO chair Yasser Arafat and Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. The PLO effectively conceded Israeli hegemony over the whole of mandate Palestine in return for local self-government in Gaza and the West Bank: abject surrender. The vital questions of Jewish settlements on the West Bank and the right of Palestinians to return to their lands were put aside: a diplomatic triumph for the US and Israel.

Fragmented

Israeli politics are notoriously fragmented. At least a dozen blocs - many with multiple components - are represented in the Knesset. But virtually the entire Israeli-Jewish political spectrum unitedly opposes any kind of *democratic* settlement with the Palestinians. The nationalist and religious hard right, including Likud, has absolutely no truck with Palestinian statehood. General Zionists merely talk the talk. Only the left, which relies on Israeli-Arab votes, is serious about a two-state ‘solution’: and that means Palestinians settling for the West Bank and Gaza, and nothing more.

Working class politics in Israel - that is, Israeli-Jewish working class politics - hardly exists, at least at this moment in time, as an effective collectivity. Historically there has been a remorseless shift from voting for the Labor Party to parties of the right in an attempt to preserve national privileges - the Jewish-Israeli working class being a labour aristocracy that has seen its social power substantially eroded by years of neoliberalism.²⁴ In 1983 membership of the trade union federation, Histadrut, stood at 1.6 million; today it is around 570,000. Histadrut, note, once the spearhead of Zionist colonisation, has also been shorn of its role in health and banking, and as a very substantial employer in its own right.

Histadrut needs to be put into the context of colonisation. Marxists have distinguished between various types of colonies: plantation colonies, exploitation colonies, colonies properly so-called, etc. Broadly the colonisation of the India, Congo, South Africa type saw the exploiters enslave people, gaining a fat profit from the native workforce, including peasant farmers, through all manner of barely concealed forms of robbery, cheating and double dealing. That went hand-in-hand with staffing an army officer corps, running a bureaucracy and managing railroads, docks, etc. The colonisers therefore constituted a relatively narrow caste who often maintained close ties with the imperial homeland (to which they often returned, having made their fortunes).

Nonetheless, it must be understood that in terms of political economy Israel is what Karl Kautsky called a “work colony”²⁵ or what Moshé Machover prefers to call an “exclusion colony”.²⁶ Instead of the colonisers constituting themselves as a narrow, often highly privileged, caste, the colonisers make up the full spectrum of classes: bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, small farmers, workers, unemployed reserve workers, etc. Instead of relying on the labour of the indigenous population, it is either replaced, marginalised or driven to the point of extinction. Examples: USA, Canada, Australia.

Israel is definitely an exclusion colony. Despite present-day claims, Zionism was never a national liberation movement. It was always,

as it first presented itself - crucially in Theodor Herzl’s foundational *Der Judenstaat* (1896) - a colonial-settler project that would rely on Jewish labour playing the vanguard role: “The poorest will go first to cultivate the soil. In accordance with a preconceived plan, they will construct roads, bridges, railways and telegraph installations; regulate rivers; and build their own dwellings; their labour will create trade, trade will create markets and markets will attract new settlers.”²⁷ Hence, whatever the socialistic pretensions of Labor Zionism, from the beginning Israel owed far more to the *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) ideology of late 19th century European reaction, than anything remotely progressive.

Lenni Brenner makes the point:

Enthusiasm for *Blut und Boden* were part of Zionism before the first modern Zionist ever left Europe. Race Zionism was a curious offshoot of racial anti-Semitism. True, these Zionists argued, the Jews were a pure race, certainly purer than, say, the Germans who, as even the pan-Germans conceded, had a huge admixture of Slavic blood. But to these Zionists, even their racial purity could not overcome the one flaw in Jewish existence: they did not have their own Jewish *Boden*. If the Teutonic racists could see themselves as *Übermensch*en (supermen), these Hebrew racists did not see the Jews in that light; rather, it was the reverse. They believed that because they lacked their own *Boden* the Jews were *Untermenschen* and therefore, for their “hosts”, little more than leeches: the world pest.²⁸

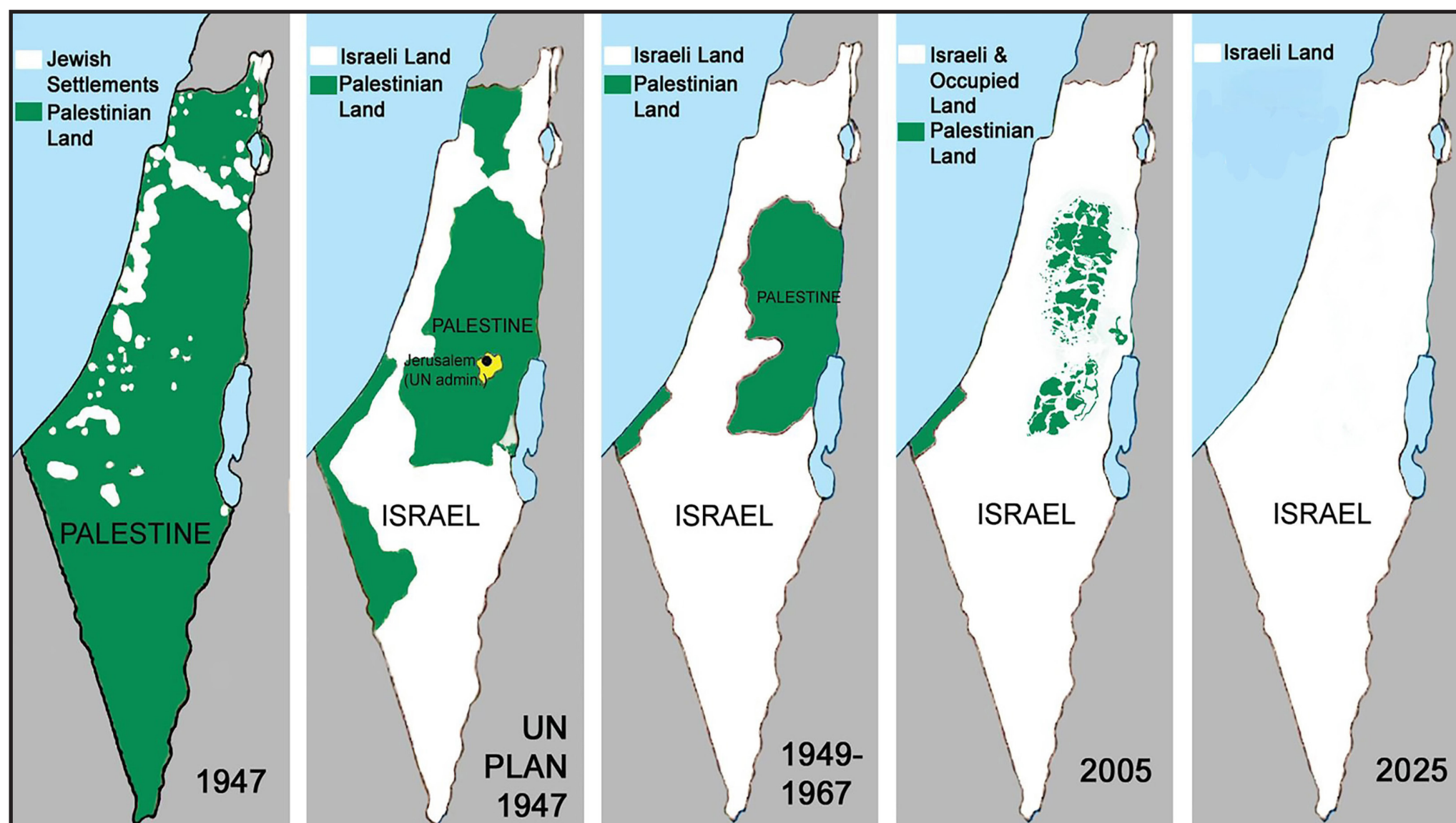
To get themselves the soil necessary for national salvation, the Zionists, for good ideological reasons, latched upon Palestine. What marked them out, when they went there, was not that to begin with they were a minority of the population in Ottoman and then mandate Palestine. No, the Zionist project relied on propertyless migrants coming from all manner of different countries, while exercising “no coercive power over the indigenous population”.²⁹

That began to change with the formation of the Haganah militia, but it was poorly armed and could only manage defensive operations till the 1940s. At first the Zionists were substantially dependent on external sources of capital too. After all they had to purchase land from wealthy native owners and most certainly relied on the good will of an imperial sponsor (to begin with Britain, which agreed the Balfour declaration in November 1917 in the expectation of carving out for itself a “Jewish Ulster” in the midst of a hostile Middle East).

Histadrut played a determining role. It organised Jewish workers and forced the Jewish capitalist class to grant all manner of concessions - not least barring indigenous, cheaper, Arab labour from whole sectors of the economy (relaxed somewhat after statehood). Histadrut also provided Labor Zionism with the money, the votes and the organisation needed to make it the dominant force politically from the mid-1930s till the late 1970s. So it was far removed from being a trade union federation of the type normally seen in the so-called west.

British left

Historically, loyally reflecting British imperial interests, mainstream Labourism has maintained a sympathetic attitude



Shrinking Palestine ... will it disappear entirely in 2025?

towards Zionism. Poale Zion - now the Jewish Labour Movement - affiliated to the Labour Party in 1920. Successive Labour conferences voted in favour of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Labour considered the Israeli Labor Party a fraternal organisation and maintained close contacts. From the early 1960s the TUC was giving Histadrut financial aid for its Afro-Asian Institute - a wonderful means for Israel to spread its diplomatic influence. Trade union tops regularly spoke out against Arab feudalism, backwardness and Nazi ideas.

As for the 'official' CPGB, in the late 1940s it temporarily abandoned its historic hostility to Zionism. The CPGB formed a National Jewish Committee, which supported Jewish migration into Palestine and land purchases. Stalin, myopically, saw nothing more than a chance to weaken British influence in the Middle East by supporting Zionism ... including with the supply of Czech arms.

Hence, disgracefully, in 1948, the 'official' CPGB wholeheartedly welcomed the establishment of Israel, greeting the state's foundation as "a big step toward fulfilment of self-determination of the peoples of Palestine" and "a great sign of the times".³⁰ After 2,000 years of supposed *uninterrupted* persecution the Jewish people had liberated themselves at last. In parliament its MPs, Willie Gallacher and Phil Piratin, sponsored an early day motion condemning the Arab states for their 1948 intervention in Palestine, urging the Labour government to recognise Israel and demanding an immediate end to military aid to Arab states.

On the Labour left Edward Short, Jennie Lee and Tony Benn were proud to be counted amongst the Labour Friends of Israel. They routinely cited the *kibbutzim* as a brave socialist experiment. Eric Heffer even defended Israel's continued occupation of the West Banks and Gaza after 1967 on the grounds that Israel was "the only

genuine democratic and socialist-oriented state in the Middle East".³¹

Next to nothing of that now remains on the left. Today Israel counts amongst those countries dominated by the hard right and is therefore regarded as an abomination by those who regard themselves in the least bit progressive. True, there is still a pro-Zionist 'left'. But it is, thankfully, marginal and widely despised: the Alliance for Workers' Liberty comes to mind, so does the CPB's resident Zionist, Mary Davis, and her grotesque 'Anti-Semitism awareness courses' (as if the *Morning Star's* CPB has an anti-Semitism problem, when, in actual fact, it has a pro-Zionism problem).

Does this mean that the left has lighted upon a correct programmatic orientation? Hardly - instead we are presented with a range of positions, all of which are far from adequate.

We have already mentioned the AWL and the *Morning Star's* CPB. Essentially their two-state 'solution' echoes the PLO, Fatah, the Israeli Labor Party ... and the international bourgeois consensus. It amounts to economic Zionism. A little Israel - an Israel returned to its pre-1967 borders - is expected to live peacefully alongside a West Bank and Gaza Strip Palestine. Except, of course, it will not.

For appearances sake, till Trump, US administrations paid lip service to this touching picture of the wolf lying down with the lamb. But, in practice, the US backed Israeli aggression to the hilt. The same goes for its allies, such as the UK, Germany and Italy. So there was no repetition of the early 1990s, when apartheid in South Africa was negotiated away in a US-sponsored deal, which gave black citizens the vote in return for the African National Congress leaving capitalist big business intact.

In Israel-Palestine there is no overwhelming oppressed national majority. There is no threat of a revolutionary explosion. The odds are completely stacked in Israel's favour. That is why Hamas resorts

to desperate suicide missions and the PLO and Fatah are reduced to impotent verbal gestures and pathetic diplomatic pleading. Recognising this, the likes of the AWL, CPB ... and various Labour left odds and sods clutch at business-sponsored anti-democratic liberal protests and peaceniks such as Standing Together - that and common economic struggles in Israel, which are supposed to weld together Hebrew and Arab workers into a lever for social change.

In fact Zionism acts to keep workers inside Israel structurally divided. That means legal, political and material privileges for Israeli-Jewish workers - privileges they will hang onto for dear life ... unless there is something much better on offer (Israeli-Jewish workers, especially those at the bottom end of the labour market, have no wish to compete with Arab-Israeli/Palestinian worst paid labour as *equals*, that is for sure).

As a justification for the two-state/federal-state 'solution', we are assured that an Israel-Palestine rapprochement would provide the solid, democratic foundations, from where alone the struggle for socialism can begin. In other words, their two-state/federal-state 'solution' is based on a combination of naive wishful thinking and mechanical, stagist reasoning. Note, trade union politics - ie, struggles over wages and conditions - always find themselves cut short by the high politics of war, security, national privilege, etc. There have been no Histadrut strikes demanding equal civil rights for Palestinians, ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and calling for the right of return. Nor should any such development be expected within the narrow confines of today's circumstances.

The Socialist Party in England and Wales offers a 'socialist' version of the two-state 'solution'. It calls for a 'socialist' Israel alongside a 'socialist' West Bank-Gaza Strip Palestine. Israel, it should be noted, is treated as a 'normal'

country: the idea of it remaining a "settler state" is dismissed out of hand.³² That despite the ongoing ethnic cleansing and the relentless announcements of yet more Jewish settler 'outposts' on the West Bank and the Golan Heights - there are already 720,000 settlers in the occupied territories (including east Jerusalem).

Anyway, why on earth two such *socialist* states would remain separate, especially given the substantial population crossover, is something of a mystery. More to the point, the means of achieving such an outcome once again relies almost entirely on trade union politics, which by its very nature is sectional and confined to the relationship between sellers and buyers of the labour-power commodity. Hence trade union politics as trade union politics do little more than reproduce the *division* of the working class: on the one side, nationally privileged labour aristocrats and, on the other, a nationally oppressed underclass.

Then there is the left version of the *old* PLO single-Palestine 'solution': the Socialist Workers Party being the quintessential example. Ignoring the history, power, connections and wishes of the Israeli-Jewish population, there is the call for the abolition, the dismantling of Israel and in its place "one secular, democratic [capitalist - JC] state built on the principle of equal rights for all citizens, including Israeli Jews".³³

The SWP has long ago given up trying to seriously think through what is and what is not a viable strategy in Israel-Palestine.³⁴ What it is primarily interested in nowadays - especially post-October 7 - is posturing. The SWP strives might and main to present itself to the mass pro-Palestine demonstrations, not least its Muslim contingents, as the most militant, most implacable opponents of everything Israeli - and thereby sell a few more papers and gain a few more fleeting recruits. Politically though, the result amounts to tailing Hamas.

Needless to say then, the Israeli-Jewish working class is deemed to be entirely incapable of playing any positive role. Israeli Jews, most of whom consider themselves secular, will paradoxically be allowed individual religious freedom, but not collective national rights under the SWP's single-Palestine 'solution'. Israeli Jews are often defined away as a non-nation, but even when it is admitted that they do constitute a nation, they are classified as an oppressive, counterrevolutionary one, which should thereby be denied the right to self-determination presumably in perpetuity.

That this would transform the Israeli-Jewish population into an opposed nationality never seems to occur to left advocates of a single capitalist Palestine. So, for example, in a secular, *capitalist* Palestine, Israeli-Jews would have "language rights, freedom of worship and the right to their own culture, but political rights? No."³⁵ Of course, a nation threatened with a denial of political and national rights is likely to fight tooth and claw against any such outcome.

Objectively, though, the balance of forces are violently against a single-capitalist-state 'solution'. There are some 7.2 million Israeli-Jews (settlements included); and 10-11 million Palestinians worldwide; but only 6-7 million of them live in Israel, the occupied territories, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. It is fair to say, then, that any projected single Palestinian state would include roughly equivalent numbers of Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. Assuming, that is, no forcible movement of peoples; no attempt to drive the Israeli Jews into the sea; no closure of refugee camps and dumping of Palestinians over to the west side of the Jordan river; no round-up and expulsion of Palestinian workers in Saudi Arabia, etc. Therefore what is being proposed is a 'unity' where one half of the population gets no say in the matter - impractical and in strategic terms really dumb.

SUPPLEMENT

After all, the Israeli-Jewish working class has everything to lose and nothing to gain from such a single-capitalist-state ‘solution’ that is more or less guaranteed to be neither secular nor democratic. They are, therefore, more than likely to resist any such outcome with all their strength. The whole of the 20th century since 1933, but especially the 1943-45 holocaust, tells us that. Without military conquest - a highly unlikely and in and of itself an unwelcome outcome - the immediate demand for a single-state ‘solution’ is entirely illusory. Translated into the ‘Palestine shall be free from the river to the sea’ slogan, it goes down well on street demonstrations, but offers zilch in terms of bringing about a rapprochement between the two peoples in Israel-Palestine and advancing common working class interests.

The call for a single Palestinian state “may seem completely utopian”, the SWP’s Alex Callinicos once owned up. He also correctly stated that there is “very clear evidence that the two-state solution cannot work”. There exists, he says, the “massive imbalance of power between the two sides. Israel is one of the greatest military powers in the world, backed and subsidised by the US”.³⁶ Right again.

Hence, it is pertinent to ask exactly who is going to establish the single Palestinian state. After all, according to comrade Callinicos himself, the Palestinians are incapable of achieving any kind of viable state alongside Israel by their efforts alone. How then can we expect them to establish a single state against the wishes of the global US hegemon and the vast mass of 7.2 million Israeli-Jews? Perhaps what the SWP therefore envisages as its agent of change is the Axis of Resistance - what is today a thoroughly deflated, but always symbolic combination of Iran, Lebanon’s Hezbollah, Hamas and Yemen’s Houthis. In the imagination the Axis could reasonably be joined by Muslim Brotherhood governments in Egypt, Syria and Jordan.

An anti-working class agency, if ever there was one. However, such a pan-Islamic alliance (leave aside the Shia and Sunni divisions) could, conceivably, defeat Israel, as Saladin’s forces defeated the outremer, crusader, kingdom of Jerusalem in 1187. But that would, though, hardly produce a *secular* Palestinian state. Nor would it produce a *democratic* Palestinian state. True, if such an unlikely combination were to come together - and, just as unlikely, achieve military victory over Israel - it might lead to a mass exodus of Jews (to who knows where). But if that did not happen, the Jewish-Israeli population would have to be subject to extraordinarily harsh measures to crush the inevitable resistance. The poles of national oppression would, yes, thereby be reversed. But, we are told, what does that matter? It would, be ‘national liberation’ via the destruction of the settler-colony ... and from the (nuclear?) ashes, hopefully some kind of ‘socialism’ would arise. Not something any genuine Marxist would care to countenance.

Though it might be an inconvenient truth, no *democratic* solution can be won without the consent of Israeli Jews - that is, a clearly expressed majority of them. Those Humpty Dumpties who claim otherwise are coining a contranym, whereby words become their opposite. Democracy is divorced from basic democratic rights - it becomes a *denial* of basic democratic rights.

Yet the fact is, despite the

warnings, pained outrage and courage of Israeli-Jewish socialists, anti-Zionists and pacifists, the Israeli-Jewish population at large consistently, often overwhelmingly, supports the wars of their elected politicians, generals and capitalist masters, irrespective of the hatred of Israel that this inevitably engenders. Why? Israel is a colonial-settler state and all such states face a fundamental problem. What to do with the people whose land has been stolen? During the wars of 1947-49 and 1967 well over a million Palestinians fled or were forcibly driven out. Palestinians in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank are therefore ‘unfinished business’.

Both the Palestinian enemy within and the Palestinian enemy without engender a permanent state of insecurity. Israeli Jews know they are resented, know they are hated. When it comes to worst-paid labour, the Palestinians willingly undercut them. Then there are the Hamas rockets, suicide bombers and the October 7 spectacular. Understandably, the Israeli-Jewish population feels under constant threat and therefore - frightened, vengeful, maddened - willingly supports, urges on Israeli aggression, oppression and even genocide. The hope is to crush or finally remove the Palestinians - an oppressor’s peace.

Does it follow that Israelis cannot make a *democratic* peace with Palestinians? That any Israeli settlement with the Palestinians is bound to be a sham? There can certainly be no *democratic* peace with Israel as a *Zionist* state - any more than there can be with an *Islamic* Palestine.

Zionism is, arguably, a nationalism *sui generis*. While it now boasts a homeland, Zionism claims purchase over the loyalty of *all* Jews, even though the majority of the people-religion are not Israeli and do not speak Hebrew (around 40% of the world’s Jewish population lives in the US, roughly the same as in Israel). No less to the point, the Zionist state is committed to expansion and denying elementary rights to a good portion of the population it rules over (ie, the Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories).

Nevertheless, the Israeli-Jewish people, the Hebrew-speaking nation, is a real, living entity and cannot be dismissed or discounted just because Israel began as and continues to be a settler colonial state. Israel emerged out of the last phase of the British empire, in the midst of a terroristic civil war and unforgivable crimes that no-one should forget. That said, there is no reason for refusing to recognise the definite, historically constituted Hebrew nation which took state form with the May 14 1948 declaration of Israeli independence.

And since then millions of Jews have migrated to Israel, learnt Hebrew, intermarried, had children, assimilated, and made and remade the Israeli-Jewish nation. Today some 80% are sabras - Israeli born - and mostly second or third generation.³⁷ Hence, the Israeli-Jewish nation not only inhabits a common territory and shares a common language: it is historically constituted.

Of course, most, if not all, of the world’s states came into existence by way of terrible oppression. But, while fully taking into account history, any consistently democratic programme must be squarely based on contemporary realities - crucially human facts on the ground. Abolition of *Zionist* Israel, legal equality for all, secularism, halting expansionism and withdrawing from the occupied territories are

basic (minimal) programmatic demands. None of that, however, should be taken as synonymous with an eviscerating reconstruction of the pre-1948 situation. One might just as well call for the abolition of the US, Canada, Australia, etc, and a return of lands to the enfeebled remnants of the aboriginal populations.

The only realistic, progressive and humane programme must be based on a mutual recognition by both Palestinians and Israeli Jews of each other’s national rights. Needless to say, it would be an excellent thing if both nations *chose* to happily live side by side or, even better, to slowly merge together into a single nation. No rational human being would want to oppose either such outcome. The question is, though, how to arrive at such a happy outcome? Given where we are situated today, our discussion must necessarily return to the question of agency.

Arab nation

No democratic solution for the Israel/Palestine conflict can be achieved in isolation. Objective circumstances simply do not permit it. That is as certain as anything can be certain in this uncertain world.

By themselves the Palestinians - debilitatingly split between Hamas and Fatah - palpably lack the ability to achieve anything beyond abject surrender or hopeless resistance. Certainly not a single Palestinian state, where Israeli Jews have ‘full’ religious rights, but no national rights. There is, however, a way to cut through the Gordian knot: widen the strategic front. There are nearly 300 million Arabs in a contiguous territory that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean, across north Africa, down the Nile to north Sudan, and all the way to the Persian Gulf and up to the Caspian Sea.

Though studded here and there with national minorities - Kurds, Assyrians, Turks, Armenians, Berbers, etc - there is a definite Arab or Arabised community. Despite being separated into 25 different states and divided by religion and religious sect - Sunni, Shi’ite, Alaouite, Ismaili, Druze, Orthodox Christian, Catholic Christian, Maronite, Nestorian, etc - they share a living bond of pan-Arab consciousness, born not only of common language, but a closely related history.

Arabs are binational. There are Moroccans, Yemenis, Egyptians, Jordanians, etc. But there is also a wider Arab identity, which has its origins going back to the Muslim conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries. The most well-known candidate for Arab unifier was Nasser. This uncrowned Bonaparte led the Free Officers’ revolution in 1952, which overthrew the pro-British monarchy of Farouk I. Nasser then oversaw a radical agrarian reform programme, nationalised the Suez canal, allied Egypt with the Soviet Union and put his country on the course of state-capitalist development. This went hand-in-hand with crushing both the Muslim Brotherhood and the working class movement.

Nasser called it ‘Arab socialism’. Especially with his success in the 1956 crisis - an Israeli invasion followed by a pre-planned joint French and British intervention and then an unexpected American veto - Nasser’s popularity soared throughout the Arab world. Pro-Nasser Arab socialist parties, groups and conspiracies were sponsored or established themselves. His name became almost synonymous with pan-Arabism.

Nasser demanded that natural resources be used for the benefit of all Arabs - hugely popular with those

below. Everyone knew he meant oil. Of course, the house of Saud instantly became an implacable enemy. Yet because of mass pressure the Ba’athist authorities in Syria sought a merger. Despite the repression suffered by their co-thinkers in Egypt, the ‘official communists’ and the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood likewise favoured unity.

The United Arab Republic was formed on February 1 1958. Nasser was appointed president and Cairo became the capital. Yet the UAR proved momentary. Syrian capitalists did not gain access to Egyptian markets and Egyptian administrative personnel were painted by Syrian officers, bureaucrats and top politicians as acting like colonial officials. The union ignominiously collapsed in 1961. Opposition came from the Damascus street. However, from then onwards the UAR became a hollow pretence. It united no other country apart from Egypt.

The 1967 Six Day War with Israel proved to be the final straw for Nasserism. Israel’s blitzkrieg destroyed the airforces of Egypt, Syria and Jordan on the ground and by the end of the hostilities Israel occupied the Sinai, the West Bank and the Golan Heights. Nasser was humiliated and died soon afterwards a broken man.

Evidently, Arab reunification remains a burning, but unfulfilled, task. The fact that Nasser’s short-lived UAR saw the light of day is testimony to mass support for Arab unity. No less to the point, what was a potent sentiment in the 1950s and well into the 1970s needs to be revived in the 21st century and given a new democratic and class content.

So we are not talking about reviving Nasserism. Nor are we talking about something akin to the pan-Slavism of Ludovít Štúr which excused so many of the wars and intrigues of the late Russian empire. No, communists need to take the lead in the fight for pan-Arab unity - as Marx and Engels and their comrades in the Communist League did in the fight for German unity. Such a fight, is, of course, inseparable from the task of building a mass Communist Party - first in each Arab country and then throughout the Arab world. A Communist Party of Arabia.

What of reconciliation between Hebrews and the Palestinians? This can only happen in the context of sweeping away the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan, Lebanon’s sectarian warlord plutocracy, Egypt’s military bureaucratic regime, the House of Saud and the establishment of working class rule in a socialist republic of Arabia.

Only from such a wide salient, even if it is in the process of realisation, can the Israeli-Jewish working class be prised away from the clutches of Zionism and formed into a positivity. Even if it is initially confined to the Mashriq, an Arab socialist republic could offer Israel federal status, with the confident expectation that such an invitation would receive a positive response from below.³⁸

Hence, the road to a united working class in Israel-Palestine passes through Amman, it passes through Beirut, it passes through Cairo and it passes through Riyadh.³⁹ ●

Notes

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2. Z Jamaladdine *et al* ‘Traumatic injury mortality in the Gaza Strip from Oct 7 2023 to June 30 2024: a capture-recapture analysis’ *The Lancet* February 8.
3. In order: Sophie Squire ‘Six months of slaughter, six months of resistance’ *Socialist Worker* April 3 2024; Ofer Cassif of the ‘official communist’ Hadash party in

Israel; and US ‘realist’, John Mearsheimer *Al Jazeera* January 24.
4. www.ajc.org/news/what-is-trumps-proposal-for-gaza.
5. *The Daily Telegraph* February 25.
6. www.chathamhouse.org/2025/02/negotiating-tactic-or-not-trumps-gaza-plan-has-already-done-irreparable-damage.
7. www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/2/28/what-has-the-report-into-israeli-military-failures-on-october-7-said.
8. www.eurasiareview.com/15022024-did-israel-deliberately-ignore-warnings-of-an-attack-by-hamas-to-enable-them-to-destroy-gaza-oped.
9. Hamas *Our narrative ... Operation al-Aqsa Flood* p8.
10. See R Feldman *Messianic Zionism in the digital age: Jews, Noahides and the Third Temple imaginary* New Brunswick NJ 2024.
11. “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, the Kadamites, the Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaims, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and the Jebusites” (*Genesis* xv, 18-1).
12. www.jpr.org.uk/insights/israels-jewish-demography-changing-and-it-so-diasporas.
13. I Pappé ‘The collapse of Zionism’ *New Left Review* June 21 2024.
14. *The Jewish Chronicle* January 6 2025.
15. www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees.
16. See A Ben-Zvi *Decade of transition: Eisenhower, Kennedy and the origins of the American-Israeli alliance* New York NY 1998.
17. N Chomsky *The fateful triangle: the United States, Israel and the Palestinians* London 1983, p43.
18. www.cfr.org/article/us-aid-israel-four-charts.
19. www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/israel-strategic-asset-united-states-0.
20. J Conrad ‘Zionist imperatives and the Arab solution’ *Weekly Worker* January 22 2009: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/753/zionist-imperatives-and-the-arab-solution.
21. H Clinton ‘America’s Pacific century’ *Foreign Policy* November 2011.
22. H Bresheeth-Zabner *An army like no other: how the Israeli Defence Force made a nation* London 2020, p13.
23. *The Times of Israel* October 8 2023.
24. The thesis of the Jewish-Israeli working class being a labour aristocracy is closely associated with Maxime Rodinson. See his *Israel: a colonial settler state?* New York NY 1973.
25. See M Macnair (intro) *Karl Kautsky: on colonialism* London 2013.
26. M Machover ‘Colonialism and the natives’ *Weekly Worker* December 17 2015: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1087/colonialism-and-the-natives.
27. www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/25282/pg25282-images.html.
28. www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/mideast/agedict/ch02.htm.
29. M Shalev *The labour movement in Israel: ideology and political economy* Westview CO 1996, p1.
30. *Daily Worker* May 15 1948.
31. E Heffer ‘Why Labour should support Israel’ *Labour looks at Israel: 1967-1971* London 1971, p31.
32. J Horton *Socialism Today* February 2 2024.
33. SWP pamphlet *Palestine, resistance, revolution and the struggle for freedom* London 2023, p28.
34. Eg, the SWP’s co-thinker in Germany, Ramsis Kilani, comes out with the bog standard “strikes and mass mobilisations” and “workers developing their own capability for revolutionary self-governance” catch phrases. But, though he denounces “Stalinist conceptions of a revolution by ‘stages’”, that is actually what he advocates (R Kilani ‘Strategies for liberation: old and new arguments in the Palestinian left’ *International Socialism* No183, Summer 2024). Incidentally, Die Linke, Germany’s so-called ‘left’ party, disgracefully expelled the comrade on entirely bogus charges of “anti-Semitism” in December 2024. Anne Alexander, the SWP’s Middle East expert, confirms the stagism when she writes of her perspectives for Palestine having “two aspects”: “The first would be a [an altogether improbable - JC] revolution inside Palestine, led by Palestinians, for a single democratic and secular state, achieved through the dismantling of the whole social and political system of apartheid by a movement from below.” The second aspect being “a revolutionary process outside Palestine” (A Alexander ‘Palestine: between permanent war and permanent revolution’ *International Socialism* No181, Winter 2023). Nowhere does she mention ‘socialism’, ‘working class state power’ or ‘social revolution’ ... or even words to that effect.
35. Tony Greenstein, Letters *Weekly Worker* June 27 2024.
36. *Socialist Worker* August 5 2006.
37. www.cbs.gov.il/he/media/relase/DocLib/2024/141/11_24_141e.pdf.
38. A perspective advanced by Jabra Nicola and Moshé Machover in June 1969. See M Machover *Israelis and Palestinians: conflict and resolution* Chicago IL 2012, pp15-25.
39. To paraphrase George Habash, first PFLP general secretary, and before him Ahmad Shukeiri, first PLO chair (see JT Buck *The decline of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine* Hampshire College MA, 2013, pp3-4).