

weekly worker



Not just Netanyahu: ethnic cleansing and genocide are built into the DNA of the Zionist settler-colonial project

- Letters and debate
- Communist transition
- Iran n-negotiations
- Glasgow crime gangs

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Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10



LETTERS



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

Transition debate

The latest in the online discussion series organised by Talking About Socialism was a session titled 'The middle class: what is it? How do we win it to communism?', introduced by Peter Kennedy on May 12. The background reading for the talk was his recent article published on the TAS website, responding to aspects of Jack Conrad's article, 'Rediscovering our words', which detailed some disagreements between TAS and the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee that have come out of the Forging Communist Unity process (*Weekly Worker* April 10 2025).

Peter began his talk by posing the question of whether the middle classes have a vested interest in capitalism, and whether this interest will necessitate a lengthy transition to communism. He presented his diagram, which details the relationships between different sections of the working and ruling class, and the contradictory position of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). He further argued that we ought to understand there to be a split within the "specialist middle class professions", as there is a "hierarchical elite" at the top. The conclusion was that the contradictory, precarious position of the middle class will make the majority of them easy to win over, so they would not seek to prolong capitalism.

I raised a few disagreements with the article and talk. Contributions were limited to

three minutes - a reliable trigger for my 'post-Trotskyist stress disorder' - so my four points were not as well-developed as they could have been.

First, I pointed out that Peter's article does not properly answer the points about small capitalists made in 'Rediscovering our words'. Instead it addresses the exploitation of workers within SMEs - a different subject.

Secondly, I asked if he favours a Marxist view of class, chiefly concerned with its relationship to the means of production, or a sociological view. From the article it seemed the latter: "... there exists a top brass at the top of other middle-class occupations - law, criminal justice system, police, military, senior civil service - who are, collectively, truly part of the capitalist class's ruling apparatus." Just as the labour aristocracy theory has no predictive capabilities, this idea of inherently 'middle class' professions, and the way Peter categorises them, does not have any use to revolutionaries. Any of these are subject to proletarianisation - comrade Nick Wrack (a barrister) helpfully gave successful strike action in his profession as an example.

Third, I asked Peter for his thoughts on section 3.19 of the CPGB's *Draft programme* - the aspect of our minimum programme which contains proposals to address the instability of petty bourgeois life.

Peter summed up his talk by saying that small capitalists do not appear to have a real stake in capitalism, and would have more security in a communist society. Certainly, if we understand communism as a society

shorn of states, classes and all exploitation, committed to the full development of the individual, then, of course, it would afford a former petty bourgeois greater security. My fourth and final point was to respond that this is true, but, since the same applies to everyone, trivial. The same can be said of large capitalists, and Marx recognised as much in the so-called 'lost chapter' of *Capital* volume I, where he writes that a capitalist is just as enslaved by capital as a worker.

None of this reveals anything about how we win over the self-employed, nor about their status post-revolution.

In the discussion, one participant stated that the CPGB "has an idea of a lengthy transition period" and I asked for a source for this claim. In reply, Edmund Potts quoted from a more recent piece by Jack Conrad on the fusion talks: "As for socialising everything, we agree ... but slowly" ('Programme 'n' chips' *Weekly Worker* May 5). From the rest of the paragraph it is clear that comrade Conrad is arguing that a gradual approach towards socialising small businesses is likely to be required by necessity - not because the CPGB advocates gradualism for its own sake. It seems as though a game of Chinese whispers has been going on. Comrade Potts also drew attention to the phrase, "perhaps lasting a generation or two", in the same article. He said that if a transition following a revolution was lasting this long it would be in trouble, and its viability should be questioned.

From the discussion I think I have a rough grasp of the differences. The CPGB sees communism - the end of class antagonisms - as the objective that workers are striving for, once we have taken power. As the economy is a global system that makes an anachronism of nation-states and their borders, the smashing of the bourgeois state will not complete the disappearance of capitalism. The class struggle must continue, through mass democracy in workers' states which are committed to their own future non-existence.

In contrast, Peter Kennedy began his talk with the assumption, which no-one seemed to disagree with, that, as we enter the transition phase, workers have already "abolished capitalist ownership and control: [there will be] no surplus value extraction, no exploitation". The roles of the SMEs "will be abolished, and they'll take on new roles within the transitional phase" and, as SMEs become commonly owned, there will be "an immediate end to supply-chain super-exploitation".

Nick Wrack put it even more strongly: capitalism is followed by communism, then communism develops. All we need to do to get there is win over the majority - by 'talking about socialism', presumably - to the brilliance of the communist ideal. No basis is given for why or how this will happen - only scholasticism: it simply must be this way or we contradict Marxism.

In fusion talks the idea has come up that we must avoid any details about transition, along with the term, 'dictatorship of the proletariat', in order to distance ourselves from the experience of the Soviet Union. Of course,

we want to make it clear that the crimes and distortions of Stalinism have no place in our vision for communism, but using them to skirt over an issue is no solution, and is unlikely to help us avoid bureaucratic socialism in the future.

A subsequent comment on this session by TAS supporter Barry Biddulph has another way of putting the difference: "The CPGB leaders follow Lenin rather than Marx. In the tradition of Russian social democracy the dictatorship of the proletariat was a communist or socialist government using the state to crush counterrevolution. For Marx, the dictatorship of the proletariat was the self-government of the workers in their grassroots organisations which have absorbed the functions of the state, including armed defence."

The implication, elsewhere in this comment, that the CPGB and the *Weekly Worker* wholly endorses the culture and doctrines of Russian social democracy, is false, which will be clear to anyone who reads it. But what he advocates is no different, with the continuing existence of classes and a coercive state, however radical its difference from the bourgeois state might be.

Without a proper explanation, the idea of a successful working class revolution immediately causing the sudden death of wage-labour just sounds like wishful thinking. It is a terribly exciting notion which I would love to be able to believe: it would probably give our mental wellbeing a boost in the short-term, as would believing that revolution is only five years (or five calls for a general strike) away. But nothing in the history of class struggle suggests it is likely - any more than capitalism being abolished by the 'second coming' of Christ.

Chris S made the excellent point that to advocate any time scale on the transition would be to make ourselves hostages to fortune. It is indeed a speculative subject, on which no-one can pretend to have all the answers.

Different points of view on the character of different classes after the revolution, or on the nature of the transition to communism, are not of such an essential character that they should be a hindrance to communist unity. They are speculative matters, on which no-one should pretend to have all the answers. Even so, there is evidently still much to be clarified and debated on these matters.

TAS's next public discussion

is on Monday June 2, when Stephen Owens will be speaking about Reform UK.

Billy Clark
Email

Stalin praise

I noticed that some Trotskyist and 'libertarian socialist' social media accounts chose to commemorate the death of Trotskyist and 'left' oppositionist Karl Radek in a Soviet correctional labour camp on May 19 1939.

Some chose to use the adjective "killed", perhaps to make the event more significant and dramatic than it actually was. It is, of course, impossible to establish all the exact facts of what happened nearly 90 years ago, but the best evidence and accounts suggest Radek died after getting into a fight with a fellow inmate and 'left' oppositionist named Varezchnikov.

Radek had been serving a sentence of 10 years imprisonment after being charged and found guilty in January 1937 of "being a member of the anti-Soviet Trotskyite centre, responsible for its criminal activities, but *not directly* participating in the organisation and execution of acts of a diversive, wrecking, espionage and terrorist nature" (my emphasis). Thirteen other defendants who *had* been found guilty of "*direct involvement*" (my emphasis) were sentenced to "the supreme penalty - to be shot".

Radek had actively participated in the factional and disruptive operations of the Trotskyist and 'left' oppositions since 1923 and was finally expelled from the Communist Party in 1927, after helping organise an independent, semi-insurrectionary, anti-communist demonstration on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the October Revolution. One really can't imagine anything more provocative, or even sacrilegious, if one can use such a word, than organising an anti-communist and anti-Soviet demonstration on such an anniversary.

Like many other oppositionists, he recanted his opposition a number of times and was readmitted to the party, only to be further disciplined for further factional and illegal activities. Disgraceful, scurrilous and disgusting behaviour and showing utter contempt for the Communist Party, its traditions and what it stood for in terms of establishing and building the world's first socialist society and thus contributing enormously to the worldwide transition to socialism.

It was utterly cynical and contemptible that 'leftists' such

Online Communist Forum



Sunday May 25 5pm
Thinking about the transition from capitalism to communism
Speaker: Mike Macnair - followed by 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

Communist University

Jointly organised by CPGB, TAS and *Prometheus*

Thursday July 31 until Thursday August 7 inclusive
Central London venue, a short walk from Great Portland Street tube
Details of speakers and sessions will be posted here:
communistuniversity.uk

Cost:

Whole week, including accommodation: £250 (£150 unwaged)
Weekend, including one night's accommodation: £60 (£30)
Full day: £10 (£5).
Single session: £5 (£3)

You can reserve your place by sending a £30 deposit to account:
Communist Party of Great Britain
Cooperative Bank, sort code: 08-92-99, account number: 65109991
IBAN: GB33CPBK08929965109991, BIC: CPBK-GB-22
Make sure to reference 'CU 2025'

as Zinoviev, Kamenev and presumably Radek, among others, prated continuously about the “world proletarian revolution”, when the first two specifically had actively opposed and even tried to sabotage the plans for the socialist revolution in Russia in October 1917. These ‘leftists’ in the 1920s violently opposed the very notion of building socialism in Russia after the revolution, despite the country’s vast economic potential, enormous natural and mineral resources, not to mention huge population.

It was never going to be easy and it wasn’t. The Bolsheviks had immediately to deal with external class enemies trying to overthrow Soviet power in the civil war, and later with internal enemies acting on behalf of the overthrown classes and determined to drown the revolution (and all communists) in blood.

Of course, opposition to the very concept of building socialism logically and inexorably led to the conclusion the socialist revolution itself should not have been attempted - a conclusion that Kamenev and Zinoviev arrived at a little earlier than their fellow ‘leftists’. It was predictable, but sad, that, faced with the living, concrete reality of a socialist society actually being built in front of their eyes, such ‘leftists’ should try and do everything possible to denigrate, undermine and, in the worst cases, actually sabotage it.

It is asserted, albeit frankly without any evidence whatsoever, that Radek was “murdered” in the camp and on Stalin’s orders. Given the year, I hardly think Stalin was especially concerned or bothered about people like Radek. It is exceptionally hard to see how Radek, while in a correctional labour camp, could have continued to constitute any kind of ‘threat’ to Soviet power or to Stalin personally. Bluntly, if Radek *were* to constitute any kind of threat by his earliest release date in 1947, the term of imprisonment could easily have been extended, as did happen to a number who had been sentenced to such initial terms.

Crowning this one of oh-so-

many anti-Soviet conspiracy theories, is of course the biggy that the so-called public Moscow Trials were all a frame-up and, of course, personally directed down to the last detail by no other than Stalin himself. But, if Radek was such a “threat” in 1939, after having served two years in a labour camp, that Stalin took time off from everything else on his agenda to direct and organise his assassination, why on earth did he not take the opportunity to dispose of Radek in the 1937 trial, along with the 13 other defendants sentenced to the “supreme penalty”? Why was it that the court itself determined highly forensically that Radek (and one other), while part of the anti-Soviet terrorist centre, was not *directly* involved or participating in the actual organisation of the acts themselves, and thereby merited a more lenient punishment.

The question of direct or indirect involvement is often a very fine line. Many would take the view that being involved in the ‘general staff’ of a terrorist centre makes you as guilty as those you get to do your actual dirty work. So why didn’t the court find Radek guilty of the more serious charges? Did they not follow the alleged ‘script’? In that case, according to the conspiracy theories, that should have meant they were next for the chop, but they weren’t. Did the ‘director’ choose Radek for a more lenient verdict and sentence? But why? Did Stalin have some sort of soft spot for Radek? Unlikely. And crucially what changed in the two years between Radek being sentenced and his death, if the conspiracy theory is that Stalin ordered his murder?

None of the conspiracy theories add up or can be reconciled with each other.

Finally, it is interesting to note (especially given the later public and the military trial) that in an interview with a German politician in 1934 - ie, after Hitler’s rise to power - Radek stated that the Soviet government “should be close to Germany” and that there are “some fine lads in the SA and SS”. In 1936, he, along with marshal Mikhail

Tukhachevsky, congratulated general Ernst Köstring on the day Germany occupied the Rhineland.

Of course, these were words and not concrete actions, and I am not suggesting for a second that those words alone prove their guilt in conspiring with the Axis powers. There is, however, a vast amount of exceptionally detailed evidence in the later trials themselves, which those who continue to proclaim the defendants were all ‘innocent’ really need to be able to disprove and in a systematic manner, otherwise I’m afraid such claims are just assertion, bluster and hot air.

Some more visceral Trotskyists such as Vadim Rogovin actually concede many of the points set out in the trials, but ‘justify’ the ‘leftists’ conspiracies on the basis, ‘My enemy’s enemy is my friend’, and a violent, military-led coup d’etat in the late 1930s would have been in effect Trotsky’s ‘political revolution’.

We can be grateful to Mr Rogovin for his honesty.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Kneecap

The name of the band, ‘Kneecap’, is highly offensive to some - although no doubt they’ve created it as a commentary on the madness of the time of troubles in Ireland, when people were being kneecapped left, right and centre. It was and is an appalling punishment dished out as a form of street justice. Their name keeps on cropping up and the article by your Irish correspondent has made me want to listen to their music (‘Saying it loud and clear’, May 15). Politics is a messy business!

There’s a lot of bad language in their songs. Great stuff. Sing as you speak and you can’t go far wrong. They write highly provocative lyrics - long may they sing and stick the boot into the suffocating apparatus of state rule.

Elijah Traven
Hull

Long game

In January I rejoined the Labour Party after a gap of 31 years. I’d resigned in 1994, following the election of Tony Blair as Labour leader - I was following the mistaken advice of the now late Peter Taaffe.

In January I didn’t know that Sir Keir Starmer would meanstest the winter fuel allowance and cut the personal independence payments and universal credit of new claimants. And now Starmer has echoed the words of Enoch Powell, when he said that Britons risk “being strangers in our own country”. These comments are the responsibility of Morgan McSweeney, the Labour equivalent of the Tories’ Dominic Cummings.

Given that Starmer is paving the way for a Nigel Farage-led majority Reform government, should I cancel my Labour membership direct debit? No. If only one in 10 Labour members are socialists, this still amounts to 30,000 people or 45 per constituency.

My view is that we should play the long game - let Starmer and Farage self-destruct. I’m sure many Labour members and activists are up in arms about the cuts to winter fuel allowance, PIP and UC, not to mention Starmer’s reference to Enoch Powell.

John Smithee
Cambridgeshire

ACTION

Support City University strikers

Friday May 23, 12 noon: Rally outside City University, Northampton Square, London EC1. End outsourcing of cleaning staff. Organised by Independent Workers’ Union of Great Britain: x.com/IWGBUoL/status/1923023315356012940/photo/1.

Lewisham, divest now

Thursday May 29, 6.30pm: Organising meeting, St Mary’s Centre, Ladywell Road, London SE13. Plan the next steps to force Lewisham council to divest from funds that support genocide. Organised by Lewisham Palestine Solidarity and Lewisham CND: x.com/LewGreenwichCND/status/1921902248814092644.

The USSR and the international working class

Thursday May 29, 6.30pm: Online meeting. Yassamine Mather discusses the *British road to socialism*, anti-imperialist popular fronts, patriotism, class collaboration, etc. Organised by Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

Welfare, not warfare

Thursday May 29, 7pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton BN1. Stop Starmer’s militarism - defend the right to protest. Speakers include Shabbir Lakha (Stop the War). Organised by Brighton and Hove Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/welfare-not-warfare.

Idealism and materialism in philosophy

Thursday May 29, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: x.com/CCSoc/status/1904682254984425888.

Disclosure: unravelling the spycops files

Friday May 30, 7pm: Book launch, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Kate Wilson introduces her account of police infiltration of activist groups, including sexual relationships and spying without warrant on hundreds of innocent civilians. Then the 20-year struggle to uncover the truth. Tickets £4 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: housmans.com/events.

It’s the people versus the developers!

Saturday May 31, 1pm: Demonstration. Assemble Peckham Square, London SE15. Homes for people, not for profit; council housing, not luxury flats; stop overdevelopment. Organised by Southwark Housing and Planning Emergency: www.ayleshamcommunityaction.co.uk/SHAPE.

Rethinking the roots of British communism

Monday June 2, 5.30pm: Online seminar. Author Tony Collins references his book, *Raising the red flag: Marxism, labourism, and the roots of British communism, 1884-1921*. Registration free. Organised by London Socialist Historians Group: www.history.ac.uk/events/rethinking-roots-british-communism.

Derby silk mill lockout festival

Saturday June 7, 10am: Procession and family festival. Assemble Market Place, Derby DE1, and march to Cathedral Green for rally. Commemorating the silk mill workers, locked out by their employers in 1833 for refusing to accept pay cuts and abandon their trade union. Organised by Derby Silk Mill Festival: www.facebook.com/DerbySilkMillRally.

Bargain books

Saturday June 7, 11am: Book sale, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Get your hands on Marxist classics and rare pamphlets. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/497.

Welfare, not warfare; stop the cuts; tax the rich

Saturday June 7, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Portland Place, London W1. March to Whitehall for rally. Labour’s cuts target the poorest, most vulnerable in society. Demand funding for welfare, wages and the NHS. Organised by the People’s Assembly: thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Invest in peace, not nukes

Saturday June 7, 12 noon: Day of action. Assemble at Guildhall Square, Armada Way, Plymouth PL1, for open-top bus tour of Plymouth and its nuclear links. Followed by protest outside the Trident nuclear dockyard, Camel’s Head, Devonport PL5. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: cnduk.org/events.

Printworkers and the 1986 Wapping dispute

Thursday June 12, 7pm: Online and onsite lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speakers Ann Field and Matt Dunne provide details of this defeat for the working class. Registration free. Organised by General Federation of Trade Unions: www.facebook.com/events/966566215671025.

Festival of the oppressed

Saturday June 21 to Sunday June 22: RS21 weekend school, Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7. 26 sessions covering how oppression is defined and remade by capitalism, and how to resist and transcend this oppressive social world. Registration £36.50 (£21.00, £11.00). Organised by RS21: revsoc21.uk/festival2025.

Jarrow rebel town festival

Saturday June 21, 11am: Parade. Assemble pedestrian tunnel, Tyne Street, Jarrow NE32. Led by Felling Silver Band. Speakers include Mick Whelan (Aslef), Kate Osborne MP and David Douglass. Followed by social at The Crown and Anchor, Chapel Road, Jarrow NE32. Organised by Jarrow Rebel Town Festival and Seven Lads of Jarrow: www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100069808375202.

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.

Fighting fund

Unique role

After exactly three weeks, we have raised £1,792 towards the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund target for May of £2,750. Yes, we still have 10 days to go, as I write, but bringing home the £958 we need before the end of the month is not something to be taken for granted.

Nevertheless, I’m confident - as I always am! - that we can get there. We’ve got so many supporters who always do their best to see us home and I hope May will be no exception. In the last week, for example, we received three-figure donations from both comrades SK and PM.

Other, more modest, but still highly valued, contributions came from MM (£75), KS (£50), TR (£40), TW and GB (£25 each), OG (£24), BB and DR (£20), SA (£12), SB and JL (both £10). All those came in the shape of bank transfers or standing orders, while comrade JB made his £8 donation via PayPal.

All in all, £767 came our way over the last week, so can you

help us match that over the next seven days, so we can get within reach of that target? If you want to play your part, there are several ways you can: not only those mentioned above, but there’s still time to send us a cheque, or even hand a few pounds in cash to one of our comrades, if you know one.

For more information on how you can help us out, please go to the web address below. We rely on your help to make sure the *Weekly Worker* can continue playing its unique role in the drive towards the organisation our working class urgently needs - a principled, democratic-centralist organisation, uniting all revolutionary Marxists in a single party ●

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

GAZA

Silence of the Beeb

Israel is using food as a weapon of war. Despite recent token gestures, the Gazan population faces starvation. David Lammy huffs and puffs but allows the export of arms to continue. As for Donald Trump, says **Ian Spencer**, he is more interested in real-estate deals

It was not only the bright spring sunshine in London which gave an almost surreal quality to the 27th national Palestine solidarity demonstration. An estimated 600,000 of us took to the streets and yet you would not know it from the coverage on the BBC: not only was it not on TV, but you will search the BBC website in vain for any reference to the May 17 demonstration at all.

One would have thought that opposition to bombing and starving 2.2 million people was a newsworthy event. Indeed, if the polls are to be believed, a clear majority of people in Britain oppose Israel's operations in Gaza. One does not have to be unduly cynical to suspect that the BBC is deliberately consigning one of the biggest demonstrations of recent years to the memory hole. You must turn to Al Jazeera, social media or the left press to get any idea of its scale.

The size of the demonstration was in no small part due to the 77th anniversary of the Nakba and the launch of Israel's Gideon's Chariots plan to escalate its offensive, including a full reoccupation of the shattered Palestinian enclave. Israel resumed its attack on Gaza in March, after breaking a two-month ceasefire - ostensibly to free the remaining hostages, but in fact to 'finish the job' of ethnic cleansing. Most recently, the Israel Defence Forces issued another evacuation order for the city of Khan Yunis, concentrating the population even further. Over 70% of Gaza is now in Israeli militarised zones or under displacement orders. There are no safe spaces in the Gaza Strip.

No aid

Since March 2, for 11 weeks Israel has cut off supplies of food, fuel, medicine and aid, exacerbating hunger and malnutrition.

In brief remarks made on May 4, Donald Trump acknowledged that Gazans were "starving" and suggested Washington would help get food into the strip. On May 18 Israel announced that it would allow "minimal" aid into the strip to prevent a "hunger crisis" - it allowed five lorries carrying humanitarian aid (mostly baby food) into the territory the next day. Tom Fletcher, the UN's humanitarian aid chief, said that it was "a drop in the ocean of what is urgently needed".¹ He went on to warn that 14,000 babies could die in Gaza in the next 48 hours under Israel's blockade. As of May 20, the 93 trucks waiting at the Karem Shalom crossing had not delivered their aid to UN distribution points.² Fletcher is a British career diplomat, who used the term 'genocide' speaking to the UN security council on May 13, to describe what is happening in Gaza, in an exhorting critique of Israel and the impotence of the UN.³

Along with Trump, who avoided Israel on his recent visit to the Middle East, other Israeli allies, such as France, Canada and even the UK, felt able to speak out against the "egregious violence". Canada has threatened sanctions, and the EU is reviewing trade agreements. Even David Lammy, possibly with one eye on future trials in the international courts, has suspended talks on a trade deal with Israel. He has summoned the country's ambassador and described the military escalation in Gaza as "morally unjustifiable". However, there is no sign that the UK will suspend any more weapons export licences, prevent the use of



Paid for by you and me

RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus as a base for reconnaissance flights or as a staging post for the delivery of US military aid to Israel.

We have seen 19 months of slaughter and, while estimates vary - depending on whether you count the thousands under the rubble and the excess deaths resulting from the denial of medical care for the full range of conditions - the fact that around 53,000 have been killed, is shocking enough. According to the World Health Organisation, recently stripped of funding by the Trump administration, the entire population of Gaza is facing food shortages. The latest analysis from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), of which the WHO is a member, reveals that most of the people of Gaza are in a catastrophic situation of hunger, acute malnutrition, starvation, illness and death.⁴

Famine has yet to be declared, but people are starving now. Three quarters of Gaza's population are at "emergency" or "catastrophic" food deprivation - the two worst levels on the IPC's scale. If the situation persists, nearly 71,000 children under five are expected to be acutely malnourished over the next 11 months, according to the IPC.⁵

People in Gaza are trapped in a dangerous cycle, where malnutrition and disease fuel each other, turning everyday illness into a potential death sentence. Malnutrition weakens the immune system and makes the healing of even simple wounds much slower.

Meanwhile, over 121,000 people have been wounded in Gaza, and these are not simple wounds. 22,500 have sustained life-changing injuries, including amputations, spinal cord trauma, traumatic brain injuries and

major burns. Gaza has the highest number of child amputees per capita worldwide, with its healthcare system increasingly unable to help them owing to the deliberate destruction of hospitals by the IDF. More than 10 children are losing one or two limbs every day in Gaza.⁶ According to Unicef, the UN children's security fund, there are at least 1,000 child amputees.⁷

Many of the malnutrition-related deaths are due to common diseases like pneumonia and diarrhoea, which children are particularly susceptible to, while pregnant and breast-feeding mothers are also at high risk of malnutrition. Linked to this is the fact that the IDF has systematically targeted the water supply. Where clean water is scarce, breastfeeding is an infant's best hope of survival, but that presupposes that the mother is well nourished enough to produce milk. Malnutrition also has effects that will last for years, even if food were plentiful from today. This can even extend to future generations, as it is known to exert a catastrophic effect on epigenetic factors in the population, leading to birth defects, stunted growth and cognitive impairment.

UN criteria

There is now an increasing likelihood of widespread famine. According to UN criteria, famine is when at least 20% of a given population face extreme shortages, more than 30% of children suffer from acute malnutrition and at least two out of every 10,000 people or four out of every 10,000 children die each day from hunger-related causes.

After fat stores are depleted the body is dependent on muscle and bone for energy. Severe protein deficiency

causes fluid retention and a swollen abdomen in children. More than 9,000 children have been admitted to hospital for treatment of acute malnutrition since the start of the year, according to the UN.⁸

Hunger weapon

As hunger is weaponised by Israel, the people of Gaza face not just starvation, but continuing bombing too. Tom Potokar, a British plastic surgeon stationed in southern Gaza with the charity Ideals, has reported that the bombing is "shredding people to pieces". He was at work in Gaza European Hospital when it was hit by Israeli bombs. Hundreds of people have been killed in recent days and Israeli tanks have rolled into the strip from the north and south. The 61-year-old consultant, who previously worked at the Welsh Centre for Burns and Plastic Surgery in Swansea, has had to move hospital three times as a direct consequence of Zionist bombing. Since Israel violated the ceasefire in March, at least 3,131 Palestinians have been killed and 8,600 have been injured.⁹

Trump's apparent recent remarks about starvation in Gaza should give no grounds for optimism about his concern for peace, as seen by his signing of a \$142 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia. At best, it promises a transient respite in a relentless campaign aimed at removing the Palestinian population. It is a symbolic act - about as effective as the British government's sanctioning of a handful of named settlers on the West Bank, while the ongoing settler violence undergoes a dramatic surge, assisted by the IDF.

The US president's Middle East tour to the United Arab Emirates

and Qatar has been a boost for the Trump family real-estate business. Aside from the lucrative Saudi arms sales for US weapons manufacturers, the 'gift' of a \$400 million Jumbo jet from Qatar is a measure of Trump's priorities. He gives every indication that his real-estate ambitions for Gaza have not ended. He told reporters on May 15, "I have concepts for Gaza that I think are very good. Make it a freedom zone," he said. "Let the United States get involved, and make it just a freedom zone."

The United States is very much involved, as is the UK, as co-belligerents, alongside Israel, and that is just the point. The marchers, commemorating the 77th anniversary of the Nakba, understand better than most what really needs to happen: the cessation of all military and economic aid to Israel, the closure of all Israeli military infrastructure in the UK and USA, equal rights for all in Palestine/Israel, the end of occupation and the right of return for Palestinians ●

Notes

1. www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20250519-first-aid-trucks-entering-gaza-are-a-drop-in-the-ocean-says-un-aid-chief.
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ZIONISM

Death by degrees

It is not just Netanyahu and his far right coalition government. Ethnic cleansing and genocide are built into the DNA of the Zionist project. And, of course, the British state is fully complicit, explains **Eddie Ford**

With Operation Gideon's Chariots - approved unanimously, of course, by the security cabinet - the genocidal nature of the Israeli state has become obvious to most thinking people, even if most establishment politicians are reluctant to admit it. Even the name has ominous implications: 'Gideon' invokes the biblical warrior who led a chosen few to annihilate the Midianites - an ancient Arab people - making the operation redolent of divine vengeance and ethnic conquest, and clearly meant to frame mass slaughter as a righteous cause.

Just as obviously, the plan is a formal blueprint for permanent occupation, mass displacement and annihilatory violence against the besieged and displaced Palestinian civilian population. A second Nakba that could be far worse than the first one, which over 1947 to 1949 saw approximately 750,000 people fleeing their homes in terror from the advancing paramilitaries and then the new Israeli state's military - there were numerous massacres, hundreds of Palestinian villages destroyed, or depopulated and repopulated, with new Hebrew names, by incoming Jewish settlers.¹ During the cabinet's discussion of the operation's biblical name, Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly said about the Gazans: "We want them to die alone."

So far, information about Operation Gideon's Chariots have come from a leak, so we do not know the exact details. But we can see the evidence in front of our eyes. There is not only talk of taking "total control" of the Gaza Strip, but also of dividing it into three civilian zones - and if you want to go from one zone to another you have to pass through a checkpoint, which obviously gives Israel the power to decide who will be let through.

This is all supposed to be part of the Zionist plan to 'defeat Hamas', even though Netanyahu must have been told by the generals that it is an impossibility, especially as Hamas enjoys support in the West Bank and in the Palestinian diaspora as the leading resistance force. In that sense, it is not dissimilar to the IRA in Northern Ireland: it was not a bunch of isolated fanatics, but an organisation deeply rooted in the population.

From March 2 until a few days ago all aid to the strip was cut off in a blockade, with widespread reports of people living on the edge of starvation - a conscious Israeli policy to let people die or ready them for mass expulsion.

Criminally, Israel has forbidden aid agencies from storing food and medication in warehouses, requiring that all food entering Gaza be taken directly to its final location - presumably to maintain the fiction that Hamas is 'stealing' the aid and hence must be frustrated. In a pure display of cynicism, Netanyahu recently issued a video statement that he had decided to allow "minimal" aid into Gaza, because "we cannot reach a point of starvation for practical and diplomatic reasons" - genocide by degrees. At least a fifth of the population is threatened with starvation. The UN's humanitarian chief, Tom Fletcher, was interviewed on May 20 on the BBC's *Today* programme about



Yet another victim of Israel's 'plan to defeat Hamas'

the "starvation crisis" in Gaza - he estimated that 14,000 babies could die within 48 hours if aid does not reach them.

We have expressed surprise numerous times before in this publication at the relatively low number of official deaths reported so far by the Hamas health authorities. According to them, the figure of over 53,000 has now being reached, which is being added to every day - particularly since Operation Gideon's Chariots. But if you read reports from *The Lancet*, once you take into account bodies still buried under the rubble, premature deaths from injuries, and so on, the truer count is nearer 70,000-plus. Nevertheless, we seem to be on the edge of a *qualitative* leap in terms of deaths.

Of course, people do not die normally from actual starvation itself. Thus a doctor will not write 'starvation' on the death certificate - the chances are that the person would die of something else. If people are denied food, their whole body deteriorates and they become more vulnerable to diseases that they would normally be expected to shake off. Eg, diarrhea, pneumonia, and measles.

Acceptance

You cannot call it unanimity, but there is very widespread acceptance amongst judicial experts - including some on the conservative end of the political spectrum - that what is going on amounts to genocide. It is not just progressive academics or Amnesty International making such statements - though, of course, the latter has been blasted many times by Israel for its 'anti-Semitic' bias.²

For instance, the Dutch newspaper *NRC* interviewed seven renowned genocide and holocaust researchers from six countries - including Israel - all of whom described the Gazan campaign as genocidal, saying many of their peers shared this assessment.³ Israeli historian Raz Segal has declared

that "there is no counterargument that takes into account all the evidence", and describes the blockade of Gaza as a "textbook case of genocide" connected to the original Nakba. For his assessment, a job offer to Segal was cancelled by the University of Minnesota, where he was about to be appointed head of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies - the result of a campaign by the pro-Israeli Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas.

As *NRC* notes, even 'cautious voices' have changed.⁴ Shmuel Lederman of the Open University of Israel used to oppose the "genocide label" until Netanyahu flouted the International Court of Justice's January 2024 order to prevent genocide by allowing emergency aid into Gaza. Lederman finally began to see the Israeli government as genocidal after the IDF seized control of the Rafah crossing last year, cutting off the only humanitarian aid route, as international experts warned famine was imminent and as analysts warned the true death toll in Gaza could ultimately reach 200,000 - which is more than plausible.

Genocide studies as an academic discipline does not treat the issue as a binary - an on/off light - but more like a dimmer switch. We need to grasp genocide as a phenomenon not by looking at it after the event, but *during* the event. The fact of the matter is that if you deny food, do not have in place proper sanitation or electricity supplies, then you are moving in the direction of genocide. Anything else is apologetics - an area where Britain is indeed complicit. It has provided diplomatic and military cover for Israel, supporting its 'right to self-defence' - ie, to commit genocide.

If we look at the top rung of the Israeli airforce, it is the American-designed F35 - a fifth generation fighter bomber costing between \$80 million to \$109 million apiece. However, F-35s rely on a complex supply chain,

the second biggest source being British-based companies such as Rolls Royce, BAE and GE Aviation. In total something like 15% of F-35s - the rear fuselage, swivel nozzles, electronics, and ejection seats - are manufactured in the UK. So Britain is enabling Israel's killing machine.

Shouting

A few MPs could be heard shouting "genocide" in the House of Commons after David Lammy, the foreign secretary, announced that the government was suspending its trade negotiations with Israel and summoned the Israeli ambassador, Tzipi Hotovely, to the foreign office.

Lammy told parliament that the Gaza blockade was "morally unjustifiable" and went on to say that Israeli finance minister Bezalel Smotrich had spoken of Israeli forces "cleansing" Gaza and "destroying what's left" of Palestinians, who were "being relocated to third countries" - perhaps a reference to purported US plans to *permanently* send up to a million Palestinians to war-torn Libya.⁵ The foreign secretary thundered about this being "monstrous", "repellent" and a form of "extremism".

Pusillanimous as ever though, Lammy did not mention genocide, or even ethnic cleansing, even though as a graduate of Harvard Law School he must be aware of the law surrounding these issues and the thoroughly illegal nature of what Smotrich was proposing. More to the point, he totally fails to understand why Israel is a genocidal project. It is not because of Benjamin Netanyahu and his coalition, nor Donald Trump. It was *Labour Zionism* that oversaw the first Nakba and the Six Day War - that saw the seizure of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and also the Golan Heights - which has since been annexed, along with East Jerusalem. Contrary to what we are often told, what is unfolding with Operation Gideon's Chariots is not a case of some rightwing aberrant

- it is Zionism, left, right and centre: the rest is just a question of when and where.

We can read it in Theodor Herzl's 1896 *The Jewish state*, which you could regard as the foundational document of modern or political Zionism.⁶ Though some Zionists now like to dress themselves up in the language of anti-colonialism and national liberation, in the late 19th century they had no such compunctions - they were quite frank and open: this was a colonisation project, and a vanguard of farmers and labourers would build a new Israel. For this an imperialist sponsor was needed, as Herzl was explicit about. Then the indigenous Arab population could be displaced by one means or another - buy them out or persuade them to leave using other means.

Revisionist Zionist Ze'ev Jabotinsky wrote a famous 1923 essay, in which he said that Zionism must "proceed regardless of the native population" and "develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population - behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach".⁷ And you are peddling fairy stories to believe anything else - something today's revisionist Zionists, including Netanyahu, accuse Labor Zionism of doing.

That is why the current situation is dangerous. Yes, Israel is obviously a racist project, though just saying that can get you suspended or expelled from the Labour Party - but it is more than that. It is actually predicated on ethnic cleansing and eliminating the original people of the land being colonised. So the left must avoid deluding itself into thinking that victory is inevitable, because Israel has an apartheid system as previously in South Africa, so we should expect an equivalent outcome. The model of colonisation is different, even if certain factors are overlapping.

Israel is not an *exploitation* colony based on screwing the native labour, like in South Africa or under the British Raj in India - where colonial officials oversaw a vast Indian workforce. Rather, it is modelled on North America and Australia (and not least Tasmania, where they got rid of every last aboriginal). It is what Karl Kautsky called a "work colony" - although Moshé Machover has argued in these pages and elsewhere that it is more accurate to label it an *exclusionary* colony.⁸ Sure, you have Palestinian labour at the margins, but this is not what defines Israel's political economy - it relies on providing Jewish jobs for Jewish workers.

That is what both Labor Zionism and revisionist Zionism advocate and defend ●

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POLEMIC



Celebration of Stalin's birthday in 1949 China

Centuries of Stalinism?

What is the nature of the transition from capitalism to communism? In the first of a series, **Mike Macnair** begins with the ideas of the 1950s Fourth International and how 'official communists' see things today

We have been discussing the question of the transition to communism in the Forging Communist Unity talks. The CPGB's *Draft programme* presents this as involving the immediate overthrow of capitalist *political rule*, followed by a more or less prolonged process of socialisation of the means of production (starting immediately with land and infrastructure, banks and finance, and so on). To quote the *Communist manifesto*,

We have seen above that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy.

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the state: ie, of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.

Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by means of measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further

inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production.

The issues are, of course, posed significantly differently in the 2020s than in 1848, and our *Draft programme* does pose them differently. But the *shape* of the revolution in our view remains political democracy first, then enabling a *process* of socialisation.²

Talking About Socialism comrades have urged the view that socialisation of the means of production needs to be pretty much immediate; whether because of the development of the forces of production (and in particular of workers' skills) since the 19th century; or because the working class will naturally not stop short at taking the larger capitals (and to persuade the class to do so is to create a party dictatorship); or because political democracy is only possible if there is socialisation (as enabling democracy in the workplace). I admit that I may not have listed all the arguments here.

Underlying them, it seems to me that there is a concern among TAS comrades that the CPGB's *Draft programme* might be proposing something like the gradualism in *Britain's road to socialism*, the programme of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain; or - as bad, but different - 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' (which involves intense exploitation of

sections of the working class, as well as the dictatorship of the political police).

This is going to be a series of articles. In this one I look briefly at an analogous debate in the 1950s Trotskyist movement; and in a bit more depth at three articles related to the topic in the CPB's *Communist Review*. Next week I will address Peter Kennedy's arguments in his piece, 'Differentiating socialism and communism' on the TAS website, and go on to consider the 'transition' issue in terms more of general principle and analysis.

Trotskyists

There is a certain similarity of this fear with an episode in the history of the Trotskyist movement in 1951-53. Michel Pablo (Michalis Raptis) in the document, 'Where are we going?', written in 1951 at the height of the Korean war, argued:

People who despair of the fate of humanity because Stalinism still endures and even achieves victories, tailor history to their own personal measure. They really desire that the entire process of the transformation of capitalist society into socialism would be accomplished within the span of their brief lives, so that they can be rewarded for their efforts on behalf of the revolution. As for us, we reaffirm what we wrote in the first article devoted to the Yugoslav

affair: this transformation will probably take an entire historical period of several centuries and will in the meantime be filled with forms and regimes transitional between capitalism and socialism and necessarily deviating from 'pure' forms and norms.³

French Trotskyist leader Marcel Bleibtreu characterised this statement as amounting to the claim that:

the transitional society (several centuries...) takes on a character of the sort that the Soviet-type bureaucracy (which is confused with all manifestations of bureaucracy that are inherent, wherever you have a low level of the development of the productive forces and a low level of culture) becomes a historically necessary evil: that is, a class.⁴

Pablo responded both with arguments from Marx's *Critique of the Gotha programme* (that Marx's discussion of the economics necessarily implied a *period* of transition) and by asserting that "We locate the downfall of Stalinism in the unfolding of the struggle already engaged between imperialism and the revolution in all its forms: the USSR, the 'People's Democracies', Yugoslavia, China, the colonial revolutions now in progress and the international revolutionary movement. This struggle will not

last for centuries but a much briefer period."⁵

James P Cannon in May 1953 simplified Bleibtreu's argument into the idea that Pablo forecast "centuries of Stalinism".⁶

In reality, the underlying difference between Pablo and his opponents in the 1951-53 debate was not really about the form and duration of the transition from capitalism to communism. It was about the question of the origins and nature of Stalinism as such. For Pablo, Stalinism grew from the *isolation* of the Russian Revolution - and a tendency towards bureaucratic dictatorship would thus reappear in any new isolated revolution, so that the decisive issue was *world* revolution.

For Bleibtreu and Cannon,⁷ on the other hand, Stalinism grew from the *specific backwardness* of Russia. Thus Bleibtreu argued in the document quoted that the Chinese revolution showed that the Communist Party of China had broken with Stalinism: the first of many successful communist and left-nationalist leaders who were supposed to have done so.⁸ A perspective of a series of national revolutions was thus feasible.

This perspective was reflected in the fact that after splitting from the 'Pabloites' (in France in 1951, internationally in 1953) the 'anti-Pabloite' wing could not sustain an international even of organised symbolic coordination, but instead created a series of Comintern- or

Cominform-style organisations centred on a single national party, with ‘Moscow’ in New York, Paris, London, Buenos Aires ...

I was drawn to reference this episode by the similarity of the TAS comrades’ fear that the CPGB *Draft programme’s* account of the transition supports an ‘official communist’ approach, to Cannon’s “centuries of Stalinism” trope in 1953. But the point of substance is also relevant. The transition from capitalism to communism is *necessarily on a world scale*.

Cleaver

In this context, it is useful, for seeing what *real* ‘official communism’ argues about the matter, that the latest issue of the CPB’s *Communist Review* (May-June 2025) carries three articles in different ways about the transition.

In page order, Carlos Martinez, author of the 2023 book *The east is still red - Chinese socialism in the 21st century*, reviews Torkil Lauesen’s 2024 *The long transition towards socialism and the end of capitalism*. Sion Cleaver writes on the CPB’s programme *Britain’s road to socialism* as “A Marxist approach to modern conditions”. And Ruth Pitman has a ‘political education column’, “on the significance of the Critique of the Gotha programme”. I will discuss these in a different order, starting with Cleaver before moving on to Martinez and then Pitman.

Sion Cleaver’s article purports to be a defence of the *BRS*, but in fact abstracts from it to the point that it says very little about its specifics. It states mainly propositions that most Trotskyists (let alone other forms of non-‘official’ communists) would agree with.

He begins with the point that communism is the “actual movement [*Bewegung*] which transforms [*aufhebt*] the present state of affairs. The conditions for this result from the situation that now exists” (from the *German ideology* drafts).⁹ This is agreed by all Marxists, though there is a widespread tendency to back-read the English usage of ‘movement’ in the sense of the ‘labour movement’ onto *Bewegung*, which means a process of change. The differences among leftwingers are about what the situation that now exists *is* (or, more exactly, what current dynamics are).

He returns to this issue at the end of the article, claiming that *BRS* is Hegelian-dialectical (relying on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of spirit*). It would be useful for him - and, incidentally, enable a serious critique of what is wrong with the *BRS* - for him to read Marx’s 1843-44 *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of right*.¹⁰ *BRS* is, in fact, Hegelian as opposed to Marxist: its strategy relies on the state bureaucracy and the labour bureaucracy as *potential* representatives of the general interest - rather than, as Marx pointed out, defenders of their *particular bureaucratic turf* interests.

Cleaver’s second point is that Britain today is not Russia in 1917 or China in 1949 - which, again, is perfectly true. That “the working class must use all available means - including parliament, local government, and industrial action” (citing Lenin’s *Leftwing communism*) would again be agreed by everyone, including the Socialist Workers Party and the Spartacists and their offshoots; it is only the left communists who would eschew electoral work as a matter of choice.

He goes on to quote Gramsci on “war of position versus war of manoeuvre”. He is probably unaware that this conception of making a difference between Russia and the west was actually originated by Trotsky (and, in fact, led Trotsky to a radical misunderstanding of the dynamics of World War II). Trotskyists, he says,

“often argue that any engagement with parliamentary democracy is a capitulation to reformism. However, their position assumes that conditions for immediate revolutionary insurrection already exist - a claim not supported by material analysis.”

Again, this is a complete fantasy in relation to the claims of the Trotskyists. They by and large argue precisely that, since conditions for insurrection do not presently exist, what needs to be created is a militarised ‘party’ for the future when they *do* exist, coupled with a broad-front left Keynesian party for the present. In reality, the politics of the dominant tendencies among the Trotskyist left is precisely that of the *BRS*, and their organisational separation from the *Morning Star*-CPB is due to sectarianism on both sides: for example, why can the CPB not absorb Socialist Action?¹¹

Cleaver thus actually fails to defend the actual politics of the *BRS*, defending instead a sort of generic ‘Leninist’ orthodoxy.

The basic *obvious* problem with the *BRS* is that its starting point is the struggle for a “left government”, to be a coalition of left-led Labour with the CPB and other “left parties”, on the basis of a Keynesian and nationalist policy for ‘rebalancing’ away from finance capital. The nearest approach to this policy that has ever been achieved is the Corbyn leadership of the Labour Party in 2015-19. Though the *BRS* has been re-edited since 2019, no balance-sheet is made of *why* the Corbyn project failed.

In fact, this is a larger issue: the *BRS* offers no balance sheet of *why* the leadership of the USSR itself collapsed the regime in the late 1980s, and no significant section of the working class was willing to defend it; it appears merely as a “defeat” by the USA. OK, what might we do better to prevent a similar defeat? The *BRS* offers at most support for the Chinese regime (implying the use of internal passports to hold down wages, and so on).

Relatedly, the *BRS’s* analysis of the evolution of British capitalism is built round the idea of *national* economies, characterised nonetheless by ‘Stamokap’ (‘state monopoly capitalism’). This was a theory constructed by Soviet economists to explain *cold war*-period capitalism, and has very little purchase on the world since the turn under the Carter administration to neoliberalism. What about the radical de-industrialisation of Britain since Thatcher’s administration?

The *BRS* in essence clings to an image of Britain dating to the cold war period, in order to cling to the delusion - which remains completely central to it - of ‘socialism in one country’ and ‘national roads to socialism’.

Martinez

Carlos Martinez’s review of Torkil Lauesen focuses on the idea of a “long transition towards socialism” (Lauesen’s own title) *beginning and continuing* under capitalist world dominance, with 1848 as its starting point. In this framework, the collapse of the USSR can be merely an example of ‘win some, lose some’: “The retreats suffered by our movement should be considered as part of an inevitable ebb and flow of a complex trajectory that could take hundreds of years, but which nonetheless has an inexorable historical materialist tide.”

Lauesen is right, and Martinez is right, that the process of transition from capitalism to socialism has already begun, and that we need to understand considerable aspects of modern capitalism as *responses* to the rise of the proletariat as a class, and in particular responses to the Russian Revolution and its consequences. However, this does not license a refusal to give a clear account of what led to the collapse of the USSR.

Martinez tells us that Lauesen is a Maoist by background and has probably had “no easy task coming to terms with Deng Xiaoping theory. And yet, Lauesen’s methodology adheres to Mao Zedong’s observation that ‘the only yardstick of truth is the revolutionary practice of millions of people’.”¹² Assuming Mao is correctly translated here (the context of the quotation in Mao’s *On new democracy* shows plain inconsistencies), the methodology is nonsense. It would imply acceptance of Lysenkoism and other such crap of the sort attempted in China’s ‘Great Leap Forward’ in 1958-62. The majority is *not* always correct.

The argument is that China remains socialist (in spite of the very extensive development of capitalism within the integument of political rule by the Communist Party of China) and is on the road to actually overcoming the dominance of the USA, because of its increased productive dynamism. There is, he argues, no danger of China emerging as an imperialist power, because of CPC political control.

The plausibility of this claim is to my mind very limited. US political actors through the 19th century and into the 20th argued that the USA’s constitutional order would mean that it would be egalitarian, not imperial, in its relations with overseas countries.¹³ The problem is that *politically independent capitalism as such* forces heavy engagement in overseas trade and overseas investments. This, in turn, forces both lending to purchaser countries (which produces an unequal relationship) and endeavours to push input materials suppliers towards specialisation, and navalism to protect the shipping and the investments. Capitalism, otherwise than as a colonised country, is *forced towards* imperialism - and the same is true of the Chinese use of capitalist methods as a means of development.

Martinez goes on to identify Lauesen as arguing that:

Marxists in the west must urgently adopt an internationalist perspective and help construct a global united front composed of the socialist countries, the national liberation movements, the anti-imperialist forces of the global south, and the progressive forces in the advanced capitalist countries ...

Lauesen urges his readers to make a permanent break with social chauvinism; to make a permanent break with the arrogant western Marxism which rejects the leadership and the lessons of actually existing socialism ...

The trouble is that, though Carlos Martinez is probably not old enough to have written similar arguments before 1989, with the USSR and its satellites in the role of “the socialist countries” and “actually existing socialism”, such articles were certainly written in the *Morning Star* and *Communist Review* and similar periodicals, down to a late stage before the 1989-91 collapse.¹⁴ The *political regime* of the ban of factions and police control of dissent - as much present today in China as it was in the 1950s-1989 USSR - produces the result that it is impossible to be sure about which parts of the confident assertions of Chinese success are really true, and which parts are merely ‘official optimism’.

Pitman

Ruth Pitman’s column on Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha programme* starts with the standard narrative that the Eisenachers were “nominally the more revolutionary” and the Lassalleans “more reformist”.¹⁵ She adds, for some reason, the simply false claim that the Eisenach party was larger; and understates the private circulation of Marx’s and Engels’

critiques and the amount of difference between the draft they commented on and the programme adopted.¹⁶

The first lesson she draws is on unity: that “we should never water down our long-term aim of socialist revolution as the price of formal unity, but should focus on *unity in action*, while maintaining our Marxist-Leninist principles” (original emphasis). This formula is that of the united front, but without the early Comintern’s demand for insisting on *freedom of criticism*.

Her second point is headlined: “On the role of non-proletarian strata - working for a popular front against imperialism”. This begins with a quote from Marx’s opposition to the Gotha Lassallean formula that, relative to the working class, all other classes are only “one reactionary mass”. This is followed by a quote from Lenin from ‘The discussion on self-determination summed up’ (1916) on the importance of “revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices”. Her lesson is rather broader than Lenin’s (or the early Comintern’s, in its resolutions and discussions on the national and colonial question):

The lesson for us today is to recognise and respect the potential of *non-proletarian strata* in the struggle against imperialism at home and abroad [emphasis added] ... This is relevant in the cases of resistance and national liberation movements and even bourgeois governments of nations attempting to escape the economic dominance of the imperialist countries.

Here, the ‘official’ communist parties have *repeatedly* fallen into political traps by imagining strategic alliances with either the ‘democratic bourgeoisie’ (liberals) or the ‘national bourgeoisie’ (nationalists of various stripes). The invariable result is to be knifed, producing demoralisation of the mass movement, except for the cases where the communists already controlled the armed forces (eastern Europe, north Vietnam, north Korea, China, etc).

Her third point is to draw on Marx on the distinction between full communism and “an intermediate, transitional process which he calls the ‘lower stage of communism’ and which is today generally known as socialism”. The job which she makes this distinction do is to call for vigorous campaigning in support of “the countries which are (or were) building socialist societies under the leadership of communist parties, such as the former Soviet Union and countries of eastern Europe, China and Cuba.” She complains:

... everything about these countries is constantly misrepresented in an extremely negative light, while any difficulties or mistakes made are highlighted and elevated as general principles of ‘communist’ society ...

... Meanwhile, the Trotskyists add to the bourgeois propaganda ... by describing such societies as ‘state capitalism’ or ‘deformed workers’ states’.

I note merely that *Lauesen* (favourably reviewed by Martinez) characterises the USSR under Khrushchev and Brezhnev as ‘state capitalist’. The more fundamental point is the one I have made above, both on the *BRS* and on Martinez: what *explanation* can you give, comrades, of the failure of the USSR and the eastern European states?

It should be apparent, I think, that there are fundamental differences between these approaches and that of the CPGB. While we recognise a transition period, this *starts with*

the working class taking political power through the creation of extreme democracy (or democratic republicanism).

Our approach

Unlike the *BRS*, with its ambiguous formulae about making the state bureaucracy ‘accountable to’ elected representatives (and leaving untouched the labour bureaucracy), we campaign consistently for radical democracy in the workers’ movement as well as in the state.

We are clear and explicit that there can be no socialism - not just no communism - in a single country. We would not imagine that ‘Lexit’ is politically progressive (still maintained in the *BRS*) or enter into a coalition government with nationalists, as Syriza in Greece did.

We reject out of hand illusions in the Soviet-style regimes. While we recognise that China is complicated, it is clear enough that there is a powerful dynamic towards capitalism and imperialism in that country’s development - and the political regime is not one which is subordinated to the working class as a class, with the result that a 1989-style outcome is quite possible.

And, while we argue that the Communist Party should not propose the instant expropriation of the petty proprietors (small businesses and family farms), which *would* amount to repeating the errors of forced collectivisation, we do *not* advocate the formation of people’s fronts with “non-proletarian strata”, which is a road to communist defeat ●

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Notes

1. Emphasis added. “Nach und nach” is in the German; “by degrees” is S Moore and F Engels (1888); “with the utmost possible rapidity” is in Helen Macfarlane’s 1850 translation; “bit by bit”, which is the most literal translation, is in Hal Draper’s ‘new English version’ - H Draper *Adventures of the Communist Manifesto* [1994] Chicago 2020, pp160-61.
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3. www.marxists.org/archive/pablo/1951/01/where.html (June 1951).
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5. ‘On the duration and the nature of the period of transition from capitalism to socialism’ (June 1951): www.marxists.org/archive/pablo/1951/06/stalinism.htm.
6. ‘Internationalism and the SWP’: bolshevik.org/history/pabloism/InteradSWP.html.
7. And also Mandel: ‘The question of Stalinism: ten theses’ (January 1951): www.marxists.org/archive/mandel/1951/04/10theses.htm.
8. I owe this point to Daniel Gaido’s useful review of Livio Maitan’s 2020 *Memoirs of a critical communist* (www.historicalmaterialism.org/towards-a-history-of-the-trotskyist-tendencies-after-trotsky), though I checked the quotation in Bleibtreu.
9. I have adopted, in preference to the translation used by Cleaver, that in T Carver and D Blank *Marx and Engels’s ‘German Ideology’ manuscripts* Basingstoke 2014, pp93-95 - checked against the German text of G Hubmann and U Pagel (eds) *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Deutsche ideologie zur Kritik der Philosophie* Berlin 2018, p18.
10. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/index.htm.
11. That is, *British Socialist Action*: www.socialistaction.net (a formerly Trotskyist group that is now fully committed to ‘official’ communist politics).
12. The Mao quote is from www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_26.htm.
13. Some useful quotations at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/US_imperialism.
14. Lauesen, who is old enough, was an armed-struggle Maoist in the 1970s and probably already then considered the USSR state-capitalist and Soviet-imperialist (in essence, still his judgment of the USSR after Nikita Khrushchev, p233).
15. I have written more on this: see ‘The snowball effect’ *Weekly Worker* March 20 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1530/the-snowball-effect).
16. For Lars T Lih, see platypus1917.org/2023/06/02/a-review-of-karl-marxs-critique-of-the-gotha-program.

IRAN

Red lines and regional gambits

Trump's visit to the Middle East garnered all manner of mega-sized business deals. However, unspoken, in the background, there were two looming issues, Gaza and the US-Iran nuclear talks. **Yassamine Mather** looks at the likelihood of an agreement

As the fifth round of nuclear talks between Iran's Islamic Republic and the United States approaches, both sides have turned to the media to assert their red lines. Central to the standoff is uranium enrichment: some US officials insist Iran's programme must be "dismantled", while Tehran maintains that "the principle of enrichment is not negotiable". There is nothing new about these red lines: what is surprising is why the issue has only come up after four rounds of talks, described by both sides as "positive" and "constructive".

Steve Witkoff, Donald Trump's special representative for the Middle East, recently reaffirmed this position, stating that Trump is committed to resolving the issue through "diplomacy and dialogue", but emphasised that "we cannot accept even one percent enrichment capability". This triggered a swift response from senior Iranian officials. Foreign minister Abbas Araghchi reiterated Iran's stance that enrichment would continue, and his deputy, Majid Takht-Ravanchi, warned that if the US remains inflexible the negotiations will fail. Iran's president, Masoud Pezeshkian, speaking at the Tehran Dialogue Forum, invoked the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to defend Iran's right to peaceful nuclear research.

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, speaking on May 20 at the anniversary of former president Ebrahim Raisi's death, echoed this defiance. Criticising indirect talks during Raisi's presidency as fruitless, he declared: "Saying that they won't allow Iran to enrich uranium is an outrageous mistake. The Islamic Republic is not waiting for permission from this or that party."

New proposal

In contrast to this week's antagonistic rhetoric, recent developments had suggested cautious optimism that a deal was possible. Amid the backdrop of Trump's Gulf tour and regional diplomacy, Iranian negotiators had apparently floated a proposal: a regional uranium enrichment consortium involving Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. First raised during April talks in Oman and Italy, the idea envisages a new, jointly-managed enrichment facility - its location could be a Gulf island on Iranian soil, but outside existing sites like Fordow and Natanz. The goal would be to embed Iran's enrichment within a regional and internationally supervised framework.

According to reports in Tehran, Araghchi discussed the proposal with officials in the UAE and Saudi Arabia in early May. According to these reports, the UAE responded positively, while Saudi Arabia expressed cautious interest, but did not reject the idea outright. The Islamic Republic hoped the consortium could reduce nuclear tensions, be presented as regional cooperation and offer a diplomatic way out for all parties. Iran would retain enrichment under international oversight, the US could claim it curtailed Iran's autonomy and Gulf states could assert regional control over a high-stakes security issue.

However, deep mistrust remains. Past failures - such as the collapse of the Iran nuclear deal - have cast long shadows. While international institutions like the International Atomic Energy Agency's Low Enriched Uranium



Amidst Saudi bling: Donald Trump with Mohammed bin Salman and Syrian president Ahmed al-Sharaa

Bank in Kazakhstan offer models for multilateral operations, the proposed consortium is a rare "third way".

Iran's pursuit of a multilateral enrichment framework is not new. In the 1970s, Iran's stake in France's European Gaseous Diffusion Uranium Enrichment Consortium, was frozen after the Islamic revolution, despite a legal victory over its investment. Similar proposals made to the UK, France and Germany in the 2000s were rejected amid fears of covert activity.

However, Saudi Arabia is also moving ahead on its nuclear ambitions - currently backed by the US - and it is difficult to predict what options will be preferred.

In this respect, Donald Trump's high-profile May visit to the Persian Gulf reinforced Washington's regional pivot and underscored the context for Iran's proposal. The trip featured economic deals, defence agreements and cultural diplomacy - with nuclear talks playing out in the background.

In Saudi Arabia, Trump was welcomed with royal fanfare and met by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. He also held a landmark meeting with Syrian president Ahmed al-Sharaa - the first US-Syrian presidential encounter since 2000. Alongside symbolic gestures came economic substance: Riyadh pledged \$600 billion in US investments and signed a record \$142 billion arms deal.

In Qatar, Trump oversaw Qatar Airways' historic purchase of 210 Boeing jets and visited Al Udeid Air Base. He also participated in the handover ceremony marking the FIFA World Cup transition from Qatar to the US, using the occasion to promote dialogue over confrontation. He also praised Qatar's emir, Tamim

bin Hamad Al Thani, for "acting in good faith" as a mediator between Washington and Tehran. "The emir has been quietly helpful," Trump said, "trying to convey messages and reduce tensions on both sides. He understands the stakes and wants to avoid escalation."

In the UAE (May 15-16), the focus shifted to innovation. Trump launched a five-gigawatt AI data centre in Abu Dhabi - set to be the largest outside the US - and received the Order of Zayed, the UAE's top civilian honour. Plans for 'Disneyland Abu Dhabi' were also unveiled: apparently, this would envisage a fusion of American entertainment and Emirati identity!

While the economic agreements themselves may not be especially significant on their own, they signal a shift in US policy in the region - one that abandons even the pretence of concern for what Trump calls "woke" issues: women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights and human rights more broadly. Notably, the tour did not include a stop in Israel. Some interpret this omission as a calculated attempt by the Trump administration to balance continued support for Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza with the need to maintain strong ties with Arab dictatorships - ties that are crucial for managing growing regional unrest and popular anger over the war on Palestinians. Moreover, in light of the new trade and investment deals, neither the US nor its Gulf partners appear eager to trigger a broader regional war targeting Iran.

Meanwhile, Iran's economy remains in a dire situation. At the beginning of the current year, following severe currency fluctuations in Iran, the US dollar rate

in the free market surpassed 100,000 tomans for the first time, while the price of a gold coin also rose to 103 million tomans. At the beginning of the US-Iran negotiations the exchange rate declined, dropping to around 83,000 tomans by April-May. This week, with the hardening of positions between Iranian and American officials, the dollar exchange rate in Iran suddenly surged again.

Espionage claims

UK-Iran relations sharply deteriorated in May 2025 following two high-profile British 'counterterrorism' operations that led to the arrest of eight men - seven of them Iranian nationals - in two separate cases.

On May 3, five men were detained in coordinated raids across London, Swindon and Greater Manchester. Four were confirmed as Iranian nationals and accused of 'plotting a terrorist attack', reportedly targeting the Israeli embassy. While the arrests dominated the headlines, the subsequent release of three of the suspects without charge received almost no media coverage - highlighting a striking double standard in press coverage.

That same day, in a separate operation, three other Iranian nationals were arrested under the 2023 National Security Act. They are accused of conducting surveillance on journalists from *Iran International* - a pro-Zionist, UK-based Persian-language news channel. All three men had previously been granted asylum in the UK! Iran's ministry of foreign affairs has firmly denied any involvement in either case, calling the allegations baseless.

Given the timing - coinciding

with Iran-US nuclear negotiations - it seems improbable that the Iranian state would authorise operations likely to derail diplomacy. A more plausible explanation is that rogue actors, possibly affiliated with Iran's intelligence services, were involved. Such groups have previously been infiltrated by Mossad, and any incident like this - especially arrests on British soil - undoubtedly serves the interests of Israel, which remains deeply opposed to renewed US-Iran engagement.

Tensions have further escalated amid a renewed push in the UK parliament to designate Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organisation. A letter calling for proscription, signed by over 550 MPs and Lords across party lines, suggests heavy lobbying - likely backed by Israeli interests - at what is a strategically sensitive moment.

This push, however, faces long-standing obstacles:

■ **Operational complexity:** The IRGC is not a standalone militant group - it is deeply embedded in Iran's political, economic and military structure. Proscribing it would complicate legal frameworks and make any engagement with Iran's state apparatus far more difficult.

■ **Retaliation risk:** Such designation could provoke cyberattacks, proxy escalation or threats to British nationals - risks that successive UK governments have so far chosen to avoid.

While the arrests and parliamentary letter appear to show rising pressure for confrontation, they also raise serious questions about timing, motive and the broader geopolitical gamesmanship at work ●

WDC

Everyone wants to join

While Corbyn and his trusted aides prepare to launch yet another soft left party, the SWP acts as foot soldiers ... including for born-again Green leftie, Zack Polanski. **Carla Roberts** reports from Sheffield

The generational shift in the Socialist Workers Party's leadership has seen members running around like headless chickens, without any clear political direction. In itself, that is nothing new, of course - but it is now taking on rather bizarre dimensions.

This was all too clear at a packed We Demand Change 'summit' in Sheffield on May 18. Over 400 people crammed into the Sadacca Centre to hear Jeremy Corbyn MP, Lindsey German (ex-SWP, now Counterfire), Green Party deputy leader Zack Polanski, Respect founder Salma Yaqoob and a bunch of SWP members wearing a range of non-SWP hats. This included, rather absurdly, the new national secretary, Lewis Nielsen, who was introduced as "from Stand Up to Racism and WDC nationally". The main sessions were all chaired by SWPers using any title but their SWP membership (eg, "I'm a mother and trade union activist"). This might have fooled some newcomers, though the dozen or so SWP paper sellers outside, drawn from much further afield than just Sheffield and even South Yorkshire, made it rather obvious who was running the show.

WDC works closely with Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project: Corbyn has agreed to speak on its platforms, allows donations to be collected via his PJP and has also seconded his organiser, Artin Giles, to act as WDC chair at various events.

However, reading between the lines of the report published by *Socialist Worker* (and, indeed, listening to leading SWP members), it seems that they are not welcome in the about-to-be-launched Corbyn party. Not that there are any honest reports about the negotiations currently taking place - it is all very hush-hush, but we hear that a "soft launch" will be taking place "within the next two months".

How WDC fits into the new Corbyn party remains something of a mystery - including, it seems, to SWP members. The official line given out by the SWP is that the various WDC summits are supposed to "bring together the different movements" - nothing more, nothing less. Bring them together to do what? Nobody knows - it is all very opaque. And unsurprisingly, everybody else in Sheffield was talking about the real question (just as they did at the March 29 WDC launch event): should we form a new left/socialist party - and, if so, what kind of party?

Charlatan

The only speaker at the plenary session who had no problem answering the question was Zack Polanski. Without any contributions or questions from the floor, there was no way to challenge his call for people to join the Green Party to build the "green industrial revolution" (oh, and to vote for him in the current leadership elections) or indeed question his new-found love for Gaza and the plight of the Palestinians.

Yes, people change and hope dies last, etc. But it is important to remember that Polanski - now much-feted by sections of the liberal left like Novara Media and turncoat Owen Jones - was until 2017 an active member and candidate for the Liberal Democrats. He heckled Jeremy Corbyn at an election rally¹ and entirely supported the big lie that the Labour Party was overrun by anti-Semites. He publicly criticised Corbyn "and his absolute



Packed out in Sheffield

complicity in saying or doing, or sometimes not saying and doing, [which] is an existential threat. The Jewish community needs better than someone who is primarily concerned with power."² Corbyn concerned with power? If only - he might have put up more of a fight instead of rolling over when confronted by the pro-Zionist right.

Polanski praised David Baddiel's anti-Corbyn, pro-Zionist book *Jews don't count* and proudly and vocally campaigned for the Green Party to adopt the IHRA fake 'definition' of anti-Semitism, which has played a crucial role in the campaign to conflate criticism of Israel and anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism and has been a powerful weapon in trying to silence anybody speaking out on behalf of the Palestinians:

I've been keen for a long time for the Green Party to adopt the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism. I'm thankful that I recognise my experiences with my fellow Greens is that I feel we don't have the same scale of issues with anti-Semitism in the Green Party as with [sic!] other parties do. It is nevertheless still important for us to send a clear message to Jewish communities both in the party and in the wider world that we stand in solidarity with them.³

Polanski is clearly a careerist charlatan who will hang his flag whichever way the wind is currently blowing. His born-again support for Palestine should not have gone unchallenged. Alas, the SWP allowed him to present himself and the pro-capitalist Green Party as a viable alternative and quite a few members of the Sheffield audience might well have been taken in. The SWP probably thinks it is playing a clever political game by having him at their WDC platforms, just like they think it is clever politics

to allow centrist Labour MPs, trade union bureaucrats and even active Zionists to participate in their front, Stand Up to Racism. Needless to say, this perverted version of the 'united front' in fact does very little to 'build the movement': rather it gives useful political cover to the right - and brings into ever sharper focus the SWP's own political confusion.

Lewis Nielson

When it comes to the question of 'What kind of left party', for example, the SWP has no coherent answer - not even 'join the SWP'. Various speakers tried to explain their tactic in Sheffield, and the most confused was probably Lewis Nielsen:

We have to build the politics of hope. How? We need more days like today and like yesterday and like the national demo against austerity ... We're organising a protest on the day of the benefit cuts vote in parliament and we are going to shut down the country! We need more bin workers on strike. We don't say, 'Vote for us', but we say 'Organise!' The answer is the movements. All of that requires leadership. And this leadership is in this room. And those leaders should stand at the ballot box. We could stand hundreds of candidates.

Err ... we'll shut down the country? We'll stand in elections, but don't bother voting for us?

I assume he was trying to say that the SWP wants to stand candidates, but not under the mantle of We Demand Change - presumably because people like Corbyn said 'no' in exchange for their support. It was all very unclear, but then he was *very* excited. He argued that candidates should "stand on a short platform of five demands" (it's six, actually), which were outlined in *Socialist Worker* a couple of weeks ago: no austerity, refugees welcome

and fight racism, LGBT+ liberation, welfare not warfare, free Palestine and real action on climate change.⁴ Excited yet?

He was certain about what he does *not* want: "a party made up of the existing left - an alphabet soup party. The existing left is not the answer: the movements are." In a later workshop his comrade, Maxine Bowler (presented as "a community activist who has stood in elections many times"), was even more blunt about it: "We simply do not have the time to build a party - the threat from Reform is too big. But we need to put forward an alternative. I am prepared to organise this necessary electoral challenge and sign up, here and now, anybody who wants to stand in the 2026 local elections. Come and see me and I'll put your name on the list." I did not see people rushing towards her, I have to say.

This was all the more confusing, considering that we know Jeremy Corbyn *is* involved in launching a new party (of some sort) that will very soon contest elections. As usual, he kept his powder pretty dry in Sheffield and would only say that "we have to do it: we have to launch an alternative, we have to come together. We have to find a level of agreement, which is not really that difficult." We would certainly disagree with that point - when done right, it is extremely difficult.

Non-socialists

Salma Yaqoob, who we know is centrally involved in launching the new organisation, was a bit more outspoken: "We need an answer at the ballot box. We need a new left party. Our movements are coming together and we will make a call very soon. Let's get this party started!" In a later workshop, she added: "Forming a new left party is going to be difficult, but it has to be done." She asked for a show of hands: "Who would join a

new left party if Jeremy Corbyn was involved?" Everybody in the hall put their hand up, naturally. "Well, get ready, because it is on its way!" She repeated the old formula that "we need a minimum programme and to unite on the 80% or 85% we all agree on."

When pressed from the floor what the new party will do about the "important 15% to 20% we might disagree about", she said the new organisation will "absolutely allow for free speech and differences of opinion. We cannot have leaders put out the line and expect that people follow blindly. How we are doing things will be as important as what we are doing".

That sounds good. However, we hear that there is no plan for branches or, indeed, political platforms, tendencies or factions that could openly organise to take on the leadership. So how exactly any dissent could be expressed in the new Corbyn Party is one of the many things that remain unclear. We were also a little worried when Yaqoob explained that "we might not use the same kind of language that we've used before - we can perhaps be a bit more creative", because "not everybody involved will be a socialist".

We wonder if the SWP has been told that it is not welcome in the new formation, so as to not 'put off' those non-socialists, whoever they may be - perhaps the Muslim MPs who sometimes work and vote with Corbyn? Perhaps some other local 'independent' or 'community' groups? We also got the impression from the speaker representing the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in one of the workshops that the Socialist Party in England and Wales has not been invited along for the ride. Mick Suter argued: "Any new left party of the left has to be built by the trade unions, who have to split from the Labour Party." Another SPEW member made a similar contribution from the floor. Absolute pie in the sky, as can be seen by the unimpressive list of signatories to Tusc's new appeal to that effect.⁵

It would be easy for us to sneer, particularly at the SWP's rejection - they often enough act in a similar sectarian way, doing their best to ignore and/or keep out the rest of the left. However, that would be short-sighted - clearly, it is not just the SWP and SPEW that will be kept out when it comes to launching Corbyn's new shiny party. Counterfire *might* be allowed in (though you could not tell from Lindsey German's speech in Sheffield, which was as focused on 'the movements' as the speeches by her former SWP comrades), as might the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain (some of Corbyn's former advisors, like Andrew Murray, are CPB members) and the various assorted 'broad left fronts' they run.

One thing is clear from all these secret backroom deals: the new Corbyn formation is not going to be the kind of democratic, transparent and politically principled working class party we so desperately need. ●

Notes

1. www.buzzfeed.com/jimwaterson/let-our-friend-stay-corbyn-insists.
2. x.com/ZackPolanski/status/1022434202443309061.
3. www.jewishnews.co.uk/polanski-im-a-victim-of-vicious-criticism-from-so-called-mainstream-jewish-communities.
4. socialistworker.co.uk/news/zack-polanski-leadership-bid-tries-to-pull-greens-to-the-left.
5. chng.it/dsmhNfMzb8.

AUSTRALIA

Electoral front goes national

Victorian Socialists are establishing franchises across the country. **Marcus Strom** looks at the background, the manoeuvring, the programmatic poverty - but welcomes the formation of the Communist Platform

In the aftermath of the Australian federal election, and buoyed by its very limited success, the Victorian Socialists have announced they will become a national party with franchises in all Australian states and territories.

The proposal is for Victorian Socialists to rename itself the Socialist Party and be known throughout Australia's colonial-era states as 'The Socialists'. So, in New South Wales, the most populous state, there will be 'NSW Socialists', Queensland will have its own 'QLD Socialists' and so on across the six states and two territories. Victorian parochialism will go national, with the 'party' word largely hidden from the branding.

The VS has a chequered history. Starting in 2018, the formation initially united the state's two largest socialist organisations, Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance, responding to an initiative of Stephen Jolly from the Militant/Committee for a Workers International tradition. Jolly has been a local councillor in Melbourne since 2004 and is now independent mayor of Yarra Valley. After being its star candidate in 2018, Jolly resigned from VS a year later amid "unspecified and serious allegations". Socialist Alliance, the smaller grouping, withdrew in 2020, when it lost the right to maintain a veto on the VS executive.

Sect project

The Victorian Socialists is now dominated by the (post?) Cliffite Socialist Alternative, which sees the project as its 'electoral front' - no doubt to siphon disillusioned Australian Labor Party and Green voters towards its sect project, which it sees as the embryo of the 'Real Revolutionary Party'. Like most Trotskyist organisations, it thinks the 'revolutionary' programme is only relevant during 'the revolution'. It has no concept of a minimum programme acting as a strategic roadmap to organise today's struggles to the point the working class wins power. So, in order to do 'mass work' during a non-revolutionary period, it peddles warmed-over left reformism to create a pond to fish in. Economic and liberal demands to the fore; democracy and the nature of how society is ruled sidelined.

After winning more than 5% of the vote from three electorates, Socialist Alternative thinks it has the wind at its tail and could hit the big time. A week after announcing the national push on social media, VS says it has signed up 1,700 people, with the national membership now at 3,000.

At its conference in June, it will change its name to 'The Socialist Party' and expand its executive from 13 coopting secretaries of each state and territory franchise, all of which have been appointed, not elected, by the Socialist Alternative-controlled Victorian executive - a guaranteed and reinforced majority. In response, the rival Socialist Alliance group, which had a non-aggression pact with VS in the 2025 election (unlike 2022 where they ran against each other), put out a defensive and vaguely threatening statement that said the Socialist Party "has not been initiated by Socialist Alliance, nor is it a united socialist project".¹

The Alliance statement said that the two groups met on May 8 at the initiative of Socialist Alternative (underlining that VS is still a wholly owned SA vehicle), which will put the expansion proposal to the VS conference in June but with "no



Cliffite or post-Cliffite? Opportunist for sure

immediate desire to seek greater unity for a national electoral project". In other words, they are merely seeking an arrangement where both avoid standing against each other. At the senate level that could prove tricky. However, realising there could be a clash of registering names, Socialist Alternative asked Socialist Alliance not to block its national party registration in other states with the Australian Electoral Commission. Socialist Alliance stated it would not do this: "as the longest-standing federally registered party with 'socialist' in the name, Socialist Alliance has first rights to its use". A clear threat, but what is unclear is what it wants in response.

The current rules of the Victorian Socialists, while permitting open and public 'groupings' (ie, factions), would bar Socialist Alliance members joining the Socialist Party. Reminiscent of anti-communist clauses in the ALP and the British Labour Party, VS rules state: "Members of other (registered political parties), or aligned groupings or organisations attempting to (register) ... are not permitted to join or continue membership of the party."

This puts the Socialist Alliance in a bind. If it stands aside from the Socialist Party project, it risks being completely eclipsed. Its membership is older and smaller than Socialist Alternative, which ran a very strong ground operation in the last election.

No doubt the Socialist Alternative old guard of Mick Armstrong, Sandra Bloodworth and Diane Fieldes sees an opportunity to put their old DSP rivals to the sword. And, given the *fait accompli* presented to it by Socialist Alternative, the Socialist Alliance would need to renounce its separate electoral registration to join the Socialist Party.

Of course, it should just join. One of the main reasons people do not vote for socialists is they present as a collection of infighting, rag-tag sects. Speaking as a Marxist in the Australian Labor Party, I believe it would make fighting for socialist politics in the ALP that much easier if Marxists outside got their act together.

Seizing on the opportunity to push the organisation beyond being an electoral front of the Socialist Alternative group, the fledgling Revolutionary Communist Organisation has just voted to instruct its members and supporters

to join the new Socialist Party as a site to fight for democratic unity around a Marxist programme.

Recognising the potential pitfalls, the decision of the RCO's central committee notes the launch of the Socialist Party project is a "cynical attempt by the Socialist Alternative group to expand the reach of their electoral front. This new organisation will be wholly and undemocratically dominated by Socialist Alternative and will primarily serve as a front for them to recruit to their sectarian organisation." But the living reality of such a project could create opportunities for the RCO to develop its own political culture and experience.

Resolution

The RCO resolution states:

We should not understate the importance of this opportunity to the development of the partyist tendency in Australia. The creation of the Socialist Party will deepen the liquidationist trend within the mainline of Australian Cliffism and open up a space for political struggle around socialist ideas. It would be sectarian posturing to stay out of such a struggle.

Last weekend, the RCO launched a Communist Caucus of the Victorian Socialists, that will expand nationally with the Socialist Party. It will not be limited to RCO members, but open to any in the Socialists who accepts its platform for revolutionary republican-democracy and partyism.

The RCO resolution further states:

Without the active intervention of an organised and disciplined partyist faction, the Socialist Party will inevitably degenerate into another 'broad left' project which tails Laborism and furthers the weakness and division of the socialist movement. However, with such a faction, the formation of the Socialist Party can be the beginning of an open struggle for a genuinely democratic mass socialist party with a firm base in the workers' movement.

This points to the fact that Socialist Alternative and some of its independent allies in VS believe they can present left reformist nostrums

merely to build an electoral presence. This is another attempted shortcut to the big time - and we have all seen that movie before. Nonetheless, life can be shaped. It makes sense for all Marxists not in the ALP to join the Socialist Party and take it from being an electoral front of one small sect to an organisation that has the potential to be much more.

The Solidarity group (the official Cliffite franchisee), the Communist Party of Australia, the Australian Communist Party, the New Communist Party, the Communist Party (ML), Socialist Alliance, Red Ant/Red Spark, Freedom Socialist Party, etc - all should leave their sect pasts behind them and try to unite: not as reformists, but Marxists. The current VS electoral platform, however, is more for 'wealth redistribution' and 'social justice' than socialism. While it talks about a different and new society, and calls for capitalism to be abolished, there is no strategic roadmap to achieve this goal.

And it certainly does not take this demand into its election material. While the VS aims refer to socialism (along with confused descriptions), they also state: "Victorian Socialist candidates, if elected, will fight for a radical redistribution of wealth and power." A clear left reformist formulation. While it says there will be a 'socialist republic', there are no demands to abolish the monarchy, the Senate or the colonial era states and territories. Nothing on the nature of the judiciary or even calls for proportional representation. While it does call for the abolition of the security services (ASIO), it says the money saved should be diverted "into spending on social services". While it calls for cuts to military spending, it is happy to leave the armed forces standing, only calling for the disbandment of the Special Air Service.

There should be no illusion here, either, that the VS results represent a qualitative electoral break for the Marxist left. While getting a handful of decent votes, these remained in single percentage digits - and the vote for the Senate across the whole of Victoria was 1.49%. The politics taken to the election are barely distinguishable from the petty bourgeois, left-reformist Green Party: justice for renters, action on climate change, justice for Palestine, fight the far right, people before profit. The language used by VS is more leftwing, highlighting that there is a class war within capitalism (even Warren Buffet has made that point), but the policy platform is liberal-economist reformism.

It is telling that its electoral offering is to the right of the aims stated on its website: a common fault of Laborism. And even amid these aims there is no clarity on how the working class can win power. Instead, you get this vague formulation: "Australia's constitution, government, legal system and state institutions originate in British settler-colonialism, were built on the dispossession and genocide of Aboriginal people and are geared to serve the interests of capitalism. Consequently, they must be replaced."

Righto. But this misses out how these are to be replaced and with what - two things that might come in handy.

The VS believes it is a potential short cut to mass politics based on left reformism. It challenges the Labor Party, but on the basis of left Laborism.

Socialist Alternative's journal *Marxist Left Review* in 2019 covered

the launch of the Victorian Socialists the previous year. Author Liz Walsh wrote:

In contrast to many other new left formations, the Victorian Socialists was not established as a 'broad party' aiming to become the primary vehicle through which socialists organise interventions into union, social and political struggle ... The party is more akin to an electoral front, with participants primarily uniting around the concrete goal of electing a socialist to the state parliament.²

Here there is a similarity to the attitude of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain to the Socialist Alliances a generation ago: keep the ambition limited to electing someone to parliament; socialist 'interventions' elsewhere should be done by the 'real party' through other 'united fronts'. And the electoral effort is a 'united front of a special type', as John Rees dubbed it.

Partyism

But perhaps life is already getting away from this. While Socialist Alternative argues that Victorian Socialists will be limited to an electoral front, VS's constitution says it will use "workplace organisation", "community organisation" and "political organisation" (for elections) to win its aims. This could create a trajectory beyond this limited vision. Buoyed by its relative success in pushing three electoral results above the background static that most socialist candidates receive, Socialist Alternative believes it is seizing the moment to create a national electoral vehicle for the non-ALP left - one that it controls.

Success, of course, is relative. Socialist electoral initiatives to the left of the Labor Party rarely break above single digits in terms of percentage votes. And, while the VS got a credible vote share in three seats, it can hardly claim to have broken into the big time. For instance, the Green Party has been stuck at about 10%-12% of the national vote all this century.

In the Senate elections, the VS list attracted just over 61,000 votes from the 4.2 million electors in the state of Victoria (1.51%). This is barely above the level of the 'cosmic microwave background' - the static noise in the universe leftover from the Big Bang - although it is higher than the Socialist Alliance received in New South Wales (0.25%), Queensland (0.63%) and Western Australia (0.24%).

What is most interesting about this move, is not the size of the vote, modest as it is, but the partyist logic inherent in what Socialist Alternative is attempting. What is even more remarkable is that SA - which emerged from the four-way split of the Cliffite International Socialists in Australia during the 1990s - is declaring a Socialist *Party* that allows public factions - previously unthinkable for this tradition ●

Notes

1. socialist-alliance.org/news/2025-05-18/statement-socialist-alliance-national-expansion-victorian-socialists. Inspired by groups with the same name in Britain, the Socialist Alliance is the remnant of an electoral front that began in 2001 with eight organisations. But other partners peeled off one by one until only the Democratic Socialist Party was left. The DSP then merged itself into the Alliance in 2010.
2. marxistleftreview.org/articles/launching-victorian-socialists-an-anti-capitalist-electoral-alliance.

SCOTLAND

Gangs of Glasgow

What lies behind the current upsurge in violence? **Scott Evans** looks at the history, the drugs trade - and commends the policy of harm-reduction and professional supervision when it comes to drug use

Scotland has a well-known reputation for gang-related violence, specifically emanating out of the west coast around Glasgow. Rather than focus on the salacious details of the current flare-up I want to give a broad overview going back 150 years.

Over the course of the 19th century, anti-Catholic sentiment in Scotland - at that time an overwhelmingly Protestant country - grew substantially. The Catholic population had a marginal presence at the start of the century, when large numbers of Irish Catholic immigrants came to Glasgow. At the same time the Orange Order and Ulster loyalism grew as a result of significant (although smaller) Ulster Protestant migration.¹

The Irish immigrants settled around the River Clyde looking for jobs in the booming industries of shipping, textiles, metalwork and so on, though many nevertheless remained unemployed. The Catholic centres included the increasingly densely populated Gorbals, facilitated by high-occupancy slum tenement accommodation, and is supposed to have reached around 40,000-55,000 people per square kilometre by the 1930s, which would today put it comfortably near the top of the list of the densest neighbourhoods in the world.² At a time when British rule in most of Ireland had been brought to an end, Glasgow began to see the Protestant 'razor gangs', named after the weapons they carried.

Billy Fullerton founded the infamous Billy Boys razor gang in around 1924. They wore militaristic uniform, paid subscriptions which could be used to pay off police fines and purchase uniforms, and sang songs including the inflammatory 'Billy Boys' song which includes the lines, "We're up to our knees in Fenian blood, Surrender or you'll die", banned from Scottish football in 2011.

Fullerton and his gang worked with sections of the right in breaking up leftwing meetings like those of the Communist Party and in strike-breaking. Fullerton, who received a medal for his interventions against the 1926 General Strike, became a member of the British fascists and later formed the Glasgow branch of Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts.

A few decades prior, in late 1887, Celtic football club had been formed by a group of Catholic priests and eventually sectarian violence, fuelled by the gangs and the competing national-religious identities, would find an outlet for expression in the football rivalry of the Rangers-Celtic 'Old Firm'.

The 'defeat' of the razor gangs is often attributed to chief constable Percy Sillitoe (later director general of MI5) and his 'boot and baton' approach, which he had honed during similar issues down in Sheffield. Some of the over-the-top alarmism in the present-day tabloid coverage is at least in part intended to create an image of lawless chaos in society to produce a demand for the 'law and order' wing of bourgeois politics to come in and 'sort it out' in this way. But it would be a mistake to dismiss the real issues around this form of criminal activity on that basis.

Following World War II, in order to address the housing problem in places like the Gorbals, slum tenements were demolished, 'new towns' were developed, overspill



Drugs ... strictly regulated quantities

estates were built and large tower blocks of flats were built.

A number of 'schemes' (the Scottish term for 'council estate') were built in the 1950s to rehouse Glasgow's slum population - over a quarter of a million people were relocated. Housing was more spacious and provided desirable features like indoor toilets (!), but there were little to no local amenities for people to make use of, alongside very few worthwhile jobs. Market urbanist magical thinking, the prefab rush-job characterising much of it, and the tax-take needs of the Glasgow Corporation (now Glasgow City Council) are to blame for the failures.

Drink and drugs

Without the provision of 'third places' people make their own. And with trauma unable to be fully dealt with comes a need to take a mental break - sometimes by turning to mind-altering substances. Drink and drugs and background noise (mindless TV, radio, music, whatever) can help fill the day of the unemployed with nothing to do. Bored, frustrated young people can go out with their friends, but into a built environment whose every nook and cranny repeatedly symbolises its utter lack of care for or interest in you. Some young people may just need to get away from what might be an unsafe or unstable home environment. Some are pushed deep into a kind of 'survival mode', where the world really feels like a war of all against all.

One illustrative episode of this is 'the ice cream wars'.³ What were originally ice cream vans began passing through these new 'schemes' in the late 1950s, but they also sold cigarettes and other assorted things and were like mini-corner shops on wheels. The alienation and despair leading to drug use combined itself with these vans, which started being used to sell drugs, with rival operators fighting for control over various routes. The major event of the 'ice cream wars' came with the killing of six members of a family, which, combined with police corruption, led to a 'miscarriage of justice', which was only overturned in 2004.⁴

Why the violence? Private property - including debt repayment obligations - requires a method of enforcement, provided for by the state. When what is made illegal is something like drugs, for which demand is relatively high, an illegal economy is inevitable - and those involved need alternative 'enforcement mechanisms'. A fight for monopoly control over supply through 'turf wars' and open violence becomes inevitable.

On January 13 2010, Kevin 'Gerbil' Carroll was shot dead in the car park of a popular supermarket in broad daylight. He was an 'enforcer' for the Daniel family, which was

infamous for carrying out 'alien abductions' and other intimidation tactics.

Jamie Daniel, the boss until his death in 2016, was born in the rapidly deindustrialising Glasgow. His dad died when he was 10 and his mother raised their children in Possilpark, one of the most deprived areas in the city. He had a violent early start in life, then later became associated with a Scottish-Pakistani family which was able to smuggle in high-volume, high-purity heroin, developing networks with people across England as well.

In the 1960s through to the 80s other well-known gangs were involved in loan sharking, protection rackets and robbery, but with the Daniels it was more underground and focused on drugs. This all broke out more into the open in the early 2000s, when two people associated with the rival Lyons gang stole a large stash of cocaine from the Daniels.

Its leader, Steven Lyons, is thought to have developed connections abroad with the Irish based Kinahan family, one of the world's largest transnational organised crime groups. So the Daniels, Lyons and Kinahans may all be involved in the current flare-up. An extradition treaty signed between Ireland and the United Arab Emirates which could result in the Kinahans' extradition this year may well be adding complications to the ongoing feud.

Moving a section of the problem off the streets and into the prisons, as the police constantly proudly say they are doing, is hardly helpful. Others inside the prisons - often for more petty crimes - can be more deeply incorporated into these networks and the tips and tricks of the trade. Communication between prisoners and those remaining on the outside continues. Meanwhile, new people are born into this mess every day, eventually ready and able to be recruited into the various activities.

The fact that young men join the various groups across the streets of Glasgow - many of whom simply grow out of it and never touch organised crime - results from the need to feel safety (in numbers) and belonging (group identity, collective formative experience), and for some lads it is the opportunity to enact 'competitive masculinity'. The question of whether to participate is directly posed to many young people and, if you do find yourself in the shit as a result, maybe in a violent altercation, then calling the police is often not an option - if you do, you are a grass, and that is just going to cause you more issues. So it is very difficult to pull in witnesses for these crimes and, as a result, a lot of this low-level violence will tick along without any police involvement at all.

The 'Violence Reduction Unit' in Scotland takes an approach which, I think, can be fairly described as

focused on massive surveillance and short-term group psychology. That includes a lot of stop-and-search, general increased police presence, even alcohol-use monitoring bracelets, which first saw use outside of the USA here in Scotland (the VRU takes its inspiration from Operation Ceasefire⁵ in Boston). This requires an awful lot of coordination and community involvement, so all this amounts to an inherently fragile 'peace.'

Policy options

Over-focus on the drug wars does lead people to neglect the more boring everyday aspects of NED ('non-educated delinquent') culture in Scotland. But with the presence of organised crime this stuff unfortunately does present itself as a potential funnel into these more societally damaging dynamics.

I would commend the Scottish Socialist Party for supporting a harm-reduction approach to drug use, including legal drug clinics for registered addicts.⁶ The first such clinic opened in Glasgow's west end earlier this year.⁷ But I take it the comrades still stop short of supporting the legalisation of all drugs - which would break the very core of the black markets.

On the other hand, drugs like heroin, with its ongoing addiction crisis, account for both 'harm to self' and 'harm to others', which will be inevitable thanks to the immiseration and alienation capitalism naturally produces. In other words, such drugs should be provided by licensed healthcare professionals in safe settings, aiming to gradually reduce physiological and psychological dependence. Provision should also be allowed in strictly regulated quantities by licensed vendors to people wanting to experiment.

The capitalist system always seem to find one way or another to empower the worst rather than the best humanity has to offer. For the city of Glasgow and its people to really reach its full potential we need nothing less than international socialist revolution ●

Notes

1. The Orange Order itself, formed in the late 18th century in Northern Ireland, had significant roots in prior Scottish Protestant immigration to Northern Ireland. The Scottish contingent of the Plantation of Ulster - sponsored by the British monarchy - were Presbyterian lowlanders, and then later more immigration followed the 'seven lean years' of famine conditions in Scotland.
2. See T Brennan, 'Gorbals: a study in redevelopment' *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* (1957), which claims a decline by about a fifth to 36,000 people from around 1930 to 1951 in a 200-acre area. See also en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_densest_neighborhoods.
3. www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZxEyE4p8I4.
4. news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/3519328.stm.
5. www.motherjones.com/politics/2006/01/straight-outta-boston.
6. scottishsocialistparty.org/taking-action-on-scotlands-drug-epidemic.
7. www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdekew421dgo.

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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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Pursuing a high risk strategy

Starmmer among strangers

Conceivably, Sir Keir's anti-migrant bile might be a cynical manoeuvre. The real target could well be not Reform, but the beleaguered Tories. Setting up a straight Labour-Reform fight at the next general election would, so the calculation goes, see a sure Labour victory. **Paul Demarty** investigates

So it is now the misfortune of immigrants to float through the frictionless void that is Keir Starmer's political outlook.

In a bold (or perhaps desperate) attempt to get some purchase on a political situation in which the government, despite having a near-historic majority, is apparently incapable of doing anything remotely popular, Starmer last week launched a White Paper on immigration. He did so with a speech that was processed primarily for containing the Powellite-sounding line that "we risk becoming an island of strangers".

His defenders rushed to point out, fairly enough, that he referred here to the dire consequences not of immigration as such, but of the lax enforcement of immigration rules. The White Paper itself is a laundry list of onerous regulations and pious promises to enforce the law, crack down on people-smugglers and the black economy, tighten visa requirements, and increase the time to settled status from five years to 10. A cop to his marrow (possibly the only fixed point of his outlook at all), Starmer never saw a problem he did not want to have battered with a nightstick.

The brouhaha over the "island of strangers" quip has obscured many other degenerate features of his big speech. He frames it all effectively as a cheap bit of point-scoring against the previous Tory government:

'Take back control.' Everyone knows that slogan and what it meant for immigration - or at least that's what people thought. Because what followed from the previous government, starting with the people who used that slogan, was the complete opposite. Between 2019 and 2023, even as they were going around our country telling people, with a straight face, they would get immigration down, net migration quadrupled. Until in 2023, it reached nearly one million, which is about the population of Birmingham, our second largest city. That's not control - it's chaos.¹

This will come as a surprise to anyone even remotely familiar with Starmer's political history, which involved a long and successful campaign to commit Labour under Jeremy Corbyn to rerunning the Brexit referendum - a campaign widely and correctly seen as an attempt to reverse the 2016 referendum by stealth. He explains his new policy with a series of urgent, vacuous bromides: "On a day like today, people who like politics will try to make this all about politics, about this or that strategy, targeting these voters, responding to that party. No. I am doing this because it is right, because it is fair, and because it is what I believe in."

Of course, it took Tory hacks about five seconds to compile an extensive documentary record of public statements on his part, implying he



Migrants: desperate

believed the opposite.

There is likely no simple explanation for Starmer's cratered approval ratings, but it is difficult to shake the impression that his pathological lack of principles might have something to do with it. If you are having a rough patch, as a politician you can always launch some big new initiative to try and get on top of things. But there will be a limited upside, if literally nobody believes a word you say about anything, if indeed you sort of *look* fake, if you always give the impression of having been somehow photoshopped into the surrounding environment, even in person.

Lying

So, yes, we can assume that Starmer is lying through his lawyer's teeth, and this is "all about politics", "targeting these voters, responding to that party" - that party being, naturally, not the Tories, but Nigel Farage's rampant Reform UK - still high on its crushing victory in the recent local elections. Though the main victims in that contest were the Tories, there were worrying signs for Labour as well.

So the question is, given that this is a shabby tactical manoeuvre in response to the threat of Reform, exactly what is the tactic? The most obvious explanation would be that Starmer is attempting to 'cut Reform's success off at the ankles', as Margaret Thatcher was supposed to have done to the National Front with a stringent anti-migrant rhetoric back in 1979. In Thatcher's case, it really seems to have worked; but then Thatcher was a Tory. In the sweep of political history, this is an easier trick to pull off for parties of the mainstream right, and especially for the Tories, who have ably exploited anti-migrant hysteria and even mob violence for their entire centuries-long history. It seems trickier for parties of the 'left' (very broadly defined). True, the Danish Social Democrats have succeeded this way in the last six years or so, but I can find few other examples.

Why? The basic political-science

answer seems plausible. Big splashy announcements of this sort have the effect of raising the salience of the issue (in this case, immigration) - that is, the aggregate amount of importance associated with it among voters. However, voters already have a set of pre-existing views about which parties are most to be 'trusted' on each issue. In the case of this sort of panicked reaction to the victory of a migrant-hostile far-right party, this is exceptionally unlikely to work, because the issue is already of very high salience: the success of the far-right outsider indicates a very low level of trust in the mainstream parties, the panicked reaction indicates that the Labour Party believes Reform is a serious threat, and so aping Reform essentially amounts to an argument that people should vote for Reform.

There is the alternative 'four-dimensional chess' version of the strategy. In this version, Morgan McSweeney and his fellow poindexters do not, in fact, believe Reform is a serious threat to Labour. Amplifying its message will exacerbate the damage Reform is doing to the Tories, and sets up a contest in the next general election which will be a straight Labour-Reform fight. In that circumstance, Labour can expect to draw back the support it has leaked to the Greens and Liberal Democrats, on the basis that they have nowhere else to go, if they want to keep the "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists" (as David Cameron famously described the UK Independence Party under Farage) out of government.

This would be an uncharacteristically high-risk move for the over-cautious Starmer, but perhaps not McSweeney, whose machinations in internal Labour politics betray a Kissingerian addiction to excessive strategic complexity and sudden *coups de main*. Could it work? Sure - it *could*. It could also not work - this was more or less the approach of Hillary Clinton's team in 2016, after all, on the assumption that Clinton would have a

far easier time against an unelectable, ranting lunatic like Donald Trump than an experienced, canny politician like Jeb Bush. Whoops!

Broken promises

I do not know which of these two strategies is operative, of course (or perhaps there is another one). What I do know is what is *not* going on: some kind of good-faith attempt to solve the 'problem' of immigration by massively reducing numbers. The measures on offer effectively tinker at the edges. Such was also the case with the Johnson-Truss-Sunak parliament; both Johnson and Sunak promised significant reductions in net migration (I am not sure if Truss did, but she hardly had a chance!), which, as Starmer smugly points out, simply failed to materialise.

But then, part of how we got to Brexit was *David Cameron's* idiotic promise to reduce net inward migration to the tens of thousands - which, of course, would be impossible, so long as Britain remained in a continental zone of free movement. So it goes on. The pattern is clear: leaders huff and puff about how awful mass immigration is, and promise to deal with it, but all the while the numbers keep going up.

This is not because the politicians are liars and traitors, at the end of the day (though they usually are). The British economy has been thoroughly financialised; as a result, productivity is stagnant and the public sector is in decay. There is thus high demand for certain categories of workers, which coincides with an inability to pay much in the way of attracting them; which tends to push employers into importing lower-wage labour, from south-eastern Europe pre-Brexit and from poorer Commonwealth countries today. It is these workers who make up the bulk of the top-line numbers, and if there were serious efforts to restrict migration, the result would be paralysis of the health service and the long-heralded collapse of the social care system, among other dramatic

consequences (particularly at the lower end of the service sector).

Politicians know that, and know they will be blamed, so they do not do it. They amplify the frustrations of backward voters, and then fail to deliver, which all but ensures a ratchet-effect - ever more wild promises to 'take back control', ever more grandiose token displays of cruelty to make the point, ever more disappointment. It is conceivable that a Nigel Farage, or a Rupert Lowe, really *would* pull up the drawbridge and the devil take the consequences; in the meantime, their ability to strike an anti-establishment pose ensures that they will be the beneficiaries of all this.

By the same token, the routine liberal pro-immigration argument - that immigrants contribute considerably to the economy - is both true in a way, and useless. For precisely the problem is that cheap migrant labour is used to compensate for the obvious dysfunctions attendant on the UK economy being wholly parasitical on the rest of the world. Indeed, it is itself *one of the ways* our economy is parasitical on the rest of the world.

It is incumbent on the socialist left to fight against immigration controls for the very different reason that the only way out of this 'beggar thy neighbour' situation is the united action of the working class across sectional barriers - and indeed across borders. It alone has the *potential* to disrupt the capitalists' ability to take advantage of the state system.

The immigration hawks of the left are wrong, not on their one *substantive* factual claim - that mass migration can be used to depress wages and worsen conditions - but rather on this point of strategy. They must seek to replace this alliance - of disparate national sections of the working class - with another purely within the national framework, and are therefore typically driven to the fantasy that there is some meaningful difference of *class interest* between 'productive' industrial capital and finance capital (see, for example, Sahra Wagenknecht's adoration of the *Mittelstand* of medium-sized German industrial firms).

The *failure* of such strategies of class alliance - whether in the post-war popular front programmes of 'official communism' in western Europe (the *British Road to Socialism* and its continental equivalents) or, often, in far bloodier disasters during the decolonisation period in the global south - somehow always goes undigested. We can ill afford such delusions, with political culture in Britain - as in many other countries - increasingly collapsing into vengeful chauvinism: a process exemplified by Starmer's contemptible opportunism ●

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Notes

1. www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-remarks-at-immigration-white-paper-press-conference-12-may-2025.