

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly worker



Flag wars: should left respond by inventing its own version of St George's Cross patriotism?

- Letters and debate
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JEREMY SHOULD SAY HE'S ANTI-ZIONIST

LETTERS



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

Spart fusion

I appreciated the exchanges I had with comrades of the CPGB at Communist University - in particular the openness of your organisation to engage in frank political debate. However, when it comes to the pages of *Weekly Worker*, we feel you engage our organisation in an unserious manner.

A few weeks ago, you falsely claimed the Spartacist League supported the Iranian regime. Last week we had comrade Macnair's letter entitled "Spart leopard" (August 28), whose purpose seems to be to cast a shadow over us. In it he implies we still hold the aim of effectuating "short-term raiding" operations on other organisations. Again, it seems no attempt was made to look at our actual position, which is clearly laid out in the current issue of *Spartacist*:

"The perspective of the ICL is to work toward a political realignment in the international left. We must seek to regroup the truly revolutionary elements that are today spread across various organisations as a result of coincidence and political unclarity. Our objective is not ultimately to win one or two members from other organisations, but to engage in a genuine fusion process with much larger forces" ('The crisis in the Marxist left and the tasks of the ICL' *Spartacist* no70).

We have no problem exchanging vigorous polemics, but for the exercise to be productive it needs to hold some relation to what we write and do. We do not ask that you forget our past, which we certainly do not, but we do ask that your critique of our politics be based on more than impressions from decades ago and lurid tales about our late comrade, Jim Robertson.

If I raise these points, it is not to whine, but to propose that our respective organisations engage each other in a more serious and sustained manner. Let's get real and deal with the politics at hand. The founding of a new left party in Britain offers a chance to change the overall direction of British politics. We believe it is also an important opportunity for the splintered communist forces to clarify their differences and work together. However, in both cases there is a big difference between latent potential and real potential.

There can be no doubt that, left to their own devices, the leaders of Your Party will repeat the disaster of Corbyn No1. In the same way there is no reason to doubt that most communist organisations will act in their usual self-interested sectarian ways. Thus, if we want the outcome to be different, we must act to make it so.

To this end we think it makes sense for our two organisations to seriously engage with each other and look for ways to work together. First, because we seem to align on certain important principles regarding the new left party: opposition to a coalition with the Greens, to Zionism and to support for Ukraine. Second, because we both share the aim of political clarification and regroupment within the communist left. If you are interested in our proposal, we think an obvious first step would be to exchange views on our perspectives towards Your Party (we will be publishing a substantial article in the coming days).

Of course, we are two very small organisations, but we think that

fruitful exchanges could exercise broader influence on the far left. It certainly could raise the level of political debate among communists and put pressure on other groups to work together in building a left pole in the new party.

Gabriel Perrault
Spartacist League

Spart legacy

While I usually find Mike Macnair's articles enlightening, I was a bit confused by his letter last week. Now, I'm not an expert on all aspects of Spartacist history, but I do have a sizable stack of the bound volumes of *Workers Vanguard* that I have to explain to visiting guests unfamiliar with Trotskyist intrigue, so perhaps that lends me some credibility.

Anyhow, comrade Macnair correctly asserts that much has changed within the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) since the 2019 death of their long-time leader, James Robertson. However, I find the rearward analysis a bit convoluted. How can one accuse the Spartacist League of "Oehlerism" (characteristically referring to Hugo Oehler, who refused to take up Trotsky's perspective of entry into the French Socialist Party in the mid-1930s), while earlier pointing out an example of the SL's tactic of entry in the 1970s? Furthermore, how can he insist on the SL's Oehleresque orientation, while noting how the Spartacists contend that the continuity of orthodox Trotskyism flows through Cannon and the American Socialist Workers Party, and then pointing out its strategic entries into different American formations?! Make it make sense, please.

The Spartacists historically are far from perfect, whether viewing them through an orthodox Trotskyist lens or a general communist one (they'd argue they are one and the same, but they'd at least admit their history is that of mistakes - more recently, lots of them). I think comrade Macnair sort of twists logic to fit a preconceived notion of the SL/ICL's history, which then boils down to the sort of sub-political commentary on Robertson being a drunk. The International Bolshevik Tendency made a similar comment about Robertson at the January 2024 debate between the ICL and the League for the Fourth International.

It's often stated that after a certain point in the International Spartacist Tendency (forerunner to the ICL) there was a policy of 'what Robertson says goes' (my words). I can point to some examples where that wasn't the case, but that's a larger subject. What I will say is that, now that Robertson is gone and the ICL is reorienting, his organisation certainly goes much further than his legacy probably would have liked.

C Duran
email

YP inaccuracies

I am sure comrade Farzad Kamangar did her best to report what she thought I and others had argued for at the recent aggregate of CPGB members and supporters ('Political clarity vital', August 28), but there are some glaring inaccuracies in what she wrote that demand correction.

First of all, I plead 'guilty' to what seems to be her main criticism of the amendments that I and some other comrades presented to the PCC's theses on Your Party: "Personally I think the comrades' intention is to recruit a larger number of comrades", she writes.

Err ... yes, that is true, very true. I find it rather worrying that comrade

Kamangar and the PCC seem to have a problem with that. The CPGB has by far the best politics of any group on the left in Britain or internationally. It stands out from the myriad of confessional sects, on the one hand, and unprincipled broad fronts, on the other. What other group fights for principled politics in the open and democratic way the CPGB and its publication, the *Weekly Worker*, does? We are a hugely important political trend that punches far above its weight. But our numbers are miniscule, particularly in light of the challenges in the current period.

Of course we should grow - in fact we *must* grow. Not in a sectarian way, which ignores the real world and is only concerned with itself. But in order to fight as effectively as possible for principled Marxist politics in Your Party and beyond, with the aim of building a real Communist Party. How do we do that? I believe the PCC's theses are fine as far as they go. They correctly assess the problems with Corbyn's politics and the kind of struggles we will have to face.

But they contain nothing concrete about how to go about that fight. How should we most efficiently intervene? How will we try and win over those people who are, for example, inspired by Mike Macnair's book *Revolutionary strategy*, but who remain wedded to political projects that are weak on the anti-Semitism smear campaign and/or gravitate towards social-imperialist positions on Ukraine? Where is the plan? What will we do, concretely? In this hugely fluid political period it is clearly not enough to simply carry on as we are.

Because there were no practical proposals from the PCC, our amendments tried to put some flesh on the bones - basically, to get the ball rolling. We proposed that, for example, we should "explore setting up a 'Communist Caucus' with others who share our ideas"; that we "develop a study/education and discussion programme, ideally with others in this political trend"; that we take steps to improve the *Weekly Worker* and "ensure it plays a leading role in cohering communist forces in YP" and that we develop "a political platform for use in YP", which outlines our key demands and political proposals for our work there.

We should take inspiration and build on the political work we did in the Labour Party. I still question if it was correct not to make Labour Party Marxists into a real membership organisation. Nevertheless, we made quite a splash, particularly at Labour Party conference time, when our daily edition of *Red Pages* influenced many debates, reporting openly about political disagreements and developments. We should build on that experience for our intervention in Your Party.

It is a shame that the PCC seems to have taken our rather modest proposals as a hostile attack - and from a "rightwing liquidationist faction" at that. I did joke that this alleged faction would have to be called the "action faction", as there is no alternative political project behind it. We do not seek to overthrow the PCC or change our politics *vis-à-vis* Your Party. But we are arguing that the organisation can do much better in terms of the *concrete application* of those politics. Perhaps in formulating this or that proposal, PCC comrades got the impression we are trying to subordinate the CPGB to other political trends. That is not correct.

Comrade Kamangar, for example, claims that those moving the

amendments "believe that a less aggressive tone in the *Weekly Worker* and a more 'movementist' approach will resolve the issue and bring significant numbers into the CPGB".

I have gone through the transcript of our aggregate, helpfully produced by Zoom, and I cannot find a single reference to "movementist", by anybody, not even in a different version of the phrase. Which is odd, because the comrade has put the word in quote marks. None of us mentioned anything about a "less aggressive tone" either. Not even in passing.

The comrade also profoundly misunderstands one of our amendments. She writes in reference to point 11, which lists some key demands from the CPGB's *Draft programme*: "In the proposed amendments, they attempt to make only a very brief reference to our programme ... and replace it with a sub-minimum programme."

This is not true. Our amendment did not seek to "replace" our programme, but we sought to develop - *additionally* - specific propaganda around some parts of the programme relevant to our work in YP. For instance, to develop a 'political platform', which could be made into a leaflet, a nicely designed graphic, etc. That is obviously a good idea.

The most controversial amendment was our proposal that the *Weekly Worker* should "play a leading role in cohering communist forces in YP". This urged the editorial team to think about ideas on how this could be achieved, including that the "editorial team *could* [emphasis added] consider co-option and providing structured access to pages for comrades outside our ranks, always ensuring we retain full control". This has been misinterpreted as a demand that the *Weekly Worker* must immediately appoint rightwingers to take over the paper and ruin it, basically, by arguing for moderation and nicer language.

Readers of the *Weekly Worker* will be pleased to hear that we intend no such thing. We simply proposed *options* that the editorial team *might* consider in its attempt to "ensure it plays a leading role in cohering communist forces in YP". As should be obvious, this proposal is very much dependent on the pro-communist forces in YP moving closer together: for example, around a Communist Caucus. Would it not be excellent if those forces started to understand how useful a tool the *Weekly Worker* is in the fight for a Communist Party? If they started to see it as *their* paper, submitting reports, handing it out at YP meetings, etc? Our proposals are aimed at making the *Weekly Worker* into an indispensable weapon for communists operating in YP.

There is, unfortunately, no sign of such a Communist Caucus coming together on a national level - yet (though there is a local caucus being launched in Manchester). This makes it all the more important that the CPGB ups its game.

It is interesting that comrade Kamangar states that "the editorial team is, in effect, the PCC, so this amounts to saying the PCC should coopt non-CPGB members". Is it always the case that the *Weekly Worker* editorial team and the PCC must be one and the same? Clearly not. We had until recently an editor who was not a member of the PCC. I understand that the current arrangement has more to do with real-life pressures rather than a political principle. It is bizarre to imply that this has to remain the way it currently is.

Of course, the PCC has political responsibility for the *Weekly Worker* - and should retain control over the paper, no question. But is it really inconceivable that there could be a wider editorial team, containing non-PCC members? With proper responsibilities for particular sections, for example? Why could you not co-opt somebody who, hypothetically, commissions and chases up articles around Your Party to fill a weekly supplement, particularly if such a supplement were an integral part of a Communist Caucus in YP? Why must that person automatically become a member of the PCC? This is nonsense. The overall political responsibility would clearly remain with the editor-in-chief, as we clearly state in the amendment, "always ensuring we [ie, the PCC] retain full control".

These key practical proposals were held over to the next aggregate for time reasons. If the PCC shows it is taking some serious steps to move forward our intervention in Your Party, then I don't think there is necessarily a need to move (all of) them. They were conceived as a way to get things moving, to start a discussion on how we can take a more serious lead to at least *try* and win to our programme the growing trend of pro-partyist communist forces in YP, rather than just adopt a 'wait and see' approach. This was our only reason for moving the proposals.

It is never nice to be criticised, but, rather than feeling defensive and dismissing our proposals as coming from a "rightwing liquidationist faction", the PCC would do well to take them as a starting point to develop and strengthen our intervention in YP.

Carla Roberts
email

YP nature

On August 30 I was at the local launch meeting of the Jeremy Corbyn Party for the two London boroughs of Greenwich and Bexley, along with about 80 other people. There was a very large poster on the wall, reading: "It's Your Party. What do you want to call it?" A dozen or so wrote their proposals for the name beneath.

The comrade who opened the meeting declared himself to be a member of Socialist Alternative, while a minority of others present included those from the Socialist Workers Party, SPEW, and RS21 - as well as myself, a member of the CPGB. Lots of others did not identify themselves as members/supporters of any left group (though I'm sure comrades from other left groups were there too).

The SA comrade who spoke first said that it was now essential for us to organise, since "the enemy's at the gates" - in the shape of Reform UK. He announced that the meeting would soon be divided into small groups of eight to 10, so that everyone would be able to speak (if only to others in those small groups) and share their ideas about the political priorities the JCP ought to adopt.

In the group I attended - as in all the others - participants were asked to state the policies, both national and local, that Your Party ought to prioritise. In my group (and I suspect in all the others) the main ones were tax the rich, defend and expand the NHS, reinstate proper funding for education and other services, including those run by local councils, and renationalise all former publicly owned institutions. Anti-protest measures must be ended and we must mount opposition to the racist measures proposed against

asylum-seekers - and, of course, oppose Israel’s attacks on Gaza.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there were also proposed policies that could easily be adopted by pro-establishment parties, not least taking genuine action to halt climate change, but also adopting better measures to end pollution, stop speeding on roads and defend ‘safe spaces’.

For my part, I stressed that the main question right now was the *nature* of the party we needed - one that aimed to end capitalism and establish the rule of the working class. I also emphasised that what was needed was *international* action - not just to combat climate change and end the Israeli genocide, etc, but to abolish the system of exploitation and establish socialism worldwide.

For the final half hour we all went back to the main hall, where a spokesperson from each of the groups that had just met (appointed beforehand, not by those present) outlined the (national and local) political priorities discussed in those groups. There were then about 10 minutes left for a broader discussion - very useful!

Rod Wells
Greenwich

YP grassroots

I helped to convene and organise the initial grassroots meeting of Your Party in Cardiff last week. There had been a Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition/Socialist Party meeting a few weeks prior, but to my knowledge that was pretty much only attended by SPEW members and their trade union supporters in Cardiff.

There were a few Revolutionary Communist Party comrades in attendance at the meeting I helped organise (alongside two ex-members of the official CPB, who cursed the Eurocommunist liquidators!). I was doing it in my personal capacity and not as a member of the organisations I am a part of (Welsh Underground Network and Plaid Gomiwnyddol Cymru).

We’ve established an interim steering group to help with organising in the meantime.

Finlay Crawford
Cardiff

YP left reformist

I see that I have made it into a resolution unanimously passed on August 24 at the CPGB aggregate on the new Your Party, which you call the “Jeremy Corbyn party”.

Unfortunately the resolution is inaccurate. It states: “Some, like Tony Greenstein, have called for bans and proscriptions. That would mean a witch-hunt from day one.” Perhaps I can clarify this statement before it passes into folklore.

I do not believe that the new party, whatever its name is, should have left sects masquerading as parties, entering it for the sole purpose of recruitment to their sect rather than helping build the new party itself. I would be in favour of the new party adopting such a policy, given the destructive and fratricidal nature of the left sects over the years.

I am not, however, in favour of enforcement of the ban through witch-hunts, lists of proscribed organisations or similar bureaucratic paraphernalia. The mere disapproval of such tactics by the membership should be enough for the left sects to get the message. I am in favour of left groups and currents organising around the different papers and arguing their politics, whilst at the same time taking part with other members in building what I hope will become a mass left-reformist party.

The history of the left in Britain

is a history of failure and no group epitomises this more than the CPGB. One of the results of this is the growth of a far-right party, Reform, which, according to current polling, will form the next government. That should worry everyone on the left. The Starmer party is clearly incapable of opposing Farage, since all it does is to echo Farage’s talking points. Hence the need for the new party.

It means accepting that in the current climate forming a revolutionary socialist party is impossible for the simple reason that we are not in revolutionary or pre-revolutionary times. We will have to ally with forces to our right who agree on such minor things like the right to protest, freedom of speech and association, and opposition to the deployment of terrorism laws to outlaw protest groups like Palestine Action.

I note that the CPGB recognises that the new party came out of the mass Palestine solidarity movement in Britain. (It wasn’t so long ago that you were openly contemptuous of what you termed “movement politics”). I also welcome the fact that you have abandoned the futile attempt to unite various micro-sects into a slightly larger sect and that you are now devoting your energies to the new Your Party. I just hope that the CPGB does more than simply offer it a programme!

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

YP Bennites

Carol Taylor of the Republican Labour Education Forum has sent the following letter to Jeremy Corbyn and Zara Sultana:

“There are real issues and problems that have to be addressed about the name, character-ideology, strategy and programme of ‘Your Party’. Discussions and debates may seem ‘divisive’, but it is sensible that differences are brought out and made transparent as a way we can find the lessons from the past that can be applied for the future.

“1. We propose the circulation of Tony Benn’s 1992 Commonwealth Bill to Your Party supporters. This sets out constitutional proposals for a democratic republic. It provides a useful starting point for a wider discussion in the labour movement on a written constitution.

“2. The republican principle of the sovereignty of the people and hence ‘democracy from below’ is the foundation of democratic organisation - states, trade unions and parties. In our view, this principle of sovereignty applies to the membership of Your Party and ought to be included in the party rules.

“3. The application of the republican principle of sovereignty means that all representatives of the party must be regularly elected, accountable and subject to recall. In our view, this principle ought to be included in the party rules.

“4. We highlight Benn’s proposal for an English parliament to stand alongside the existing Scottish and Welsh parliaments.

“5. We highlight Benn’s proposal to end all jurisdiction of the British crown in Ireland.

“6. We propose the end of all jurisdiction of the British crown over England, Scotland and Wales. In each nation, sovereignty is vested in the people. These ‘free’ nations will be able to negotiate new constitutional relations with each other if they choose.

“7. Your Party must not adopt the national structure of a British Labour Party, with subordinate Scottish and Welsh parties. There must be autonomous English, Scottish and

Welsh parties. There should be a liaison or coordinating committee of the three parties. We suggest that, as a social republican party, Sinn Féin be invited to send representatives to this committee.”

Steve Freeman
RLEF

YP time waste

An entirely justifiable first response to urgings to join the ranks of the latest iteration of class betrayal and treachery, Your Party, would be to say, ‘For crying out loud, here we go trotting down that cracked and potholed old road yet again, having learned nothing whatsoever from past experience!’ Join up and attempt intervention at the serious level of building a programme for genuine socialism, become demonised and labelled as ‘wreckers’, then duly banned - so finding yourselves right back at square one.

Most simply put, all of it as an entire waste of time and effort immeasurably better spent on continuing to do what we do as revolutionaries, whilst leaving Labourites to do what they do so extremely well without us - that filthy, and arguably even deliberate, *calculated* class betrayal of workers and decent-minded progressives!

But a next batch of thoughts might well throw up how there’s no real harm done in going through the old routine - that music hall *shutick* - so just go along with it, if only for the sheer amusement of watching uninspired operatives on both sides of the stage doing their thing. But, then again, where the matters involved are in fact of the utmost importance not only nationally, but *globally*, Ukrainians, Russians and, of course, Gazans and Palestinians (amongst all other victims within modern-day capitalism) could be provided with a lead, a template: a demonstration of how Bolshevik-modal revolutionary politics is the *sole* way forward towards authentic liberation.

Lecture over! ‘Best of luck’ inside Your Party’s predictable recycling of complicity in the status quo - its inevitable ghastliness and utterly deplorable lack of any transcendency. See y’all on the other side!

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

YP broad front

I know you see your letters page as open, but I take a broad view of the letters published in socialist newspapers. You control your own letters page, as all others do, so a choice is open to publish, here, there or anywhere. I don’t want to be constricted by one single editorial office, nor should anyone else. And, since I am not in any way associated with your paper or its ‘cells’, I am free to use other papers to attack from afar.

It’s a broad front, but in total it contains the entire socialist movement in Britain. Whether communication doesn’t take place in a formal sense between parties, or however critical it may be of other parties, it is an interconnected front that doesn’t stop its work, but can’t be unaware in various ways or levels of the broad-front action and thinking of other parties and papers. That isn’t grammatical, but I hope you see what I mean!

The proof I would like to see of the 700,000 sign-up of Your Party - and what all of us would like to see - is it turning into much improved sales of the only press that can properly serve it: the socialist press. Let it be our gold rush. *Together only* can our socialist movement successfully challenge, then overcome, the British state.

Elijah Traven
Hull

ACTION

Resist the world’s worst arms fair

Daily until Friday September 12: Protests outside the DSEI arms fair, Excel Exhibition Centre, Western Gateway, London E16. Business is booming for the arms industry. Thousands of exhibitors will be dealing in equipment to cause untold death and destruction. Join the discussions, training and actions - themed events every day. Organised by Stop the Arms Fair: caat.org.uk/events/stopdsei2025.

We refuse: saying no to the army in Israel

Friday September 5, 7pm: Book launch, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Author Martin Barzilai discusses his book of interviews with conscientious objectors and dissidents, who have refused to join Israel’s conscription army, the Israel Defence Force (IDF). Tickets £4 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: housmans.com/events.

Chartism Day 2025

Saturday September 6, 10.30am: Conference, Heritage Quay, University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield HD1. Eight sessions covering the history of the Chartist movement. Tickets £12. Organised by Society for the Study of Labour History: sslh.org.uk/2025/07/17/chartism-day-2025.

National march for Palestine

Saturday September 6, 12 noon: Assemble Russell Square, London WC1. March to Downing Street. Stop starving Gaza; stop arming Israel. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/summer-of-action-for-gaza.

Stand up for choice

Saturday September 6, 2pm: Counter-protest. Assemble at the Millicent Fawcett statue, Parliament Square, London SW1. Oppose anti-abortion groups and stand up for the right to choose. Organised by Abortion Rights: abortionrights.org.uk.

Remember Burston Strike School

Sunday September 7, 10.30am to 4pm: Rally, Diss Road, Burston, Norfolk IP22. Commemorate the longest strike in history. Free entry. Organised by Unite the Union and the TUC: burstonstrikeschool.wordpress.com/2025-rally.

Fight Starmer’s cuts - lobby the TUC

Sunday September 7, 1pm: TUC rally, Old Ship Hotel, 32-38 Kings Road, Brighton BN1. Urge the TUC to call a national demonstration against Starmer’s cuts. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/events/1361950818235603.

Welfare, not warfare - lobby the TUC

Sunday September 7, 2pm: Rally outside Conference Centre, Kings Road, Brighton BN1. Demand trade unions join calls on the government to put wages and welfare before warfare. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/welfare-not-warfare-lobby-the-tuc.

Capitalism can’t save us

Sunday September 7, 3pm: Online discussion. Michael Roberts speaks on how Marx’s economics explain today’s crisis. Organised by Arise - A Festival of Left Ideas: www.facebook.com/events/3775047249294398.

Stop arming Israel - stop Starmer’s militarism

Tuesday September 9, 6pm: TUC fringe meeting, Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton BN1. Starmer’s government is hiking up military spending, while cutting back on education and welfare. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Marx Memorial Library open day

Saturday September 13, 11am to 3pm: Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Explore the historic building, which includes the office where Lenin edited *Iskra*. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/510.

Wigan Diggers festival

Saturday September 13, 11.15am to 9.30pm: Open-air, free festival, The Wiend, Wigan WN1. Commemorating Gerrard Winstanley and the 17th century Diggers movement with music and political stalls. Organised by Wigan Diggers Festival: www.facebook.com/events/1178446303737306.

March against Tommy Robinson

Saturday September 13, 12 noon: Assemble Russell Square, London WC1. The TUC and many affiliated trade unions are supporting this demonstration against the far right and racism. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: www.facebook.com/StandUTR.

Social movements in Iran

Sunday September 14, 1pm: Public meeting, Groene Loper 5, Eindhoven, Netherlands and online. With insights on the recent attacks by Israel in Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Gaza. Speakers: Yassamine Mather and Iman Ganji. Followed by questions and discussion. Organised by Accountability Without Borders: www.eventbrite.nl/o/accountability-without-borders-114884242501.

Trump not welcome

Wednesday September 17, 2pm: National demonstration. Assemble Portland Place, London W1. Protest against Starmer’s Labour government for inviting Trump on a second state visit. Trump’s support for Israel has facilitated the genocide in Palestine. Organised by Together against Trump alliance: stopwar.org.uk/events/trump-national-demonstration-against-state-visit.

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.

ZIONISM

Say it loud, say it proud

Why does Jeremy Corbyn refuse to say he is anti-Zionist? Jack Conrad urges Your Party to draw a clear red line. Israel is an expansionist project, a racist project, a genocidal project

Recently, Ani Says, a pugnacious pro-Palestine activist and long-time supporter of Jeremy Corbyn, asked him if he would follow Zarah Sultana's lead and openly declare himself an anti-Zionist. He is filmed umming and ahing. When she pressed him, Ani was edged aside by Oly Durose, Corbyn's communications and media officer. She then talks with Laura Alvarez, Corbyn's wife. She too is filmed umming and ahing, this time on his behalf.¹

Doubtless, the reason for this umming and ahing is fear. Team Corbyn dreads a rerun of 2015-20. Pursuing the chimera of the "election of a socialist government in Britain, or at least of the election of socialists to government", and facing an unrelenting 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign, Corbyn made one shameful concession after another.²

His official spokesperson insisted he opposed a "comprehensive or blanket boycott" of Israel: "He doesn't support BDS."³ Corbyn himself wrote that it is wrong to say that "Zionism is racism."⁴ After offering token resistance, he caved over demands that Labour adopt the IHRA so-called 'definition' of anti-Semitism. Corbyn cited the "importance" of party unity and the need for "solidarity with the Jewish community."⁵ Worse, proclaiming his commitment to "rooting out anti-Semitism", he threw friends, allies and supporters to the wolves. Hundreds, thousands, were expelled, or driven out of the Labour Party, on transparently false charges.

Of course, the December 2019 general election saw a humiliating defeat, Corbyn falling on his sword and the swift succession of Sir Keir Starmer. Obviously then, despite the cynical calculations of advisors - special and ordinary - conciliation did not work. And the idea that it will work with the Jeremy Corbyn Party (otherwise known as Your Party) is simply risible. Why we in the CPGB say, establish a "firm line against those who favour, or who are soft on, Zionism".⁶

Comrade Sultana appears to have learnt the lesson of 2015-20: "The smears won't work this time," she defiantly declares. "I say it loudly and proudly: I'm an anti-Zionist."⁷ But not, it would seem, comrade Corbyn. So, let us spell out, not least for his benefit, what Zionism is, how we can fight it and how we can beat it.

Expansionism

Zionism is inverted anti-Semitism. It too considers Jews a race, a race of outsiders who, as such, will always face persecution from those who they lived amongst. Hence the disdain for assimilation and the dogma of eternal anti-Semitism. Instead of fighting anti-Semitism and demanding equality, it should be accepted as a fact of nature, a norm, a perfectly understandable reaction to the presence of the "Jewish parasite" in their midst. Only when the Jews 'return to Zion' will the Jews become a 'normal people'.

Naturally, nowadays, Zionism claims to be the "national liberation movement of the Jewish people".⁸ However, in its origins, Zionism was perfectly candid. The aim was a Jewish state for the Jewish people, something, which, of course, could only be achieved through colonialism and displacing the indigenous population.



Human price of Zionist settler-colonialism

Migration to Palestine began in the 1890s as a trickle and rapidly increased in the 1930s. Zionism finally arriving at state form in May 1948. Between 750,000 and a million Palestinians were expelled. The first Nakba. In 1967 Israel defeated the neighbouring Arab states and established military control over the Golan Heights, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Half a million Palestinians were driven out. The second Nakba.

Today Israel is still bent on territorial expansion: Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. In Lebanon and Syria the pattern follows the classic 'defensive imperialism' of 'buffer zones'. In the case of southern Syria the new 'buffer zone' is there to defend the Golan Heights 'buffer zone' (annexed in 1981).

However, when it comes to the West Bank and Gaza, the main drive is ideological, not military. Zionism, as an ongoing settler-colonial project, is at the very least committed to incorporating the whole of Mandate Palestine. On the West Bank, Israel has already planted well over 500,000 settlers. Some 40,000 Palestinians have been displaced and another 1,000 killed since October 7 2023 alone. Meanwhile, Gaza stands on the threshold of Zionism's final solution (ethnic cleansing or genocide). A third Nakba.

Sickeningly, the Trump administration, and its GREAT Trust international business partners, have been number-crunching proposals to build a "Riviera of the Middle East" on the rubble of Gaza. The dream is of AI-powered smart cities, sparkling high-rises and magnificent sea-views. Each Palestinian would receive a cash payment of \$5,000 if they agree to be "temporarily relocated".⁹ Libya, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Indonesia and Somaliland are all considered potential options. If they go, there will, of course, be no right of return.

Bizarrely, left panglossians doggedly maintain that Israel "cannot win" in Gaza, that Israel is "unequivocally losing" its war in Gaza, or that Israel has already "lost in Gaza".¹⁰ All true ... if Israel's war aims were ever about totally destroying Hamas and bringing home all war captives (dead and alive). However, that was never Benjamin Netanyahu's intention.

Netanyahu is many things, but he is no fool. His war aims were never

about destroying Hamas. Its social roots are far too deep. Certainly the 50 remaining war captives (dead and alive) are little more than a nuisance for Netanyahu, when it comes to Israeli domestic politics. He knows it and so do the tens of thousands of relatives, friends and supporters, who have time and again demonstrated in Tel Aviv's Hostage Square.

If you really want the war captives back from the tunnels, tents and bomb shelters of Gaza, then direct negotiations with Hamas would have been an absolute priority. And destroying Hamas and negotiating with Hamas are, to put it mildly, mutually incompatible. No, the real aims of Netanyahu and his cabinet are to uproot the indigenous population in Gaza and take yet another step towards realising the goal of a Greater Israel.

Zionism maintains that Jews have a right to the whole of the land of Mandate Palestine (either because of the approval of the Balfour declaration by the League of Nations in July 1922 or Yahweh's promise to Abraham in Genesis). True, there are profound differences over the constitutional set-up in this Greater Israel. Liberal (or General) Zionism says it is committed to market capitalism, secularism, democratic values and the rule of law (which can, of course, see unelected judges overrule Knesset votes).

However, there are those - ie, the religious Zionists - who envisage a Greater Israel as a Jewish theocracy. Fringe elements even want Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque demolished and replaced by a Third Temple - the prelude for the second coming of Jesus for messianic Christians. While secular Jews are viewed as heretics, there is a call for non-Jews, the Children of Noah (*Bnei Noach*), to observe god's laws and support his chosen people - perhaps a future source of urgently needed new settlers.¹¹

Some religious Zionists even hanker after a *greater* Greater Israel - based on various biblical passages: Genesis, Numbers, Ezekiel. At its largest extent their Eretz Israel stretches from the Nile to the Euphrates.¹² Of course, any such Israel would come with a poisoned chalice: an oppressed Arab *supermajority*. The Zionist conquistadors would have to permanently deny them elementary

rights. The newly acquired Arab population would be far too big to do much else with. Mass expulsion is simply not feasible.

Organised racism

Working class politics in Israel - that is, Israeli-Jewish working class politics - barely exists now as an effective collectivity. Historically there has been a remorseless shift from voting for the Labor Party to parties of the right in an attempt to preserve national privileges. The Jewish-Israeli working class being a labour aristocracy that has seen its social power substantially eroded by years of neoliberalism.¹³ In 1983 membership of the trade union federation, Histadrut, stood at 1.6 million; today it is around 570,000. Histadrut, note, once the spearhead of Zionist colonisation, has also been shorn of its role in health, banking and as a very substantial employer in its own right.

Histadrut needs to be put into the context of colonisation. Marxists distinguish between various forms of colonies: plantation colonies, exploitation colonies, colonies properly so-called, etc. Broadly the colonisation of the India, Congo, South Africa type saw the colonisers live off the backs of the native workforce, including peasant farmers, through all manner of dodges and barely concealed robbery. That went hand-in-hand with staffing an army officer corps, running a bureaucracy, managing railroads, docks, etc. The colonisers therefore constituted a relatively narrow caste who often maintained close ties with the imperial homeland (to which the most successful returned, having made their fortunes).

Israel is what Karl Kautsky called a "work colony",¹⁴ or what Moshé Machover prefers to call an "exclusion colony".¹⁵ Other examples being USA, Canada, Australia. Instead of constituting themselves a narrow, often highly privileged, caste and exploiting native labour, the colonisers make up the full spectrum of classes: bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, small farmers, workers, unemployed workers, etc. The indigenous population become foreigners in their own land and are either marginalised or driven to the point of extinction - typically justified using an *organising* form of racism.

Hence, whatever the socialistic pretensions of Nahman Syrkin and Ber Borochov, from its inception, Zionism actually adopted the *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) racism of late 19th century European reaction. Lenni Brenner makes the point:

Enthusiasm for *Blut und Boden* were part of Zionism before the first modern Zionist ever left Europe. Race Zionism was a curious offshoot of racial anti-Semitism. True, these Zionists argued, the Jews were a pure race - certainly purer than, say, the Germans who, as even the pan-Germans conceded, had a huge admixture of Slavic blood. But to these Zionists even their racial purity could not overcome the one flaw in Jewish existence: they did not have their own Jewish *Boden*.¹⁶

For understandable ideological reasons, Zionism latched onto Palestine (the biblical Jewish homeland). But what marked the Zionists out, when they went there, was not that, to begin with, they were a minority of the population in Ottoman and then Mandate Palestine. No, unlike 'normal' colonists, they exercised "no coercive power over the indigenous population".¹⁷

That began to change with the formation of the Haganah militia, but it was poorly armed and could only manage defensive operations till the 1940s. So, gaining the backing of an imperial sponsor was absolutely fundamental. To begin with this was Britain. It was a quid pro quo relationship. Britain agreed the Balfour declaration in November 1917 in the expectation of "forming for England 'a little loyal Jewish Ulster' in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism".¹⁸ The Ottoman empire was about to be carved up by Anglo-French imperialism and that necessitated finding, or creating, willing collaborators: France promoted the historically established Maronite Christians in Mandate Lebanon; the British turned to the incoming Zionist Jews in Mandate Palestine.

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

Friends of Israel

Obediently reflecting British imperial interests, mainstream Labourism has traditionally maintained a sympathetic attitude towards Zionism. Poale Zion - now the Jewish Labour Movement - affiliated to the Labour Party in 1920. Successive Labour conferences voted in favour of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Labour considered the Israeli Labor Party a fraternal organisation and maintained close contacts. From the early 1960s the TUC was giving Histadrut financial aid for its Afro-Asian Institute - a wonderful means for Israel to spread its diplomatic influence. Trade union

tops regularly spoke out against Arab feudalism, Arab backwardness and Nazi-tainted Arab politics.

Nye Bevan, Edward Short, Jennie Lee, Michael Foot and Corbyn’s “inspiration”, Tony Benn, were also counted amongst the Labour Friends of Israel.¹⁹ The lot of them routinely cited the kibbutz as a brave socialist experiment. Eric Heffer even defended Israel’s continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza after 1967 on the grounds that Israel was “the only genuine democratic and socialist-oriented state in the Middle East”.²⁰

Next to nothing of that left now remains. Today Israel counts amongst those countries dominated by the hard right and is therefore regarded as an abomination by those who consider themselves as being the least bit progressive. True, there is still a pro-Zionist ‘left’. But it is, thankfully, marginal and widely despised: the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty comes to mind, and so does the CPB’s resident Zionist, Mary Davis, and her grotesque ‘Anti-Semitism awareness courses’ (as if the *Morning Star*’s CPB has an anti-Semitism problem, when, in actual fact, it has a pro-Zionism problem).²¹

Does this mean that the left has lighted upon a correct programmatic orientation? Hardly - instead we are presented with a range of positions, all of which are far from adequate. Take the already mentioned AWL, the *Morning Star*’s CPB ... and the Bonapartist leader of Your Party. Essentially their two-state ‘solution’ echoes the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Fatah, the Israeli Labor Party and the international liberal consensus. It amounts to economistic Zionism. A little Israel - an Israel returned to its pre-1967 borders - is expected to live peacefully alongside a West Bank and Gaza Strip Palestine. Except, of course, it will not.

For appearances sake, before Trump, US administrations promoted this touching picture of the wolf lying down with the lamb. But, out of a naked self-interest in dominating the Middle East, the US has backed Israeli aggression to the hilt. For all the crocodile tears, the same goes for its Nato allies, such as the UK, Germany and Italy ... because of their subordination to the US hegemon. So there has been no repetition of the early 1990s, when apartheid in South Africa was negotiated away in a US-sponsored deal, which gave black citizens the vote in return for the African National Congress leaving capitalist big business intact.

In Israel-Palestine there is no overwhelming oppressed national majority. There is, therefore, no threat of a revolutionary explosion. The odds are completely stacked in Israel’s favour. That is why Hamas resorted to desperate suicide missions and the Palestinian Authority is reduced to impotent verbal gestures, pathetic diplomatic pleading and effective collaboration with the Israeli occupiers. Recognising this, the likes of the AWL and the CPB clutch at *anti-democratic* liberal Zionist protests - that and common economic struggles, which are supposed to weld together Hebrew and Arab workers into a lever for social change.

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

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

Tailing Hamas

Then there is the left version of the *old* PLO single-Palestine ‘solution’ - the Socialist Workers Party being the quintessential example. Ignoring the history, power, connections and wishes of the Israeli-Jewish population, there is the call for the abolition, the dismantling of Israel and in its place “one secular, democratic [capitalist - JC] state, built on the principle of equal rights for all citizens, including Israeli Jews”.²²

The SWP has long ago given up trying to seriously think through what is and what is not a viable strategy in Israel-Palestine.²³ What it is primarily interested in nowadays - especially post-October 7 2023 - is posturing. The SWP strives might and main to present itself to the mass pro-Palestine demonstrations, not least its Muslim contingents, as the most militant, most implacable opponents of everything Israeli - and thereby sell a few more papers and gain a few more fleeting recruits. Politically, though, the result amounts to tailing Hamas.

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

That this would transform the Israeli-Jewish population into an oppressed nationality never seems to occur to economistic advocates of a single capitalist Palestine. So, for example, in a secular, *capitalist* Palestine, Israeli-Jews would have “language rights, freedom of worship and the right to their own culture, but political rights? No.”²⁴ Of course, a nation threatened with a denial of political and national rights is likely to fight tooth and claw against any such outcome.

Objectively, though, the balance of forces are violently against a single-capitalist-state ‘solution’. There are some 7.2 million Israeli Jews (settlements included); about 10-11 million Palestinians worldwide - but only 6-7 million of them live in Israel, the occupied territories and neighbouring Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. It is fair to say, then, that any projected single Palestinian state would include roughly equivalent numbers of Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs - assuming, that is, no forcible movement of peoples; no attempt to drive the Israeli Jews into the sea; no closure of refugee camps and the dumping of Palestinians

over to the west side of the Jordan river; no round-up and expulsion of Palestinian workers in Saudi Arabia, etc. Therefore what is being proposed is a ‘unity’ where one half of the population gets no say in matters - impractical and, in strategic terms, really dumb.

The call for a single Palestinian state “may seem completely utopian”, once owned up Alex Callinicos, the SWP’s top intellectual. He also *correctly* stated that there is “very clear evidence that the two-state solution cannot work”. Crucially, there exists, he says, the “massive imbalance of power between the two sides. Israel is one of the greatest military powers in the world, backed and subsidised by the US.”²⁵ Right again.

Hence, we are obliged to ask exactly who is going to establish his single Palestinian state. After all, according to comrade Callinicos himself, the Palestinians are incapable of achieving any kind of viable state alongside Israel by their efforts alone. How then can we expect them to establish a single state against the wishes of the global US hegemon and the vast mass of 7.2 million Israeli-Jews? Perhaps what the SWP therefore envisages as its agent of change is the Axis of Resistance - Lebanon’s Hezbollah, Hamas, Yemen’s Houthis ... and the Islamic Republic of Iran? But today, especially after the 12-Day War, a busted flush.

In the wilder reaches of the SWP imagination, the Axis of Resistance could, perhaps, be renewed and reinvigorated with Muslim Brotherhood governments in Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Not completely impossible. But any such combination - leave aside national rivalries and Sunni/Shia contradictions - would be an Axis of Reaction.

Yes, conceivably, Israel *could* be defeated, as the Outremer, crusader, kingdom of Jerusalem was defeated by Saladin’s forces in 1187. But that would, though, hardly produce a *secular* Palestinian state. Nor would it produce a *democratic* Palestinian state. True, if such an unlikely combination were to come together - and, just as unlikely, achieve military victory over Israel - it might lead to a mass exodus of Jews (to who knows where). But if that did not happen, the Jewish Israeli population would have to be subject to extraordinarily harsh measures to crush *their* inevitable resistance. The poles of national oppression would, thereby, and in no uncertain terms, be reversed.

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

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

Zionism is, arguably, a nationalism *sui generis*. While it now boasts a homeland, Zionism claims purchase over the loyalty of *all* Jews, even though the majority of the people-religion are not Israeli and do not speak everyday Hebrew (around 40% of the world’s Jewish population lives in the US, roughly the same as in Israel). Nevertheless, Israeli Jews, the Hebrew-speaking population, is a real, living entity and cannot be dismissed or discounted just because

Israel began and continues to be a settler-colonial state. Israel emerged out of the last phase of the British empire, in the midst of a terroristic civil war and unforgivable crimes that no-one should forget. That said, there is no reason for refusing to recognise the definite, historically constituted Hebrew nation which took state form in 1948.

And since then millions of Jews have migrated to Israel, learnt Hebrew, intermarried, had children, assimilated, and made and remade the Israeli-Jewish nation. Today some 80% are ‘sabras’ - Israeli born - and mostly second or third generation.²⁶ Hence, the Israeli-Jewish nation not only inhabits a common territory and shares a common language: it is historically constituted.

Arab nation

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

By themselves the Palestinians - debilitatingly split between Hamas and Fatah - palpably lack the ability to achieve anything beyond hopeless resistance or abject surrender. There is, however, a way to cut through the Gordian knot: widen the strategic front. There are nearly 300 million Arabs inhabiting a contiguous territory that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean, across north Africa, down the Nile to north Sudan, and all the way to the Persian Gulf and up to the Caspian Sea.

Though studied here and there with national minorities - Kurds, Assyrians, Turks, Armenians, Berbers, etc - there is a definite Arab or Arabised community. Despite being separated into 25 different states and divided by religion and religious sect - Sunni, Shi’ite, Alaouite, Ismaili, Druze, Orthodox Christian, Catholic Christian, Maronite, Nestorian, etc - they share a living bond of pan-Arab consciousness, born not only of a common language, but of a closely related history. Arabs are binational. There are Moroccans, Yemenis, Egyptians, Jordanians, etc. But there is also a wider Arab identity, which has its origins going back to the Muslim conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries.

Communists are, therefore, surely, obliged to take the lead in the fight for pan-Arab unity - as Marx and Engels and their comrades in the Communist League did in the fight for German unity. Such a fight, is, of course, inseparable from the task of building a mass Communist Party - first in each Arab country and then throughout the Arab world. A Communist Party of Arabia.

What of the “just and lasting settlement” between Hebrews and Palestinians that Jeremy Corbyn rightly seeks to bring about?²⁷ That can only happen in the context of sweeping away Iran’s theocracy, the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan, Lebanon’s sectarian plutocracy, Egypt’s military-bureaucratic regime, the House of Saud, the petty Gulf sheikdoms - and the establishment of a Socialist Republic of Arabia. Israel could be offered federal status, with the confident expectation that such an invitation would receive a positive response from below.²⁸

Hence, the road to a united working class in Palestine passes through Amman, it passes through Tehran, it passes through Beirut, it passes through Cairo and it passes through Riyadh.²⁹ ●

Notes

1. www.thecanary.co/trending/2025/08/28/jeremy-corbyn-zionist.
2. Andrew Murray, an entryist from the *Morning Star*’s CPB and also on secondment

- from Unite, served as Corbyn’s special political advisor alongside Seumus Milne and Steve Howell (all former Straight Leftists). Comrade Murray called the “election of a socialist government in Britain, or at least of the election of socialists to government, a realistic possibility” (‘Why the left came back’ *Tribune* October 22 2019). For comrade Murray’s extended argument see *The fall and rise of the British left* (London 2019); and for his disappointed assessment of the “best chance of electing a socialist government in my lifetime” see *Is socialism possible?* (London 2022). His latest thoughts on the JCP can be read in *Sidecar* (interview with Oliver Eagleton: ‘Force of opposition’, August 6 2025 - newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/force-of-opposition).
3. *The Guardian* December 17 2017.
4. *The Guardian* August 2 2018.
5. *The Guardian* September 4 2018.
6. Resolution, CPGB aggregate - *Weekly Worker* August 28 2025.
7. www.facebook.com/ZarahSultanaMP/posts/the-smears-wont-work-this-time-say-it-loudly-and-proudly-im-an-anti-zionist-pri/1352791306408259.
8. www.webelieveinisrael.org.uk/zionism_what_it_is_what_it_isn_t.
9. *The Washington Post* August 31 2025.
10. In order: Sophie Squire ‘Six months of slaughter, six months of resistance’ *Socialist Worker* April 3 2024; Ofer Cassif of the ‘official communist’ Hadash party in Israel; and US ‘realist’ John Mearsheimer *Al Jazeera* January 24 2025.
11. See R Feldman *Messianic Zionism in the digital age: Jews, Noahides and the Third Temple imaginary* New Brunswick NJ 2024.
12. “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, the Adomites, the Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and the Jebusites’” (*Genesis* xv, 18-1).
13. The thesis of the Jewish Israeli working class being a labour aristocracy is closely associated with Maxime Rodinson. See his *Israel: a colonial settler state?* New York NY 1973.
14. See M Macnair (intro) *Karl Kautsky: on colonialism* London 2013.
15. M Machover ‘Colonialism and the natives’ *Weekly Worker* December 17 2015: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1087/colonialism-and-the-natives.
16. L Brenner *Zionism in the age of dictators: a reappraisal* London 2004, p31.
17. M Shalev *The labour movement in Israel: ideology and political economy* Westview CO 1996, p1.
18. R Storrs *Orientations* London 1937, p405. Sir Ronald Storrs served as British military governor of Jerusalem in 1917.
19. www.facebook.com/JeremyCorbynMP/posts/tony-benn-would-have-turned-100-todaya-rare-courageous-and-continuous-voice-for-/1222968332528032.
20. E Heffer ‘Why Labour should support Israel’ *Labour looks at Israel: 1967-1971* London 1971, p31.
21. See T Greenstein ‘Distracting from genocide’ *Weekly Worker* May 2 2024.
22. SWP pamphlet *Palestine, resistance, revolution and the struggle for freedom* London 2023, p28.
23. Eg, the SWP’s co-thinker in Germany, Ramsis Kilani, comes out with the bog-standard “strikes and mass mobilisations” and “workers developing their own capability for revolutionary self-governance” catchphrases. But, though he denounces “Stalinist conceptions of a revolution by ‘stages’”, that is actually what he advocates (R Kilani ‘Strategies for liberation: old and new arguments in the Palestinian left’ *International Socialism* No183, Summer 2024). Incidentally, Die Linke, Germany’s so-called ‘left’ party, disgracefully expelled the comrade on entirely bogus charges of “anti-Semitism” in December 2024. Anne Alexander ‘Palestine: between permanent war and permanent revolution’ *International Socialism* No181, Winter 2023). Nowhere does she mention ‘socialism’, ‘working class state power’ or ‘social revolution’ ... or even words to that effect.
24. Tony Greenstein, Letters *Weekly Worker* June 27 2024.
25. *Socialist Worker* August 5 2006.
26. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabra_(person).
27. hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-07-05/debates/7F795C5C-3E77-479E-949D-22EA6599F419/IsraelAndPalestinianTalks.
28. A perspective advanced by Jabra Nicola and Moshé Machover in June 1969. See M Machover *Israelis and Palestinians: conflict and resolution* Chicago IL 2012, pp15-25.
29. To paraphrase George Habash, first PFLP general secretary, and before him Ahmad Shukeiri, first PLO chair (see JT Buck *The decline of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine* Hampshire College MA, 2013, p4).

JCP

Don't put off democracy

Max Shanly and Jack Conrad debated the pros and cons of sortition for the founding conference of Your Party. Should we seek to mirror the average? Or raise the average through electing delegates? **Carla Roberts** reports

On August 31, Max Shanly addressed the Online Communist Forum to argue that communists and socialists should join him in arguing for a system of sortition (lottery) to pick members to attend the Your Party founding conference in November. He debated with the CPGB's Jack Conrad, who argued against any such system - a video of the exchange available on CPGB's YouTube channel.¹

Comrade Shanly's background is certainly interesting. A prominent member of the Oxford University Labour Club, he sat on Young Labour's national committee during the Corbyn years. In 2020, he stood as part of the Momentum Renewal slate (linked to the ousted Jon Lansman), which was defeated by Forward Momentum. Not that there was much between them politically: under the guidance of former Liverpool councillor Alan Gibbons, Forward Momentum continued to enforce the witch-hunting constitution written by Lansman, which barred from membership all those who had been expelled from Labour - and, needless to say, Gibbons eventually became a victim of that rule himself.

Comrade Shanly has moved rather rapidly to the left since those days and clearly has learned some important lessons in terms of democracy and political programme. He has been arguing vocally for Your Party to have democratic structures similar to the Democratic Socialists of America, including the right to form permanent factions and platforms.² He continues to have the ear of key players in Corbyn's inner circle, while many of his contributions are enthusiastically picked up and supported by groups like RS21.

At the Communist Forum, the comrade started off by explaining that, unlike Ed Griffiths, he was not "a complete advocate of such a system of sortition and it is not useful in the long term. I believe in elected delegates." Personally he advocates a system of "sortition plus", which would ensure some representation for organised platforms - more on that below.

The comrade congratulated all those who had taken the initiative to set up local proto-branches: "that is an expression of the first shoots of grassroots democracy in action". However, the "refusal by those at a national level who control the data rights and the mailing lists to share access" has meant that those proto-branches "have had to rely almost entirely on pre-existing activists' networks and social media. While these have great value, they cannot then connect themselves to the great mass of people who signed up in the hope of genuine participation."

There is no democratic mandate to elect delegates - and, crucially, no intention from those above to *allow* such elections. The danger therefore was that without a system of sortition "those at the top could be hand-picking the people they want in the room for the founding conference and I have already heard through conversations with friends who are more in touch with what's going on above, that that is what some people really want."

There was also the danger of this becoming a "room-packing exercise for small groups. And running the conference in that fashion will create a situation whereby the



Petrograd soviet 1917: chosen by sortition and no Lenin, no Trotsky, no Martov, no Chernov

decisions taken in the room can easily be overruled by the good people at home, so it doesn't even matter what people in the hall vote for." This would be "letting those at the top off the hook". For the founding conference "to have any democratic legitimacy, it has to be representative", and sortition would "ensure the greatest amount of equal rights for participation. Importantly, sortition is far better than what the alternative is."

The comrade explained why he is focussed on trying to convince those at the top: "They're the ones with the access to the data and the funds and everything like that. So it's going to be them doing it, whether we like it or not."

Comrade Shanly hopes that some on the levers of power might support his proposals, which can be read online, in full³:

This system would fulfil the idea of 'one participant, one vote' which is, I think, ultimately what Zarah Sultana has been arguing for. I think she's fluffed it a bit by saying OMOV. In conversations I've had with people who are close to her I argued that, actually, we want 'one *participant*, one vote'. They've been fairly open to it, which makes me think she would be as well.

Voiceless?

The socialist left would not be rendered voiceless, he said (his 'sortition plus' bit): "Any registered participant - not just the ones who have been elected by a sortition - would be able to submit motions, amendments, proposals, strategy papers - all sorts - if proposals are supported by, say, 200 other registered participants." In addition, 10% of the delegates at the founding conference would be made up of "factional observers", who

... have set out their political platform prior to conference, and what motions they're going to be supporting - everything like that. So the CPGB could set up a platform and you could put forward 10 names, and then there would be a vote by single transfer vote using the Droop quota. And then, based on the percentage of the vote you get, you would have X number of representatives.

He later made the argument that, realistically, of those "maybe

10,000 people" who would put themselves forward for the sortition pool, "the overwhelming majority would probably be members of the organised left or otherwise politically advanced - comrades who are far less wedded to the cult of personality, for example, than a room of hand-picked conference attendees would be."

All these elections "should be conducted by an independent and neutral third party, purely because we know what some of the people at the top are like. And they will try and manipulate the result if they have the chance."

Manipulation

Jack Conrad started with comrade Shanly's last point, expressing his fear that such a system would "actually be incredibly easy to manipulate". He continued:

It is quite conceivable that those above - who you don't trust, quite rightly - will say, hey, here's a good idea thought of by Max and Ed. We'll take it. And why not? After all, they will get to choose, in practice, who the 'experts' are on the day, who the chairs are, how options, motions and factions are being presented. Say the CPGB manage to get five delegates and we want to raise an objection and the chair says, 'No I'm not taking you'. What can we do under those circumstances? Very little.

A system of sortition or lottery "is great for juries, where you have to say 'yes' or 'no'", comrade Conrad said, "but political parties are entirely different." He thought comrade Shanly was taking the "wrong approach":

We should not worry about representation in some statistical sense. I'm not a mathematician, but my understanding is that for 800,000 people, all you need is to get 384 randomly chosen people into a room to give you a 95% certainty that it reflects 800,000 people in terms of gender, age, views, etc.

But you will get politically inexperienced people stuck in a room for a weekend who will have to go through a huge stack of documents, motions, amendments. It is almost impossible for them to come to an informed decision in this way. So those above could easily go for a system like that.

But it is what we need? Take

the foundation congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. That congress took two months. If you read the minutes, you can see how they painstakingly went through all the rules, heard amendments, discussed issues. We don't want the launch conference of Your Party to last two months, but you can see how that is an entirely different way for members to exercise real democracy. What about the party programme? What about party statutes? What about a party strategy? What about a party election? Our approach to the Greens, the Labour left?

These are complex questions that do require time and require us to become experts. Can anybody become an expert? Yes. But it does take time and it takes effort. Sortition will choose average members, not *the best* delegates.

The comrade then outlined the CPGB's alternative, as previously explained in the *Weekly Worker*: The proto-branches should continue to meet; they should demand the sign up-lists; they should get together regionally, nationally, and they should also elect delegates for the launch conference:

We need to build this party bottom-up, no matter what they do at the top. Yes, there is a risk that the SWP will pack those meetings. Or they might not, because if you read *Socialist Worker*, you can get a sense that they are fearful of their members mixing with others, being pulled into all sorts of directions and perhaps being convinced by people with better politics. Who knows? But this is a potential risk we have to take, because we are not just arguing for democracy: we are also arguing for a political programme for real change. That is what we should focus on.

Comrade Conrad then mentioned the DSA, which comrade Shanly had referenced as a positive example of the "New Model Party" we should be fighting for. The recent congress in Chicago was interesting, he said, because

the so-called Majority Caucus, which wanted to do away with branch delegates and introduce an OMOV Zoomocracy - turned out not to be the majority after all. They were defeated! Small

groups like the CPGB could act to swing votes at a truly democratic conferences - and we have in the past. Exactly the role our comrades in the Marxist Unity Caucus are now playing in the DSA. They have something like 100 members and they've influenced the DSA, which has over 50,000 members. They could not have played that role if delegates at that convention had been chosen by sortition.

In agreement

Moshé Machover, who has argued for a system of sortition under communism,⁴ intervened from the floor to explain why it would *not* be a good system to elect delegates: "The main argument against this decision-making by sortition is that it leaves out of the decision-making process the vast majority of members. Whereas decision-making by a full conference, or by delegation, demands that every member takes part, either as a delegate or as an elector of the delegates."

Replying to the lively discussion, in which one participant argued that Jack Conrad's view was "elitist, because it implies we know better than the rest of the membership", comrade Conrad replied:

You know, if I broke my leg, the last thing I'd do is hobble out the door, pick the first random person I come across and ask them to fix it. I would try to get the best possible medical treatment. And that applies to politics. We don't want the average, which is what sortition achieves - we want the best. Now of course the branches might not choose what I might call the best people - but it should be up to them. And, crucially, delegates should be elected and accountable. Members should be able to ask, 'Why on earth did you vote that way?' You cannot really do that with somebody chosen by lottery.

We want an active, engaged membership, meeting every week or so, getting to know each other and their politics, arguing, convincing each other - not atomised, passive people, hoping to be picked by lottery. We want members to question delegates, to criticise them - and if they don't like what they see, they should become leaders themselves and replace them.

Comrade Shanly explained that "we are entirely in agreement, generally, about what kind of democracy we want the party to have. But we also have to be realistic about what is likely to happen. I hope we can all unite around the minimum programme for maximum democracy." He concluded: "You have all given me a lot to think about and I will seriously think about it - I'll probably even write about it."

We are certainly looking forward to discussing this, as well as other questions, with the comrade! ●

Notes

1. www.youtube.com/live/pfE7j6WUD5M.
2. medium.com/@maxshanly/towards-a-new-model-left-party-5947dc71b727.
3. medium.com/@maxshanly/born-for-life-or-marked-for-death-a12d87220e42.
4. Collective decision-making and supervision in a communist society: eprints.lse.ac.uk/51148/1/_Libfile_repository_Content_Machover_M_Machover_Collective_Decision_Making_Machover_Collective_Decision_Making.pdf.

LEFT

Trying to capture the flag

Groups of rightwing men want to plaster their towns with the Union Jack and St George's Cross flags. Should the left respond, asks **Harley Filben**, by inventing its own version of patriotism?

They congregate, in smallish groups and patriotic gear; usually men, young and middle-aged, and usually (but not exclusively) white. They do so mostly in small towns and exurbs (Basildon, Bishop's Stortford ...). Their purpose is to fly the flag, of the union or England - or, failing that, glue a cheap plasticky one somewhere prominent.

Such is 'Operation Raise the Colours'. Its meaning is disputed, as one might expect: supporters are extremely keen to emphasise a mere 'innocent desire' to see the national banner proudly on display. Opponents cast it as an outlier phenomenon of the wider far right, and in truth find very little difficulty in linking leading figures to extant far-right outfits like Reform UK or Britain First.

A useful article in *The Times*, by Ed Halford and others, interviews a bunch of people participating in these activities, and finds a rather familiar set of anxieties in the driver's seat. Some seem to be labouring under the illusion that overt displays of patriotism are somehow banned. "It is our country ... why shouldn't we be allowed to fly our flags?" asks a young man in Bishop's Stortford. ("Allowed" by whom? How many union flags did Sir Keir Starmer awkwardly stand in front of during the campaign season last year?) This man is also "concerned" about illegal immigration: "We have over a million people here we do not know."¹

The latter seems to be the motivating question for the local leader of the demonstration - a certain Lacey Kelf:

Kelf, who has previous convictions from 2020 for directing racial abuse at police officers and attacking a former partner, said he was angry that "undocumented males" had been allowed into the UK. He claimed that homeless British men and veterans were sleeping rough on the streets, while a "load of rapists, paedophiles and wrong'uns" were in hotels "buying PlayStations".

Some others quoted seem to have even vaguer grievances than being allowed (or not) to fly the flag - one young man in a Worcestershire village complaining that "we feel as though we are being ignored by our own government and we feel the future for our country is diminishing rapidly".

The opponents of this little movement have a rather different spin on things. The flag protests ('protest' seems the appropriate word here) are not dissociable from the rise in support for Reform UK, which has led opinion polls consistently for many months. They take place concurrently with raucous demonstrations outside hotels housing asylum-seekers, which have become a flashpoint in general politics over recent weeks. It is, bluntly, not much more than a year since similar protests following on from the Southport massacre spilled over into violent disorder in many cities. In such a context, flying the flag starts to look like an act of intimidation.

The rightwing stereotype of the metropolitan progressive is mostly, but not wholly, false. Adherents of progressive politics are shy of patriotism, on the



January 1931: calling fascists 'fascists' makes sense

whole - many, including ourselves and other conscious proletarian internationalists, steadfastly oppose it. A friend of mine - a run-of-the-mill progressive active in the Palestine movement locally - told me of a recent protest where a group of just such red-blooded English patriots ("flag-shaggers", as she put it) tried to take down the Palestine flags and threatened violence against one of the other protestors, who was attempting to de-escalate the situation.

Even without some general theory of imperialism or whatever, many do *instinctively* understand that intense patriotism is at least correlated with reactionary politics. Such well-founded suspicion of overt patriotism is readily produced as evidence for prosecution in the yellow press: these people hate Britain, and above all they hate *you*, salt-of-the-earth sons and daughters of Albion. This is a cycle, and in present circumstances it rolls around to the benefit, over time, of the chauvinist right.

The response of the government - yet another laughably forced Starmer photo-op surrounded by flags, and another wave of ostentatious, anti-migrant legislation - will tend to accelerate this process (as is rumoured to be the objective of Morgan McSweeney, who is supposed to favour a showdown between Labour and Reform at the next time of asking).

Progressive?

That this is a real problem need not be denied, and so it is unsurprising that efforts are periodically made on the left to align us with patriotism, to overdetermine inchoate patriotic feeling with socialist or liberal political content. The Blairite 'cool Britannia' ideology of 'British values', conceived in wholly liberal terms (tolerance, freedom, rule of law), would be one case; more populist accounts like Billy Bragg's long-forgotten 2006 book *The progressive patriot* would be another; the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain likewise endorses a social patriotism - citation-grazing from Lenin for the purpose.²

In any case, are *all* the anxieties of the "flag-shaggers" foreign to us? Are we, too, not "being ignored by our own government"? Do we not also see "the future for our country ... diminishing rapidly", and sincerely intend to fix this by means

other than drowning children in the channel?

The obvious problem with the 'progressive patriot' approach is simply that it is so frequently wheeled out and with spooky regularity fails to catch on. It is always a programme for a future that never arrives: British or English patriotism never, outside of think-tank circles and the broader intelligentsia, takes on the progressive valence promised. (Things are more complex in Scotland, but we leave this on one side.) Reasonably cogent cases can be made that it *should* do so - some tradition from Winstanley to Shelley and Blake, to the Chartists, to the 'spirit of '45' can be drawn with confidence. The international character of the *capitalist* class can be accurately stressed. Yet at the end of the day, the polarisation remains where it was: conservative, chauvinist patriotism versus progressive, cosmopolitan internationalism.

Why should this be the case? There are reasons specific to Britain, and more general ones. To take the general reasons first: the global capitalist system is organised as a system of states, in which capitalist enterprises operate and seek to maximise profit. The largest such enterprises are global, but remain ultimately domiciled for practical purposes in one or another such state, and usually in one of those towards the top of the state hierarchy. Each state is *rivalrously counterposed* to all the others in ensuring the success of its own enterprises. Only one company can own a coltan mine in the Congo at any given time; only one company, or a few companies, can dominate the market for silicon chips, thanks to capitalism's ruthless logic of consolidation.

Though this is not a zero-sum game in the sense that mercantilism supposed - it is quite possible that a newly dominant firm in the semiconductor industry may massively increase the quality and overall number of chips produced across the whole sector, for example - it is zero-sum *from the perspective of the states*. Patriotism entails improving the position of one's own state, which in turn entails reducing the position of rival states, perhaps through economic competition, but ultimately through war. Thus it tends to generate forms of chauvinism, even among oppressed nations.

Britain, specifically, plays the role of a global financial laundry, as argued by Mike Macnair.³ Taking on this role entailed, at length, shedding most of Britain's industrial capacity, with the end result an economy dependent on financial services overwhelmingly concentrated in London and the south-east. With a few exceptions - Manchester, Edinburgh, perhaps Bristol - cities outside this region are in decline, never mind smaller towns once dependent on vanished industries. Life is often only able to go on in these places by way of the employment of super-exploited migrant workers.

London occupied

Anti-cosmopolitanism is the result, targeted above all at the capital: London is understood as, in some important sense, under enemy occupation - its vastly more cosmopolitan population than most other cities being evidence for its disloyalty. Local demographic changes - even a few dozen refugees put up in a rotting ring-road Premier Inn - are cathected with anxieties about a bleak, futureless national existence.

In a naive reading, the flag protests are a hopeless symbolic gesture against an apparently hopeless prospect. In a more cynical reading, they are gambits by far-right ideologues to exploit such anxieties and provoke intemperate responses from the left, which will in turn serve as proof that we are all enemies of the *demos*. Both are true: there really is an inchoate reservoir of anxiety out there, and it really is being exploited, more or less successfully, by committed national chauvinists.

How should we respond? 'Progressive patriotism', it should already be clear, is hopeless. The national malaise, such as it is, has to do with Britain's relation to the world system: we need another world system, not a slightly different canon of national poets, to solve it; and, in so doing, we need common cause with the people all over the world getting fleeced in a million different ways. So far as these diverse forms of exploitation are couched in isolated structures of national grievance, the overall 'beggar thy neighbour' structure remains untouched, and so such grievances shall be catnip to the chauvinist right.

If we are to resign ourselves to 'unpatriotism', what next? The approach of the SWP, unsurprisingly, has been to amplify the fascist connections of the flag protests. An article by Thomas Foster makes the case at some length, mentioning - at one time or another - Britain First, White Vanguard, the Homeland Party, and many others. Keir Starmer is criticised rightly for his cynicism.⁴ (The SWP, naturally, is aggressively promoting its Stand Up to Racism front's counter-demonstration against Tommy Robinson in a week or so.) All of this is grist to the mill.

An alternative view comes from David Renton, a former SWPer now on the social-imperialist right of RS21, writing in *The Guardian*. Labelling these protests as fascist or even Nazi - he reports hearing the classic SWP chant "Nazi scum, off our streets" at a counter-demo in London - is "the wrong strategy". Even Robinson "doesn't leaven his speeches with reworked passages from *Mein Kampf*". He isn't a 'Hitler admirer', nor is he perceived as such by the movement.⁵

He notes, moreover, that "labelling our enemies fascist depends on a context where the mainstream is willing to isolate and shame Nazis. Those are not the times we are living in." His example is the recent photo of Robert Jenrick at a hotel protest, with Eddy Butler - a veteran neo-fascist - clearly visible in the background, which seems to have caused no controversy or embarrassment. Renton's advice is to concentrate on the central element in the fearmongering, that these asylum-seekers are probable sexual predators; after all, some 40% of those arrested in last year's riots, apparently, had previously been reported for domestic violence.⁵ (Such is also the approach of yet another SUtR spin-off, Women Against the Far Right.)

Renton is right, at least, that calling these people Nazis is pointless in conditions where the *cordon sanitaire* has already been breached. It was questionable in relation to the British National Party 20 years ago, which draped itself in the flag and made maudlin speeches about Winston Churchill; it was extremely silly in relation to the English Defence League, whose leading lights had no history in classic neo-Nazism, unlike the BNP. Yet his alternative is simply a lower-calorie version of the same thing; after all, if this movement does not buy the identification with fascism, is it going to buy the accusation of wife-beating?

What is missing is a movement at the level of *general* politics that can spread internationalism, and internationalist responses to the general national malaise. You cannot fight flag-waving chauvinism with taboos - that much is obvious. It is necessary to give people a different flag - a red one, for preference ●

Notes

1. www.thetimes.co.uk/politics/article/meet-the-red-and-white-army-hoisting-flags-of-st-george-mq67vn9sk.
2. See, for example, Robert Griffiths' comments here: morningsstaronline.co.uk/article/victory-day-belongs-left.
3. 'Class composition in a snapshot' *Weekly Worker* August 28: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1550/class-composition-in-a-snapshot.
4. socialistworker.co.uk/anti-racism/the-far-right-figures-behind-national-flags-campaign.
5. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/29/asylum-hotel-fascist-asylum-protests-politicians.

TECHNOLOGY

Artificial intelligence, human flourishing

AI is, we are told, an investment bubble waiting to burst, but what role, if any, should AI play in socialist society? And what role does it play in today’s world? Paul Demarty explores the complex issues

Artificial intelligence continues to drive a lot of excitement - not only in the technology and business media, but the wider news ecosystem.

Arguments continue to rage about whether the novel technologies of our moment will lead to the apocalypse or merely a second dotcom bubble, about its impacts on the environment, human literacy and even about general sanity (see the recent fracas over the decision to make ChatGPT less obsequious). Yet it is worth taking a moment to zoom out, and think about the overall relationship between these novel technologies and the communist project.

In order to get there, of course, we will have to talk about capitalism and artificial intelligence, particularly in the current situation where we are in the middle of an enormous hype-cycle about AI, which is kicking off a whole series of attendant controversies.

The current hype-cycle - at least the third over AI - really began with the public launch of ChatGPT three years ago, made by the peculiar capped-profit company, OpenAI. It was the first of many applications of its type: a chatbot that displayed uncanny intuition of the intent behind entered prompts, and proved an effective tool (with some caveats, which we will come to) for information retrieval, software code generation, document writing, machine translation and many other things besides. Competitors rushed out their own versions, sometimes rather too quickly, but consumers and businesses today can choose between ChatGPT, Google’s Gemini and Anthropic’s Claude, to name only the three most well-known examples.

This series of very impressive product launches have led to very grand predictions: that AI is going to completely reshape the world economy, that the next phase of great-power competition will be focused on winning the AI race, or indeed that we are on the cusp of machine superintelligence, for good or ill. To be sure, many of these predictions have come from the people selling the technology - a fact that, to my mind, has been little remarked on by a rather credulous media. I do not propose to discuss it in any depth, but I find the superintelligence stuff a little silly; yet there can be no doubt that at least some economic activity will be transformed by this family of novel technologies, given their broad applicability in different domains; and the same is true of the military competition angle.

Basics

To get a handle on *how* these changes will play out, we need to understand some basics, and we also need to consider the history.

First, let us talk about algorithms. The word is very common now, and usually refers to recommendation systems - you go on YouTube, and *The Algorithm* recommends to you some videos and, after you watch one, it recommends you another one. Algorithms thus seem quite mysterious, capricious beasts.

The basic idea is very simple, however. An algorithm is a series of repeatable steps a computer can take to turn some input data into some output data. The methods you learned in primary school for adding and multiplying numbers - carry the ten, all that - are algorithms. The input is the two numbers; the output is the sum or the product.

I said ‘a computer’ above, but until the invention of computers, as we know them today, the word simply meant a well-instructed human. And algorithms in this sense *radically* predate the computing machine. The word itself comes from the name of the 9th century Persian mathematician, al-Khwarizmi, who lived in Baghdad during the golden age and came up with a series of procedures for basic arithmetic with Arabic numerals (or Indian numerals, as the Arabs called them). Some even older algorithms are still in common use - Euclid’s algorithm for calculating the greatest common divisor of two numbers - which dates back to around 300BCE - is simple and relatively efficient, and is widely used, improbably, in the production of techno music.

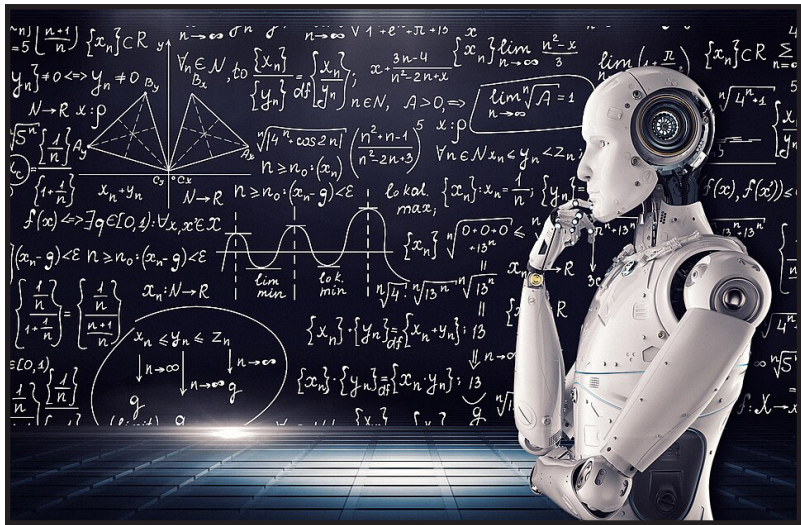
Back to YouTube. It is clear that this is an algorithm in the classic sense - there is an input (the data you send over the internet when you visit the site, and everything the site has ever learned about you) and an output (recommended videos). We understand, at least in a very abstract way, that a computer somewhere is executing a series of steps to get from the input to the output.

Yet in modern recommendation algorithms, we are not dealing with something like Euclid’s algorithm, where someone with basic knowledge of algebra can learn and readily understand how to apply it in a few minutes. These algorithms are very strange, because they were not created directly by people for other people to understand and use, but are *themselves* the output of far more complex and sophisticated software systems. There are a lot of definitions of AI out there, which are more or less useful for different purposes. To describe these modern AI systems we could do worse than ‘algorithms for making algorithms’.

History

This seems a good moment to look at the history of AI. Much of the theoretical groundwork of modern computing systems was accomplished in the 1920s and 30s, by founding figures like Alan Turing and Alonzo Church. (There are more distant predecessors, like the programmable Jacquard loom and the unsuccessful attempts of Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelace to produce a mechanical computer.) Turing, Church and others had remarkable insight into what a computer - if it existed - could and could not do. Turing, in particular, speculated about machine intelligence, and proposed the famous Turing test or ‘imitation game’. The idea was that if a machine could fool a human into believing it was a person, it would truly be seen to be intelligent.

The term ‘artificial intelligence’ was invented later, by the great computer scientist, John McCarthy. It immediately became a major research area in computer science, and it is worth noting that many of the key ideas underlying today’s AI systems were already current in the 1970s and 80s. That includes neural networks - which have exploded in use in the last 15 years - and generative pretraining (which is the ‘GP’ in GPT). Some applications were found at that stage, including voice recognition and early machine translation. A great hype-cycle began - and then crashed, when expectations were not met. Much of the 1990s is today described as the ‘AI winter’.



Universities run as businesses deserve AI-generated answers

The basic problem was really a mismatch between the ideas and the available technology. We need, here, to talk about neural networks, which are really the core of the thing. Neural networks attempt to model the neurones in the brain. Given some input data, each ‘neurone’ generates an output; there may be many layers of such ‘neurones’ that feed off each other’s output and, finally, an overall output is obtained. This will be easier with an example. Suppose you have the goal of identifying whether a picture is of an orange. A neural network will run the picture through, and at the end, it will have calculated the probability that it is indeed one of an orange.

How? This is done through training - you feed the system endless examples of photos, some of oranges, some of other things. These are all labelled for the system ‘orange’ or ‘not orange’. Given this data, the system produces a neural network that it thinks can classify images into oranges and non-oranges. Then you give it a bunch of images that are *not* labelled and it classifies them. Where it picks the wrong answer, you tell it, and then the system can try to create a better model.

This process picked up the name ‘machine learning’ at some point, and it really is like human learning in some respects. We do learn the use of words, for instance, by hearing others use them in different cases and observing the results. The problem is where it differs - humans can learn remarkably quickly from very few examples. Training a machine to recognise oranges requires millions, even billions of photos. Neither the raw computing power nor the data storage existed in the 1980s to do this in anything more than a rudimentary way.

Much energy was expended basically making the individual ‘neurones’ smarter, but that failed to really make these systems practical. What made the difference was the existence, by the end of the 2000s, of enormous pools of computing power, owned principally by the new generation of giant tech companies like Amazon and Google. Now you really could just throw data at the problem - and it worked. It improved search and recommendation engines, machine translation, and many other applications. It is easy to say that AI will change economic activity, in other words, because it already has.

A ceiling was, nonetheless, hit. Somewhat terrifyingly, the ceiling is that there is basically only so much data in the entire world. And that is where the generative pretraining comes in. This basically means automatically enriching the data in an initial phase, before the

model is finally trained. Think of voice recognition here. You are sending some sound to your model: generative pretraining will fairly reliably be able to identify the parts of the recording that are actual *speech*, so the model will not be exhaustively checking the hum of the air-conditioning between words for meaning, with all due apologies to John Cage.

That, you may be relieved to hear, is the end of the technical content of this article. I think it is important to go through, because there is not anything *fundamentally* difficult to understand going on, and so much discussion of AI today is overdazzled by the tech. It is pretty cool tech, no doubt; but part of what makes it cool is that it is built, improbably, out of quite simple primitives.

Economy

What role is AI playing in the contemporary economy? We have mentioned established uses in popular web technology. To this we must add the adoption of the technology by the military and intelligence apparatuses of the state (and their semi-autonomous contractors, of course). Innumerable examples could be listed, but under present circumstances the pertinent case is that of Israel, which widely uses AI in its ‘selection of targets’, such as it is. As in all developed societies, there is no Chinese wall between military and civilian uses of such technology. Take a consumer-market drone, after all, and strap a grenade to it, and you have a single-use bomber aircraft. Take an adtech algorithm that is supposed to feed you plausible adverts, and then slightly change how you interpret the resulting data, and you have a way of identifying targets for surveillance - or even assassination.

That last one works equally well in reverse, of course. Israel is very proud of its tech industry, but, when you take a closer look, it all seems to be leaking out of the Israel Defence Forces. Paradigmatic here is the famous Unit 8200 (quite justly famous really), which trains bright youngsters to undertake offensive cyberwarfare during their years of military service, and then spits them out as Silicon Valley entrepreneur types. Many Unit 8200 alumni have been absorbed, by way of mergers and acquisitions, into the great American tech firms. Yet this is no Israeli innovation: there was no clear line between the computer researchers I mentioned earlier and the US government. The internet itself is an invention of the research division of the US Department of Defense.

What about all the millions of jobs that are to be imminently automated, according to the industry’s prophets? I think it is worth deferring that question for a moment to discuss the role the AI boom is having in the tech industry and global political economy more broadly. That in turn requires some more history.

After both the dotcom bubble and the great crash of 2008, the response of governments - especially the USA - was to reduce central bank interest rates, in the end to close to zero. The idea was to stimulate economic activity, which it *sort of* did, but the way this happened was a little peculiar. Much of the available investment capital in the world is concentrated in a few, quite passive institutional funds: pension funds, but also sovereign wealth funds that can be very large (for example, the Saudi public investment fund).

Such funds are typically quite risk-averse, and so buy up very safe assets - foremost among them US treasury bonds. But slashing the interest rate at the Fed means reducing the yields of treasuries. There was an awful lot of money sloshing around, in other words, that needed somewhere to go. (A lot of it went into esoteric derivatives based on the American mortgage market, but that is another story.) For our purposes we need to talk about venture capital.

Venture capital is a particular form of private equity investment. A VC fund will make a large number of investments, each individually quite modest, into high-risk opportunities. The fund makes money, in the end, if a small number of those investments cash out way above the money advanced; the simple fact that most of them will fail is priced into the model. Tech companies are an obvious outlet here: if a start-up succeeds, as Facebook did for example, in capturing a near-monopoly of a market by way of its innovations, then the upside is unlimited, and investors are happy.

If you were in the start-up world around 2010, the lifecycle of a successful company might look like this. In the beginning were a couple of people - usually young and rather uncultured men - working away in a roach-infested studio flat in San Francisco. They would build some cool little app, and it would get a little buzz in the tech press, and start generating a little revenue. At this point the company was ‘ramen profitable’ - because it made enough profit for the two founders to live on the cheapest instant noodles to be bought at Kroger.

Then, perhaps, a venture capitalist would throw them some of his play money. This was called ‘angel investment’ or ‘seed capital’. The company could grow to 10 or so employees. If it survived long enough, it could pitch some other VCs for some serious money: this was called the Series A, in that it was the first real interest shown by this pool of capital. That money would all go into maximising revenue growth, and if the numbers looked good, you could go for a Series B, which would be a much larger payment. By now the company would be hundreds-strong. There might be a Series C, but basically at that point the investors would want to get paid, and would be a significant voice on the board, so the company would be polished up for sale either to a larger company, or in an initial public offering.

By the middle of that decade, something strange was happening. There were Series Ds, Series Es, and

even higher. The beautiful dream of the big ‘exit’ - acquisition or ‘initial public offering’ (IPO) - faded oddly into the background. After all, at that point, you would have to start making a profit, rather than merely making the top-line go up. Early investors could make money by selling on to later ones. And there was so much money! Big, stupid money, apparently agog at the genius of these spotty young ingenues, desperate for something to buy that was not a treasury bond.

This all slammed into a brick wall in 2022 after Russia invaded Ukraine, broad sanctions were imposed, inflation skyrocketed, and therefore the central banks pulled the only lever they had: raising interest rates. This was in the midst of one of the periodic cryptocurrency bubbles, which promptly burst (although the Trump administration’s comical corruption has led it to reinflate at present). The wider tech industry went through a period of retrenchment, with enormous layoffs at the biggest tech firms, and smaller ones through the ecosystem of VC-backed start-ups.

Good timing

The appearance of ChatGPT and the large language models therefore could not have come at a better time. The technology may or may not prove to be as revolutionary as claimed (if history is a judge, probably somewhere in between). What must be borne in mind is that the source of the hype is not primarily the technology. It is the need for the infinite money-spigot to be reopened, so that VCs and other tech capitalists can get back to a place of comfort.

The AI boom has one thing in common with the 2010s tech bubble (I think we can, in retrospect, call it a bubble). AI in its current form is not profitable. ChatGPT is a loss leader, and a spectacularly good one. The question is: where is the actual money to be made? Though the GPT approach significantly increases the efficiency of training, it is still astonishingly inefficient, compared to the average three-year-old. The environmental costs - in energy consumption, and in water consumption - are notorious.

Can this be fixed? Perhaps it can. The Chinese company, DeepSeek, released its R1 model earlier this year, which was notable for having been far cheaper to train than the incumbents. DeepSeek achieved this not through some pathbreaking technical revolution, but by methodically optimising its programmes in ways that would be familiar to any working programmer in performance-critical fields - video games, operating systems, and so on. That is why it was so humiliating to OpenAI, Google and friends, who employ many such people: they had not even bothered to try such optimising.

Suppose it can be unit-profitable - that is, let us say, that every prompt in ChatGPT somehow makes OpenAI money. Then we get to the ‘disappearing jobs’ part of the equation. It is clear that a large number of positions in the professional classes are under threat. Examples could be cited in many places. In software engineering, which is my bailiwick, there is a noticeable shrinkage in junior positions. A great part of this is actually just the effect of the end of the ‘zero interest rate’ era: the jobs shed by the tech companies during the inflation shock simply have not come back. But the impressive capabilities of AI coding assistants will no doubt increase productivity, and therefore decrease available jobs.

Many of the disappearing jobs should not have existed in the first place, of course. The fatuity of the typical tech start-up cannot be overstated - the world is not crying out for a ‘smart’ wine cooler, and never will be. I observe a considerable winnowing of the advertising industry, but regrettably there will be some advertising still taking place at the end of all this. In the end, it matters not if the slop is produced by humans or machines.

The late David Graeber wrote a book about “bullshit jobs” - jobs so obviously pointless that simply carrying them out inflicted a level of psychic damage on those employed. In the corporate and government bureaucracies of the world, there is a lot of work that falls into what I would call the trough of meaninglessness: too fiddly to be automated, but too tediously artificial to be rewarding for a human to do. The currently fashionable AI agents, based on ‘large language models’ (LLMs), may do a good job on this kind of work - a huge amount of it is basically turning a spreadsheet into an official government form in mostly predictable ways. In this country, councils used to employ a lot of people to manage housing benefit; they would pay money to tenants, who would pay it to landlords, and the paperwork would flow through the council in both directions. Clearly, even on the basis of capitalist landlordism, this was make-work.

The question of what to *do* with all the people so displaced seems pertinent, and is not unimportant in the grand scheme of things, but in fact is largely accidental to the question of AI, or any other particular technology that might appear. We have a society that is based on the pursuit of profit above all else, in accordance with the basic laws of capitalism, but that cannot survive *politically* if unemployment rises to a certain level (much higher than any we have seen recently). Thus the tendency for these systems to be overdesigned, ludicrously over-manual, and so on.

There is a common thread between the (potential) AI unemployment I have described, and the strange economic epicycles of the tech industry I mentioned earlier. Both *present themselves* as outworkings of technological progress, but on cursory examination they reveal underlying social dynamics as the real motor. AI may destroy some bullshit jobs, but did not create them. The tech industry is currently riding the AI wave, but it is not the first wave, and (assuming there is no social revolution) it will not be the last; these are determined by larger tendencies in political economy.

Culture

In that context, I want to discuss the cultural impacts of AI; for, while I am a technologist by trade, I am a humanist by inclination. There is a lot of doom-mongering around on this point. In academia, professors are driven to despair by the inability of their students to learn without getting chatbots to write their essays. The students accuse the academics of discriminating against their preferred ‘learning style’.

Artists - painters, photographers, musicians - likewise despair that the meagre income they manage to get from stock photo and music libraries will be replaced by AI image- and song-generating prompts (the strikes of the Hollywood writers and actors unions a couple of years ago hinged in part on the potential uses of AI to render them obsolete). On a wider scale, we find morbid symptoms: people completely dependent on AI to make decisions, people who have fallen in love with and married

chatbots, and so on. Less spectacular is a certain novel philistinism: why should I read Marcel Proust, if I can just ask ChatGPT to distil the 10 key lessons from his great but intimidatingly long novel? Isn’t that more efficient?

In response to such complaints, AI boosters will point out that there have been moral panics about all new media so far: about the deadening effects of television, of the cinema, of the novel; indeed - if we go back to Plato’s *Phaedrus* - about writing itself, which he worried would degrade man’s memory. The trouble is that Plato was at least partly correct. Consider the London cabbie - who cannot join the guild without learning by heart the whole map of central London. This quite literally changes the shape of their brain. Compare the confusion of many of our contemporaries who cannot get around London without staring at a map on their phones continuously. Some of those people actually live there.

Yet again AI seems an all-too-convenient scapegoat. Academics increasingly sound the alarm about the fact that it is effectively impossible to stop students cheating, and that more and more university administrations are in cahoots with the generative AI vendors. Yet universities only face these problems because they are already reduced to mere rubber-stamping of degrees on a thoroughly marketised model. If you pay £10,000 a year for a degree, you damn well expect to get the degree; vice-chancellors know this, and so the idea of a university as a community of knowledge, and therefore a community of *discrimination* between acceptable and unacceptable standards, died long ago.

The colonisation of the arts by vast corporate interests is now decades old. Popular music in the anglosphere has long been dominated by a few centralised ‘hit factories’, whose product is then laundered through the image of a succession of pop stars. The book lists are dominated by celebrity ‘autobiographies’ that are, of course, universally ghostwritten. Netflix and other streamers increasingly commission their films by way of the same microtargeting techniques employed by digital advertisers.

Now, of course we defend people against the attempts of their bosses to replace them with machines and throw them into penury. Even when mechanisation represents significant progress, which is doubtful in many of these cases, the question remains: what now for the workers? And that goes even for Hollywood actors, I would say, despite the problems posed by having one union for both Al Pacino and someone whose biggest gig was playing a waitress in one episode of *Law and order*.

Beyond that, however, we must ask - *what* is being defended here? If our visual culture *must* be dominated by comic book franchises, since they allow Disney to write itself a cheque for a billion dollars a few times a year, why should humans be involved in making them? The whole thing, considered in the large, is an algorithm for printing money. Why should algorithms not dominate the component parts of the process?

In the same way: it is one thing to defend the institution of the modern research university. Can we really defend institutions that effectively *pretend* to be such universities when in fact what they do is offer a ticket to a comfortable professional existence in exchange for large sums of money, and when that offer is in very many cases essentially fraudulent? When so much ‘research’ is of such low quality, focused on gaming impact metrics and the like rather than

anything so vulgar as advancing the state of human knowledge?

The large language model is, apart from its reality as a technical instrument, the perfect image of the contemporary culture industry and the neoliberalised university. It takes text inputs, and turns them into roughly plausible outputs (whether text, image or sound). Likewise, in every medium-sized town in this country you can find something that roughly looks like a university, and produces graduates and research papers. Martin Scorsese got into trouble a few years back for saying that, for him, the comic book franchises are not cinema. I think he is quite right - but they are *roughly like* cinema.

Why *not* do all this stuff by machine, then? Because to do so would be in some respects to admit that the whole thing is a fraud. The current situation, where, stereotypically, a student uses ChatGPT to write a paper and an overworked post-grad uses ChatGPT to grade it, tells you only that *nothing* should write (or grade) the paper - human or machine. LLMs do not make cultural and intellectual life obsolete: they merely demonstrate that, from the perspective of a declining capitalist order in a state of acute cultural exhaustion, they already were.

The future

Which seems a good moment to talk, finally, about AI in connection with socialism and communism, with all the usual caveats about writing recipes for the cookshops of the future.

The socialist revolution we seek has, as I see it, three pertinent characteristics for our discussion. Firstly, it is the act of the broad masses themselves, and establishes a truly democratic political regime. Secondly, this political regime is to assume control of the economy (leaving aside the question of petty proprietors). Thirdly, the overriding objective of socialist and communist society is the flourishing of humanity.

That means, of course, that there will have to be rapid movement towards directive economic planning *in natura* in the central sectors of the economy. Planning must be alert to environmental constraints,

to political calculations of the revolutionary parties, and so forth. It seems to me utterly inconceivable that planning could be effectively done without the kind of large-scale, data-driven, machine-learning/AI systems that have been invented in recent decades. Such systems, after all, are *already* used for central planning by large enterprises like Amazon.

How will these systems differ from the ones currently employed by capitalist enterprises? The need for democracy means that they must be far more transparent in their functioning. So far as planning involves ML algorithms, for such planning to be subject to democratic accountability, the algorithms must be transparent. Source code must be published; so must corpuses of training data. Only in this way can laypeople, assisted by subject-matter experts, take *decisions* about planning mediated by AI systems. Under capitalism, a given AI model is currently the firm’s ‘secret sauce’. Socialism must abolish such secrecy. If the sauce is so tasty, give us all the recipe!

The other condition we mentioned - the goal of the flourishing of humanity to replace the quest for profit - constrains not so much the nature of such technology as its use. AI, like all other industrial technology, should be used to eliminate drudgery and dangerous work, so that people are freed up for higher and more human pursuits. AI should not be used to *replace* those higher pursuits. The age of the AI girlfriend has to come to an end, for a start. We do not aim to free up people’s time so it can then be gobbled up by manipulative social media algorithms.

More than that cannot really be said without dictating too much to the ‘cookshops of the future’. But that is the point: it should be up to the *people*. When discussing technological change, we too often miss the point: it is not technology *per se* that throws people out of work or degrades them, any more than it is the sword that kills them. We need to think less about what AI will or will not do, and more about *who* is really doing it) ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

Fighting fund

You did it!

Let’s start with some excellent news: in the last four days of August we went soaring past the *Weekly Worker*’s £2,750 fighting fund target!

Special thanks, first of all, go to comrades TB and DH for their fantastic *three-figure* donations! But other very handy last-minute bank transfers/standing orders came from RL (£60), BK (£50), BH (£25), AB and DL (£20 each), IS and JD (£10). Then there was the £5 contribution via PayPal from TR, while comrade Hassan made his usual cash donation to one of our comrades, this time for £10.

All that came to £535, taking our total for the month up to £2,947 - just under £200 above target. Well done, everybody!

So now let’s see if we can keep that up in September. And I can tell you that, with just three days gone as I write, we already have £468 in the kitty. All the donations making up that amount came in the shape of more transfers/standing orders - thanks very much, comrades AC

(£100!), BO (£55), LC (£50), EW (£35), MM (£31), ST (£30), MS (£25), D L and MT (£20 each), CP (£16), AN and BG (£15), RM (£13), RP (£12), MM (£11), and finally DI and CH (£10 each).

Please do your best to keep up the pace, comrades. Let’s see if we can make that target once more this month. And we really need to - the *Weekly Worker* absolutely depends on all those readers and supporters who recognise our potential role in the nascent Jeremy Corbyn Party, and our overriding struggle to build a single, united, democratic-centralist Marxist party to lead the way towards a global future free of capitalist exploitation, warfare and genocide! ●

Robbie Rix

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IRAN

Global hard truths

Where does the Islamic Republic sit in the international pecking order? Will the alliance with China and Russia save the regime? **Yassamine Mather** investigates. Meanwhile, there are moves on the left

In the final days of August, three major European powers - the United Kingdom, France and Germany - moved to trigger the 'snapback' mechanism against Iran's Islamic Republic.

This mechanism, built into the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA or Iran nuclear deal), allows any signatory to claim Tehran is in violation and thereby restore all previous UN sanctions. 'Snapback', conceived as an enforcement tool to keep Iran in check, has always been controversial. When the Trump administration unilaterally exited the JCPOA in 2018 and then attempted to invoke snapback, other security council members insisted the US had forfeited that legal standing. The dispute revealed not only the fragility of the deal, but also the political rivalries surrounding it.

In the last few days, the European decision to revive snapback carries weight well beyond legal technicalities. Although the sanctions formally re-enter into force in October 2025, their announcement alone has sent shockwaves through Iran's battered economy. Its currency, the rial, has plunged further, foreign investment has evaporated and expectations of deeper isolation loom large. For Tehran, already grappling with domestic unrest, environmental crises and the aftershocks of the 12-day war with Israel, the move represents a tightening noose.

UN Security Council

Against this backdrop, Iran has no option but to lean heavily on Russia and China. Both permanent members of the UN security council and signatories to the JCPOA, they provide Tehran with some diplomatic cover, a level of economic support and limited strategic cooperation. Yet their assistance is calculated, pragmatic and constrained by larger global interests.

China remains Iran's main economic partner. Despite sanctions, Beijing is effectively the buyer of last resort for Iranian crude - reportedly absorbing nearly 90% of Iran's oil exports. In the first half of 2025, Chinese imports averaged 1.38 million barrels per day, slightly down from 1.48 million in 2024, but still accounting for around 14.6% of China's total oil imports. Much of this trade is hidden: shipments are routed through a shadow fleet of aging tankers, with cargoes relabelled as Malaysian crude before arriving at smaller Chinese refineries. This explains why official Chinese customs data has not listed Iranian oil since mid-2022, even though its imports remain steady.

In addition to oil, China is now Iran's main commercial partner. Iranian exports consist largely of raw and semi-processed materials, such as iron ore, metals, plastics and organic chemicals, while Chinese exports to Iran are dominated by machinery, vehicles and high-tech equipment. Electromechanical products alone make up nearly 40% of the total. Since 2021, a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement has framed these exchanges, with Beijing emerging as one of the top contractors in Iran's infrastructure, energy and engineering projects. Chinese investment guides openly rank Iran as a leading market for construction, technology and prefabricated equipment exports - a clear signal of Beijing's commercial priorities.



Missiles: but not capable of reliably delivering a nuclear warhead

For Tehran, this trade is a lifeline. With western markets closed and its regional economy constrained, Chinese purchases sustain oil revenues, while Chinese goods fill the vacuum left by departing European suppliers. But this lifeline is fragile. There are fears that the reactivation of UN sanctions could complicate shipping, with new provisions allowing international inspections of vessels suspected of carrying Iranian crude. Many warn that even China may struggle to maintain current levels of imports if scrutiny intensifies.

Russia's role is less commercial, but equally important. Moscow continues to trade energy and weapons systems with Tehran and helps develop alternative financial channels to bypass the US-dominated SWIFT financial messaging system used by banks. Together with China, it promotes settlements in national currencies: Iran has been partially integrated into China's yuan-based CIPS (Cross-Border Interbank Payment System) network, while Russia pushes its SPFS platform (an alternative to SWIFT, developed by the Bank of Russia in response to western sanctions).

Diplomatically, Russia and China act as Iran's shield at the UN. They have rejected western moves to condemn Tehran's nuclear programme or escalate sanctions, arguing that the JCPOA must be preserved and that the US - having abandoned the deal - must first return to compliance before demanding anything of Iran. This is Iran's own stance and provides Tehran with legitimacy on the international stage.

Both powers also use international forums to express some support. At the International Atomic Energy Agency they occasionally try to soften or dilute resolutions against Iran. Within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), they promote Iran's integration into Eurasian structures, aligning with Tehran's 'Look east' doctrine articulated by supreme leader Ali Khamenei. President Massoud Pezeshkian's visit to China this week, to attend the SCO summit in Tianjin, is part of this effort to demonstrate Iran's pivot toward Asia and to strengthen ties with both Beijing and Moscow.

Yet, even here, there are many limits. During the 12-Day War, neither Russia nor China offered support for Iran. Russian officials emphasised their relationship with Israel, home to the world's second-largest Russian-speaking population,¹ while Chinese media downplayed its reliance on Iranian oil, framing the conflict instead as a disruption to global energy markets. This cautious diplomacy reflects each country's balancing act: Moscow values its ties with Israel, and Beijing maintains close economic and technological relations with Israel.

On the strategic front, Russia has relied on Iran's cheap drones since the Ukraine war. In return, Tehran expected Russia to provide advanced air defence and aerospace technologies. Such exchanges would have significantly upgraded Iran's defensive capabilities. However, so far there is no sign of such deliveries.

China's military posture is even more restrained. Reports after the Iran-Israel war suggested Beijing had supplied air-defence systems to Tehran, but these were quickly denied by the Chinese embassy in Israel, frustrating Iranian media. Beijing invited Pezeshkian to attend its September 3 Victory Day military parade alongside Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un - a symbolic gesture interpreted in Tehran as reassurance. Yet Chinese policy-makers remain reluctant to cross the line into overt military aid, given the risk of jeopardising relations with the US, Europe and Israel.

Within Iran, frustration is growing. Platforms such as the Azad YouTube channel argue that repeated high-level visits to Moscow and Beijing have delivered little in terms of tangible defence guarantees. Israel's ability to dominate Iranian airspace during the 12-Day War underscored the urgent need for stronger security arrangements, which neither Russia nor China appears willing to provide in full.

Belt and Road

Ultimately, Russian and Chinese support is shaped not by altruism, but self-interest. For Beijing, stability and energy security are paramount. Iran is valuable as a supplier of discounted oil and as a node in the Belt and Road Initiative, but China will not risk its much larger trade relationships with the west. For Moscow, Iran is useful as a partner in undermining US influence and sustaining oil prices, but Russia's resources are tied up in Ukraine. Neither country desires a nuclear-armed Iran that could destabilise the region still further.

In this sense, Pezeshkian's mission to China encapsulates Iran's broader dilemma: it has tied its future to a 'Look east' strategy at a time when both Moscow and Beijing are cautious, transactional and unwilling to jeopardise their global priorities for Tehran's sake. Iran may gain enough support to endure, but not enough to escape the cycle of sanctions, isolation and crisis management.

As reformists promote concessions to the west and the regime conducts secret talks with the US and European countries, conservatives within the Islamic Republic call for withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and presumably for the achieving of nuclear *military* capability. This is a misguided suggestion. It would certainly provide Israel and the US with an excuse for another war, which Iran would lose.

Inside the country, there have been attempts to build united fronts to confront both the foreign military threat and the Islamic Republic itself. However, most of these remain delusional. Apparently, some people inside Iran have nominated me to be their representative in a delegate conference of 84 members to be held by the Republican Front of Iran, outside the country, but with delegates named from within. Their statement epitomises the confusion of sections of the Iranian left. They are rightly opposed to both foreign intervention and the regime. However, their aim of achieving a "secular, free, democratic Iran" pursuing an independent foreign policy is an illusion. The example of Iran's Islamic Republic has proved beyond any doubt that an independent foreign policy by any country in the Middle East or indeed anywhere in the global south requires:

- the overthrow of capitalism in that country;
- an international, regional battle against imperialism and for the establishment of socialist regimes in the region and beyond.

For all its repressive, reactionary policies, the Islamic dictatorship's failure to maintain an independent foreign policy has nothing to do with nuclear enrichment or support for regional military proxies. It has everything to do with its complete dependence on international capitalism, debts accumulated under successive reformist and conservative governments to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and with pursuing neoliberal economic policies that have alienated very large sections of the population - exploited in insecure, low-paid, often temporary jobs - making them enemies of successive governments, even when the threat of foreign military intervention is real.

Rather than becoming a delegate to such a gathering, I have no option but to expose the myth that a state like Iran can somehow become

democratic and 'independent' while pursuing the rationale of capital in the 21st century.

Parallel to this, the left - in exile and inside Iran - is also trying to find some form of 'unity'. Of course, after many failed attempts to achieve cooperation, never mind unity, given the age and political baggage of those involved, it is difficult to see how anything can be achieved. However, a unity call by comrade Yadi Shishvani from the Unity of Communist Fedayeen, has gained a lot of support. More than 150 comrades - both members and supporters of existing organisations, as well as independent socialists - attended two very long meetings organised on the issue.

Two meetings

I was at both and the debates reflected the urgency of the situation and the commitment to support the struggles of the Iranian working class at a time of war and imperialist aggression. However, the call was also well received because of the prestige of comrade Shishvani, a former Fedayeen labour activist in the Tabriz tractor factory, who a year and a half ago led his organisation's departure from an "alliance of Iranian communists and socialists", following its failure to take a strong stance against Zionism and genocide in Gaza.

These two initial meetings did not come to concrete conclusions, and some of the debates seemed irrelevant. However, this is the first time in decades that so many from different political tendencies of the left, inside and outside Iran, have come together. There is a faint hope that the discussion can at least lead to a more organised, coordinated cooperation between socialist groups and individuals in supporting the current struggles of the Iranian working class against imperialism and the capitalist state in Iran ●

Note

1. That is, outside the former Soviet Union.

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

ORWELL

The road from Eton College

Seventy-five years after Orwell's death, **Paul Flowers** continues his series by turning to his take on socialism, totalitarianism and the significance of Spain's Civil War

George Orwell travelled to Spain in December 1936 to fight in the Spanish Civil War. His experiences there proved to be extremely influential in two ways. Firstly, for the first time in his life, he saw the working class in a militant and confident mood. Secondly, he saw the murderous reality of the Stalinists, as they sought to destroy a revolution and crush all those who opposed them. The first factor was to fade in his consciousness until his confidence in the ability of the working class to shape its own destiny was little more than a memory and a hope for the future; the second was to remain a prominent and permanent influence upon his political outlook.

Many years later, Orwell stated that prior to 1936 he did not have "an accurate political orientation". However: "The Spanish war and other events in 1936-37 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood. Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic socialism, as I understand it."¹

Arriving in Barcelona in December 1936, he found himself in a city in which, as he put it, "the working class was in the saddle". Although he was a bit disconcerted by this unfamiliar phenomenon, he was to look back at it with fondness:

Above all, there was a belief in the revolution and the future, a feeling of having suddenly emerged into an era of equality and freedom. Human beings were trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine ... There is a sense in which it would be true to say that one was experiencing a foretaste of socialism, by which I mean that the prevailing mental atmosphere was that of socialism. Many of the normal motives of civilised life - snobbishness, money-grubbing, fear of the boss, etc - had simply ceased to exist.²

Orwell went to Spain in order, as he put it, to fight against fascism and to fight for "common decency".³ And if his belief in socialism was reinforced, as he discovered this quality amongst the Spanish workers, so was his dislike of Stalinism.

Franco's military coup in June 1936 against Manuel Azaña's liberal coalition administration provoked a militant response. Workers and peasants seized factories and the land, which they then controlled through elected committees. They set up militias to fight Franco's troops. Although the political centre ground between the militant upsurge and Franco's forces was rapidly narrowing, the Communist International posed the struggle in Spain as one between "the proletariat, the peasantry, the democratic bourgeoisie and the intellectuals on the one side, and the monarcho-feudalist reactionaries, the counterrevolutionary fascists, on the other". The fight was "for the maintenance of the democratic republic", not for socialism.⁴

This was not an academic matter, a case of fraternal debate. A civil war was soon to break out within the republican side, with the marginalised republican government being propped up by the local Stalinists and by Soviet military and intelligence personnel. The latter imposed a reign of terror, with their



Broadcasting for the other side

secret police acting autonomously of any domestic control, and infiltrating the republican police and judiciary. Their main targets were their leftwing rivals.⁵

Orwell was at first more inclined towards the stance of the Communist International, that the war against Franco should be won before wide-ranging social reforms could be implemented, but he soon realised that this was unrealistic, as those who had first taken up arms against Franco combined that fight with the seizure and running of factories, transport and land; indeed "their resistance was accompanied by - one might almost say it consisted of - a definite revolutionary outbreak". He came to recognise that the Stalinists' policies were not only holding back and even reversing the struggle for social gains, but were demoralising the militants, and impeding the war effort against Franco.⁶

Stalinism

He reacted strongly to the slanderous campaign conducted by the Stalinists against other leftists, and he attempted to help those who had been imprisoned. He trod on many sensitive toes with his trenchant writings:

When I left Barcelona in late June [1937] the jails were bulging ... But the point to notice is that the people who are in prison now are not the fascists, but revolutionaries; they are not there because their opinions are too much to the right, but because they are too much to the left. And the people responsible for putting them there are ... the communists.⁷

Orwell was very disturbed that his writings were censored and rejected by such publications as the *News Chronicle* and the *New Statesman*, which preferred to believe the official communist version of events in Spain.

After his return from Spain, Orwell spent a lot of time grappling with the questions of socialism, Stalinism, democracy and totalitarianism. Unlike many leftwingers, he saw through the barrage of Stalinist propaganda. His parody of the Moscow trials remains a delight:

Mr Winston Churchill, now in exile in Portugal, is plotting to overthrow the British empire and establish communism in England. By the use of unlimited Russian money he has succeeded

in building up a huge Churchillite organisation, which includes members of parliament, factory managers, Roman Catholic bishops and practically the whole of the Primrose League ... Eighty percent of the Beefeaters at the Tower are discovered to be agents of the Comintern ... Lord Nuffield ... confesses that ever since 1920 he has been fomenting strikes in his own factories. Casual half paras in every issue of the newspapers announce that 50 more Churchillite sheep-stealers have been shot in Westmoreland or that the proprietress of a village shop in the Cotswolds has been transported to Australia for sucking the bull's eyes and putting them back in the bottle.

Nevertheless, unlike many anti-Stalinist leftwingers, in particular the Trotskyists, he did not take a positive view of Bolshevism. One of his major criticisms of not merely Stalinism, but of the whole Bolshevik tradition, was that it restricted democracy. He insisted that socialism had to be democratic, and he rooted the rise of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union in what he saw as the Bolsheviks' rejection of democracy: "The essential act is the rejection of democracy - that is, of the underlying values of democracy; once you have decided upon that, Stalin - or at any rate someone *like* Stalin - is already on the way."

Orwell rejected Trotsky's criticisms of Stalinism, stating that he could not avoid taking responsibility for the evolution of the Soviet regime, and there was no certainty that "as a dictator" he would have been preferable to Stalin. He wondered if the Soviet Union constituted "a peculiarly vicious form of state capitalism", and made a significant comparison, when he stated that the society described "does not seem to be very different from fascism".

Orwell was convinced that the whole thrust of societal development was towards totalitarianism. At this juncture, he claimed that the government's preparations for the forthcoming world war would lead to the establishment of "an authoritarian regime" along the lines of "Austro-fascism". Although he used language reminiscent of the far left, when he condemned the Communist International and its Popular Front campaign - the call for all social classes to demand an Anglo-Franco-Soviet 'collective security' alliance against Germany for mobilising support for a world war - his anti-war stance of the late 1930s was predicated upon his concept of the totalitarianisation of society, rather than, as in the case of anarchists and Trotskyists, upon an overall rejection of participation in an imperialist war.

Orwell's feelings, as war approached, can be ascertained, if rather obliquely, in his novel *Coming up for air*, which he wrote in early 1939. It brings out in a necessarily refracted form many of his concerns about the future, and many of the themes that are introduced play a major role in his subsequent works, both fiction and non-fiction, and underlie much of his thinking at the start of World War II.

The main character in *Coming up for air* is George Bowling, a middle-aged, middle-class insurance salesman who returns to Lower Binfield, his rural Oxfordshire

birthplace, for the first time in over two decades. Bowling's lengthy reminiscences of his childhood and youth serve to reinforce the core of Orwell's thinking, that people thought that something good in society - a feeling of security or, more exactly, a feeling of continuity - was disappearing, and would not, indeed could not, be regained. Furthermore, if in the past "it was simply that they didn't think of the future as something to be terrified of", now the future is an enforced uniformity with everything "slick and shiny and streamlined", "celluloid, rubber, chromium steel everywhere, arc-lamps blazing all night, glass roofs over your head, radios all playing the same tune, no vegetation left, everything cemented over". The futuristic glass and concrete factories of *The road to Wigan Pier* make a reappearance.

Bad times

The rapidly approaching war hangs like a shroud over *Coming up for air*, but the war itself is not really the problem; it is the "after-war" that is really frightening. For all the talk of uncertainty in the future, there is a very real certainty: "The bad times are coming ..." Images of a future repressive, regulated - in other words, totalitarian - society occur and reoccur throughout the book. 'Rubber truncheons' - not any old truncheons, but rubber ones - crop up with monotonous regularity, and barbed wire, slogans, posters with "enormous faces" and street tannoys announcing the latest victory make their appearance: a series of ugly interruptions to the dreamy reminiscences, a premonition of the dystopia of 1984.

Despite the vividness and sharpness of his overtly political writings, these glimpses in this novel of a post-war nightmare are perhaps the most illuminating insights into Orwell's fears, as the world tipped into the biggest and most destructive war in history ●

Notes

1. G Orwell 'Why I write', *Collected essays, journalism and letters (CEJL)* Volume 1, Harmondsworth 1984, pp26, 28.
2. G Orwell *Homage to Catalonia* Harmondsworth 1989, pp2-3, 82-83.
3. *Ibid* p188.
4. *International Press Correspondence* August 8 1936.
5. Two attempts by Bill Alexander and Robert Stradling, both partisans of the 'official' communist movement, to discredit Orwell's Spanish accounts concentrated on minor points of dispute with him, and said little (Stradling) or nothing (Alexander) in respect of his statements about Stalinist atrocities in Spain. See B Alexander, 'George Orwell and Spain' and R Stradling, 'Orwell and the Spanish Civil War' - both in C Norris (ed) *Inside the myth: Orwell: views from the left* London 1984.
6. G Orwell *Homage to Catalonia* Harmondsworth 1989, pp90, 190.
7. *New English Weekly* July 29 1937. Orwell was never forgiven by the official communist movement for exposing its baleful role during the Spanish Civil War. Indeed, such was its enduring loathing of him that he even achieved the seemingly impossible feat of uniting the warring factions of the CPGB, whilst it was tearing itself apart in the mid-1980s.

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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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**Self-sufficiency
is a nationalist
myth peddled
by left too**

Drill, Kemi, drill

Global warming could possibly switch off the Gulf Stream in our lifetime, making the UK a pretty miserable place to live. Yet the Tory leader wants us to ignore this and max out oil and gas production, writes **Eddie Ford**

As the planet steadily heats up, with every added fraction of a degree bringing more serious harm to the ecosystem, we are reaching various tipping points that indicate a catastrophic and irreversible climate breakdown.

One particular concern is the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), of which the Gulf Stream is part. It is the main ocean current system in the Atlantic and a component of the overall ocean circulation system, thus playing a vital role in the planet's climate system: it brings sun-warmed tropical water to Europe and the Arctic, where it cools and sinks to form a deep return current.¹ This keeps northern and western Europe warmer than it would be otherwise, with the difference of between 4°C and 10°C, depending on the area.

Previously, the collapse of the Gulf Stream - using that as shorthand for AMOC as a whole - was considered unlikely, though it was already known to be at its weakest in 1,600 years as a result of the climate crisis, with studies of the Florida Current suggesting that the Gulf Stream was around 10% weaker from around 1200 to 1850 due to increased surface salinity and hence probably contributed to the conditions known as the Little Ice Age.²

But two major studies have indicated that collapse is no longer considered a low-likelihood event, as the Gulf Stream appears to be more unstable than previously thought - in many models the tipping point is predicted to be reached in the *next decade or two*, after which the shutdown of the Gulf Stream becomes inevitable, owing to self-amplifying feedback. This can be seen by the fact that air temperatures are rising rapidly in the Arctic because of the climate crisis, meaning the ocean cools more slowly there. But warmer water is less dense and therefore sinks into the depths more slowly. This slowing allows more rainfall to accumulate in the salty surface waters, also making it less dense, and further slowing the sinking, thereby forming the feedback loop.

If the Gulf Stream severely weakens or even collapses, one of the paradoxical effects of global warming in a country like Britain is that it could get a *lot colder* - becoming more like Labrador in Canada, which is at a similar latitude, but has different inclement conditions: wet, windy and dank.

So we have the study recently published in the journal, *Environmental Research Letters*, which analysed the standard models used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.³ The new analysis examined models that were run for longer, to 2300 and 2500, and made the "shocking" discovery that the tipping point at which shutdown



Slowing down

becomes inevitable is likely to be passed within a few decades, but that the collapse itself may not happen until 50 or 100 years later. According to the research, if carbon emissions continue to rise - which seems near certain - then 70% of the model runs will lead to collapse, while an intermediate level of emissions will result in collapse in 37% of the models. Even in the case of low future emissions, shutdown will happen in 25% of the models, rather than the 10% chance that the older models suggested. The true figures could be even worse, because the models did not include the torrent of meltwater from the Greenland ice cap that is also freshening the ocean waters.

Start collapsing

Similarly, the European Union's commissioner for climate, Wopke Hoekstra, has warned that the Gulf Stream could collapse in a few decades after a significant study was released by Utrecht University researchers.⁴ This analysed 25 different climate models and found that under what they called a "moderate emissions scenario" - meaning a rise in global temperatures of around 2.7°C above preindustrial levels this century - the Gulf Stream could start collapsing from 2063; and, of course, the planet is well on track to reach that level of heat. But under a "high-emissions scenario" of warming above 4°C, which unfortunately is far from impossible, the shutdown could occur as early as 2055.

Of course, to get a fuller perspective, we should remember that all the previous models and studies have said that the Gulf Stream would not collapse this century - we are only talking *probabilities*.⁵ But the consequences of a switch off when it comes to Europe, especially Britain, are incredibly serious - it would shift the tropical rainfall belt, on which many millions of people rely to grow their food, plunge western Europe into extreme cold winters, even as global warming marches on, giving us summer droughts, and add 50cm to already rising sea levels. For these very reasons, climate scientists have been warning for many years that a Gulf Stream/AMOC collapse must be avoided "at all costs" - so, while every

added fraction of a degree warmer threatens more serious danger, it is also the case that every fraction *less* can potentially diminish that danger.

Hoekstra has called the Utrecht study yet another "wake-up call", as it shows the Gulf Stream could collapse in our "lifetime". Earlier this month, the European Commission vice-president, Teresa Ribera - in charge of the EU's overarching environmental policy - suggested that the AMOC should be "added to the list of national security acronyms in Europe", given the devastating impact of a shutdown. Sybren Drijfhout, a researcher at the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute and responsible for the study in *Environmental Research Letters*, said that the Utrecht research was "solid" and he too expressed frustration that the climate crisis seemed to have become less of a priority in European politics in recent years despite the threat posed by global warming.⁶

Yet we are literally running out of time - as can be seen in the UK, which has just had its hottest summer on record, according to the Met Office.⁷ The mean temperature for meteorological summer, which encompasses the months of June, July and August, was 16.1°C, which is significantly above the current record of 15.76°C set in 2018. Thus all five of the warmest summers on record have now occurred since 2000 - a clear signal of global warming, with June and July suffering four heatwaves, including temperatures above 30°C. As many can testify, there was very little rainfall across much of the country during the summer. England has experienced what the government has described as "nationally significant" water shortfalls - so that much of the country is still under a hosepipe ban. Meteorologists have said this year's consistent warmth was driven by dry ground from spring, high-pressure systems and unusually warm seas around the UK, and minimum temperatures had been exceptionally above average.

You could argue that maybe we should be grateful for small mercies, because, although the summer has been consistently warm, there has not actually been extreme heat. The highest temperature recorded to date

for 2025 was on July 1 in Faversham, Kent at 35.8°C - well short of the UK's all-time high of 40.3°C, set in July 2022. On the other hand, the Met's head of climate attribution, Dr Mark McCarthy, points out that in a "natural climate", you could expect to see a summer like 2025 with an approximate return period of *around 340 years*, but, given the human-induced climate crisis, we could expect instead to see these sorts of summers *roughly one in every five years*. That is, we could experience much hotter summers in the very near future.

Everything points in this direction, one more example being that the cooling La Niña weather phenomenon - having the opposite climate impact of El Niño - might be returning between September and November. But, even if it does, global temperatures are expected to be above average, said the UN's World Meteorological Organisation.⁸ Conditions oscillate between La Niña and its opposite, El Niño, with neutral conditions in between - after a brief spell of weak La Niña conditions, neutral conditions have persisted since March. The unusually protracted 2020-23 La Niña was the first "triple dip" of the 21st century, and only the third since 1950. However, despite all this, La Niña's cooling effect did nothing to break the run of exceptionally hot years. The past 10 years make up the hottest 10 individual years ever recorded and temperatures have remained at record or near-record levels even after El Niño conditions faded last year - 2024 being the hottest year on record. Predictions about the weakening or collapse of the Gulf Stream sound all too plausible.

North Sea

Yet tell that to Kemi Badenoch, the current Tory leader, who is blindly chasing after Nigel Farage and Reform votes by effecting the scrapping of net zero targets - even though it was Theresa May who first put the targets into law in 2019 (presumably she is now regarded as too 'woke'). In what is obviously her version of Donald Trump's "drill, baby, drill" mantra, Badenoch promised this week in Aberdeen to aim to "maximise extraction" of oil and gas in the North Sea, announcing plans to overhaul the North Sea Transition Authority, which oversees the issuing of licences, dropping the word 'transition' and replacing its 12-page mandate with a simple order to get as many hydrocarbons out of the ground as possible.⁹

In Trumpian mode, she told her audience that Britain is in the "absurd situation" of "leaving vital resources untapped", while neighbours such as Norway extract them from the same seabed: "Britain has already decarbonised more than every other major economy since 1990,"

Badenoch claimed, "yet we face some of the highest energy prices in the developed world". This is not sustainable, she continued, which is why the Tory leader is "calling time" on this "unilateral act of economic disarmament and Labour's impossible ideology of net zero by 2050". A future Conservative government will scrap all green and other mandates for the North Sea in favour of getting "all our oil and gas out of the North Sea", as "economic growth and our national interest came first".

But this is illiterate nonsense on every conceivable level, as correctly observed by Peter Franklin in the online *Unherd* magazine.¹⁰ That is essentially because in the UK oil prices are determined by *global markets*, as are natural gas prices. Perhaps even more importantly, the UK produces *less than 1%* of the world's oil and gas supply, so logic dictates - sorry to spoil your fantasy, Kemi - that upping the output a fraction will hardly make any difference. North Sea production peaked decades ago and all that can be achieved with new oil and gas fields, even if you leave aside the ecological implications, is to slightly slow the rate of decline.

As Franklin writes, the whole controversy is about "whether or not we leave the last drops in the ground" and, either way, "it won't affect our progress towards net zero nor, for that matter, the prices at the petrol pump". Even if a Nigel Farage government nationalised the oil industry under a policy of 'British oil for British consumers' - you can just about imagine such a thing - it would not work to lower prices or create 'energy security', because Britain can never achieve "self-sufficiency" or "self-reliance", when it comes to oil and gas. Badenoch and Farage are peddling autarkical delusions ... predictably, along with various 'official communist' nationalists such as the *Morning Star*'s CPB and the CPB Marxist-Leninist.¹¹ ●

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Notes

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