

# weekly worker



**After eight months of diplomatic efforts,  
it is back to an intensification of  
sanctions and phasing into World War III**

- Letters and debate
- Your Party plans
- CPGB polemic
- Reform UK rally

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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# LETTERS



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

## End is nigh

Jack Conrad's 'Say it loud, say it proud' (September 4) is an article in two parts - one good, one bad (very bad).

I have no major quarrel with the first part, but the number of Palestinians expelled in 1967 was 300,000, not 500,000. Also the demolition of the Al Aqsa mosque and its replacement by a 'Third Temple' may be a prelude for the second coming of Jesus amongst certain sections of Christianity, particularly within some eschatological traditions, but it is not universal.

However, that is not where the threat comes from, but from Israel's crazy settler messianic fundamentalists, who certainly don't want to see Jesus on their patch! Their desire is for the return of the Messiah, not Jesus. Nor is it true that these messianic fundamentalists are a 'fringe' movement. On the contrary, they are the heart of rightwing Zionism.

I also disagree with Conrad's differentiation between ideological and military Zionism - the former applying to Lebanon and Syria and the latter to the West Bank. In fact the initial justification for colonising the West Bank was also strategic and military: the so-called "Auschwitz borders" of Abba Eban.

But my main criticism of Conrad's article is over the second half, 'Organised racism', where he says that "Working class politics in Israel - that is, Israeli-Jewish working class politics - barely exists now as an effective collectivity." That begs the question: when has it ever existed? The role of the Histadrut has never been to represent the Israeli working class. It operated according to the slogan, 'From class to nation', whereby the Arabs were their class enemy.

Palestine and Zionism provide the purest example of exclusionary or exterminatory colonisation and Jewish society consists of a full range of classes, from a big bourgeoisie to the working class. But the Israeli working class has never had an organisation representing its political and economic interests separate from its own bourgeoisie.

It's not true that the Zionists exercised "no coercive power over the indigenous population". From 1909 there was a settler force, Hashomer, and, from 1920 onwards, Haganah. During the Arab Revolt from 1936-39 Haganah was extensively deployed with the British army and took part in its counter-insurgency operations. From 1938 there was formed Orde Wingate's Night Squads and out of them developed the Palmach shock troops. The Jewish Settlement Police were also formed.

The Zionists might not have had fully developed militias, as was the case in South Africa, but they were nonetheless well armed in comparison with the Palestinians. The Irgun, of course, had formed its own militia and these were active in attacking the Palestinians.

Conrad describes the 'two-state solution' as "economistic Zionism". I think a better description would be 'utopian Zionism'. However, we agree that the idea of Israel living alongside a Palestinian state is wishful thinking. He says that economic or trade union politics are always trumped by "higher politics" of war and security. But why? Because the Israeli Jewish working class has grown up within an apartheid state, where it is taken for granted that, being Jewish, they will have economic and political privileges

which Arabs will not have. In other words, they identify with the state in all its aspects, when it comes to the Palestinians.

I also agree that the Socialist Workers Party poses the question of a democratic, secular state in the abstract. However, it is a very concrete demand, first adopted by the Palestinian national movement before it was seduced by talk of two states and neo-colonial solutions. But where Conrad goes wrong is where he deems the Israeli working class capable of fulfilling any positive class role. He bemoans that supporters of a democratic, secular state will not cede collective national rights and, even worse, deny their right to self-determination "in perpetuity". If Conrad is serious, he is suggesting that, in the event of the Israeli state deZionising its Jewish population, it should then be allowed to begin the process of forming a Zionist state again.

I do not accept that the Jews of Israel form an oppressed nation. Self-determination therefore is out of the question. Self-determination applies to oppressed, not oppressor, nations. It is the right to be free from national oppression. The Israeli Jewish nation defines itself against the indigenous Palestinian population - it has little else to hold it together. But for the Palestinians, secular and religious Israelis might well have fallen on each other. The conflict between Jewish fundamentalists and secular Israelis is a very real one, but it is one that the former are winning. The messianic Zionists have been gaining in strength for over half a century and, together with the ultra-orthodox Haredi population, form a ruling block.

It is my belief that we are seeing the beginning of the end of Zionism, which was born in blood and fire and will undoubtedly end the same way - In this I agree with professor Ilan Pappé. Israel's seeming strength today is really the strength of the United States's empire, and that is waning. Without the USA Israel would be nothing.

**Tony Greenstein**  
Brighton

## Non-functional?

The letter by Parker McQueeney (August 21) advising those of us here in Britain to move towards greater unity deserves a further clarification and explanation of the 'situation on the ground'.

First, a correction and clarification on Forging Communist Unity. The early initiative came from a proposal from Why Marx? to run a series of events, probably outside London, on questions of party and organisation. They approached Prometheus, the CPGB-PCC, Talking About Socialism and Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (RS21) to encourage an initial call. Those of us involved in RS21 encouraged someone from our elected leadership to attend, in part because at the time the popular 'Party Time?' events were occurring in London and it seemed there was a moment to, as McQueeney says, "take the initiative", facilitating such conversations outside London. At the first meeting, both the CPGB-PCC and TAS suddenly argued that we should forget any events, be bolder, and instead begin a process of organisational fusion.

As Alex from *Prometheus* contributed from the floor during the opening panel of Communist University, that was politically naive. Of course, if you are the CPGB-PCC and TAS, whose memberships are between 10 and 20 and around three at the start of FCU (happy to be corrected in this regard), such decisions can be made quickly. For RS21 (an organisation of between 400 and 500)

this was not going to happen - there is an 'apples and oranges' organisational problem here. Never mind the fact that no trust had been built through joint work - something the CPGB-PCC perhaps should have recognised as a barrier, given that founding RS21 comrades share much of the existing left's hostility to the CPGB-PCC and its younger cadre are put off by the repeated transphobic dog-whistling of its members.

Even after this, I argued against collective participation from those of us in *Prometheus*, (and to clarify for McQueeney, the caucus in RS21 have never been involved collectively). Why was this? It is worth laying out my reasons for the clarification of those interested - and particularly those internationally who consider themselves of this tendency, especially given it has bearing on how we act in 'Your Party'.

The reasons are twofold. Firstly, the numbers involved made it a non-starter. It is important to have an organisational-numerical floor to the question of programmatic unity, especially when it comes to mergers, otherwise time is exhausted on negotiations between 'organisations' that do not have the forces to meaningfully further the politics. Of the larger force in FCU, the CPGB-PCC, its failure to recruit and declining numbers are well established. This is also visible in its activity and lack of clear strategy to use what numbers it has. For example, it is clear in their reporting on the initial We Demand Change event that the CPGB-PCC couldn't even get a member to go to this space of several thousand people, despite the months of notice, and make the argument for their politics.

It is my view that TAS is capable of intervening merely as a set of individuals based in Manchester and the CPGB-PCC is 10-20 older comrades spread across Britain unable to intervene beyond producing the paper. Both have passed through an organisational floor, which means they cannot meaningfully propagandise, never mind agitate, for these politics here in Britain.

The argument against this, raised by members involved in FCU, is that mergers become greater than the sum of their parts and it was worth the roll of the dice. However, I was unconvinced by this. To sufficiently popularise this politics, we also must win a layer of the rank and file of the membership of the British left, both inside and outside organised groups, but the position the CPGB-PCC are in makes them unlikely to do this. In my view the opposite is true: I believe the CPGB-PCC actually make popularising this politics harder. There is the longstanding cross-group hostility to the CPGB-PCC, which we can decry as unfair, but is real and which the organisation seemingly has no solution to overcoming, other than defending 'robust polemic' in the corner like a sad child left out of a birthday party.

In addition to this, the younger generation who do not share the left's existing hostility are hardly going to be convinced either. Here is a group which has no meaningful activity beyond producing and distributing the paper, which has repeatedly pushed transphobic talking points, and which has already churned out what few younger members it brought in. If FCU had succeeded, my estimation is it would be the case of uniting 25 old allies, with the effect of alienating a possible few hundred new ones.

For those of us who find much in *Revolutionary strategy* and in the wider arguments about programmatic unity, there is a significant lacuna which must be answered in practice. How do you actually move from

the number of smaller, isolated groups towards agreement around a programme? On this question, the story of the CPGB-PCC is a slow and painful failure, of which the collapse of FCU seems to be a final sad note.

With regard to operation in Your Party then, we have the immediate struggle for democracy around the founding conference, as well as the need to cohere Marxists to argue for our politics in the long run. The same assessment around FCU in my view also applies in regard to McQueeney's proposals around agreeing a platform for work in Your Party - whilst those involved in FCU are welcome to intervene and we certainly should coordinate, it is a mistake to treat groups like the CPGB-PCC as functional organisations.

This may seem harsh, but I think it is important to communicate to those in the USA, Australia, Poland, Netherlands, Germany and elsewhere just how dysfunctional, isolated and spent the CPGB-PCC is in practice. Sadly, a platform would likely succeed more without them - nor are they necessary for a partyist platform to be put forward.

To counteract this, *Prometheus* has been refounded and established itself. Organisationally members of Marxist Unity Caucus now already exceed other 'partyists', we are working towards participating in Your Party and are intervening to push this politics forward (see also Joe Carman's contribution at CU on this question). We shouldn't exhaust ourselves by placing what is clearly an albatross around our necks.

**Harry H**  
*Prometheus*

## YP pro-sortition

Carla Roberts quotes Jack Conrad as saying that "if I broke my leg, the last thing I'd do is hobble out the door, pick the first random person I came across and ask them to fix it. I would try to get the best possible medical treatment. And that applies to politics" ('Don't put off democracy', September 4).

This is apparently intended as an argument against sortition *and in favour of election*. But it's an odd one, because doctors and nurses are not in fact elected. They are appointed, on the basis that they possess the appropriate skills and have undergone the appropriate training. And that doesn't apply to politics. In setting a broken leg, everybody agrees what the desired outcome is: we want the leg fixed, with no nasty complications, so that pretty soon comrade Conrad is running about on it again as good as new. But in politics we don't all agree. On the contrary, politics necessarily involves a struggle between different material interests, different philosophies, different programmes, different principles. It can't be reduced to a matter of professional competence, like surgery - at least democrats, whether their preferred mechanism is sortition, election or anything else, have always insisted it couldn't.

I don't want to put too much weight on an argument that comrade Conrad may only have made in passing (certainly not until the fracture has fully healed!). Arguing against sortition is slippery ground, I'm afraid: you put one foot wrong and before you know it you're arguing against democracy *in general* (or else against trial by jury in particular).

But the real kick of comrade Conrad's objection to sortition, in the debate reported by comrade Roberts and in his two recent articles on the subject ('Make Your Party now!', August 21; 'Put politics in command', August 28), is not this. Essentially, he is worried that sortition would not

give the left groups enough votes. Assuming their members make up about one 80th of the total pool (10,000 out of 800,000), they would only get something like one delegate in 80 at a sortitionist conference. I can't deny it.

But do these groups exert no influence at all, political or intellectual, beyond their paid-up membership? Does nobody read their papers? Do their members not make the arguments in the wider movement? Just take the organisation that publishes the *Weekly Worker*. There are people out there who have never set eyes on a CPGB membership card - even, perhaps, on somebody who holds one - but whose thinking on issues like a minimum-maximum programme has nonetheless been shaped by the CPGB's.

In a democratic political culture, that is how you set about gaining influence for your ideas. You make the argument - in print, in meetings, and, yes, on social media - and you win people round. You don't go gossiping behind closed doors with invisible leaders or the bourgeois press. You don't spend your time stacking little selection meetings. You make the argument, and you persuade people, and you educate people: and then, when a random subset of the rank and file are picked out by sortition, your ideas will be in the mix. And if you keep doing it, and other people with other ideas keep doing it too, and everyone keeps gaining experience through regular sortition and rotation, then the political level of 'the average' rises. You get that bit closer to a society in which, as the saying goes, every cook can govern.

Does election achieve the same? A bit; not much. Any attempt to elect conference delegates through crypto/quasi/proto-branches would certainly involve a lot of stacking of small meetings. And under present circumstances it would also mean more than a little backroom gossip with invisible leaders: because, once I've proclaimed myself the South Oxford branch and elected myself and my mates as delegates, I will still need to sweet-talk somebody at the top into issuing us our voting cards. Delegate elections when there is no recognised branch structure would in reality mean a conference hand-picked by whichever committee got to approve the delegates' credentials.

"Logistically," comrade Conrad writes in his article of August 28, "sortition is more than feasible". It's a hell of a concession, given that most other proposals - apart from appointment by the leadership - aren't really feasible at all. But, luckily enough, sortition is more than just feasible: it is the organisational form we ought to prefer anyway, if we want our politics to be educational, consciousness-raising and genuinely democratic.

Opting instead for elections might not result in any broken bones, but it would be a definite misstep.

**Edmund Griffiths**  
Oxford

## YP anti-sortition

Starting with an email list of supporters is probably not the ideal way to launch a new party that is meant to be a real political vehicle. But, in Sam Gindin's words, "Creating a socialist party is a voluntarist act." The founding conference that the as-yet-informal Your Party leaders have committed to is an opportunity to build on the enthusiasm of so many sign-ups and to set things in motion officially. For those who have any number of various opinions on what sort of party it should be, the lead-up to the conference and its proceedings are incredibly important.

The immediate question that



follows from the announcement of the intention to hold a conference is: “Who gets to be there?” The possible extremes range from everyone who has shared their email address to only hand-picked attendees.

So far, I have basically seen two options in circulation: ‘one member, one vote’ and sortition. Both are lacking for reasons that have been laid out in the *Weekly Worker*.

‘One member, one vote’ in this context might mean that everyone who signed up as a supporter gets to participate (or maybe everyone who pays dues). So many people in so many places without pre-existing structures in which people can form their opinions means that in reality there will be a very one-way process of communication by existing leaders and that virtual voters will be asked to rubber-stamp slogans. Here in the USA a similar type of proposal was recently defeated at the convention of the Democratic Socialists of America. There is no automatic way to ensure that people make good decisions by going over them. Everyone could vote, but this does not guarantee that any of them would actually participate in productive campaigns in the 3D world.

Sortition - choosing participants randomly in the hope of getting a good enough sample - is suited for classless communism, but not now. We should not leave the direction of the movement for democracy and socialism up to chance. You can’t wish away - or hope to box out - the sects or bureaucrats by flipping a coin: they have to be self-consciously argued against by large numbers. Sortition gets at the need to develop in many people the attributes of leadership. But, contrary to proponent Edmund Griffith’s claim that it’s what the “grassroots” want, most people likely don’t know what the word means.

**Griffin Mahon**  
DSA

**Elect YP delegates**

Approximately 40 comrades attended a recent Redcar gathering of the Your Party movement. Set up by a pre-existing network of former Labour-era Corbyn supporters, the meeting was cordial, if slightly ad hoc. Whilst the bulk of the audience fitted into a ‘Labour left outside the Labour Party’ bracket, members of the Socialist Party, CPGB and other non-aligned Marxists were also present.

Eric Barnes from the Social Justice Party made some reasonable points about community/party building - some positive, others overly reliant on direction from the centre. Whilst far from rebellion, limitations of the leadership in galvanising the party movement were acknowledged by most.

Some suggestion that the meeting had not been widely enough advertised had some validity and, whilst there seemed to be confusion about what the current transitional arrangement represented, promises of a steering group and roadmap to conference were made for next time. Positively, in a wandering exchange about decision-making, an overwhelming majority - possibly everyone present - favoured delegate-based mechanisms for any foundation conference, with clear scepticism with regards to Zoomocracy evident.

**Paul Cooper**  
email

**YP Glasgow**

On September 5, the first large gathering of Glasgow Your Party supporters took place in a packed-out venue with a capacity of 200 people. The format of the meeting was of a workshop with around 20 break-out groups. There was no top-table and no

guest speakers and, as an alternative to a founding statement crafted by the self-selected organisers, they solicited and compiled thoughts from attendees on the need for and hopes for the party, and interviewed people in person on the day.

I’m very sceptical of the workshop meeting format - which always ends up feeling rather rushed, unfocused, shallow and unclarifying. But as a way to kick off the proto-branch with such a broad range of political and life backgrounds present, you could certainly do worse. I was definitely happier attending this than some top-table-dominated succession of speeches from left celebs, filled with socialistic pablum and vague promises.

It was wrongly reported by *The National* as if it were an official launch (two journalists attended - the other from *The Herald* - who were asked to leave after the opening introduction), which led to complaints from some that it was unadvertised and therefore undemocratic. Jim Monaghan, who sits on the ‘Scottish secretariat’, has reported online that there are around 20,000 sign-ups in Glasgow alone. The vast majority of that 20k will not have been aware of the meeting beforehand, which required coming across the WhatsApp group or Instagram page by chance or by word of mouth. Of course, it wasn’t advertised to Your Party sign-ups because it is unofficially organised, but it could have been if the local groups were given the contact information of those signed up. ‘Data protection concerns’ is no excuse.

As for the politics of the meeting, it would be fair to say that the most common themes were the connectedness of society’s most serious, acute and chronic problems to capitalism, and the need for the party to be democratic.

**Scott Evans**  
Glasgow

**YP and SPEW**

Northampton’s Socialist Party in England and Wales comrades will no doubt be disappointed with the turnout at their public meeting to discuss ‘What next in the fight for a new workers’ party?’ Only eight were at the venue, including SPEW regional organiser and the evening’s main speaker, Steve Score.

Revealing the limited ambitions SPEW has for the new formation, comrade Score stated that it would be progress if YP stood on the pinched, sub-reformist manifesto Labour stood on in 2017. It clearly yearns for a re-run of the pre-Kinnock Labour Party, where its Militant predecessor enjoyed a degree of notoriety and success.

Warming to his theme, the comrade stated the new party should be based on the “organised working class” - by which he meant the trade unions, which “were key to the formation of the Labour Party”. And affiliated unions should “have a say in the new party, which reflects the size of their memberships”: ie, granting millions of votes to the trade union bureaucracy - the politics of the bourgeoisie inside the workers’ movement.

Local SPEW branch chair Katie Simpson called for YP to be a revolutionary socialist party. However, she went on to describe the 2017 Labour offering as a “socialist manifesto”.

From the floor I challenged the idea that we should be limiting ourselves to recreating the Labour Party. It was not, and never had been, a vehicle for socialist transformation. The creation of Labour by the trade unions had been an outlier; the reverse of what had happened elsewhere in Europe, where Marxists, socialists and anarchists had

created the trade unions.

As for Syriza, its mistake was to take power in a situation where it did not have majority support and had neither the intention nor the ability to implement a Marxist minimum programme. And going it alone in the hope others might follow was a poor strategy.

**Andy Hannah**  
email

**YP Majority**

On September 6 I attended the annual conference in Newcastle of ‘Majority UK’ (set up by former North East mayor Jamie Driscoll, who resigned from Labour after being prevented from standing for re-election in 2023). Having had no involvement with Majority before, I attended as Zarah Sultana was speaking and I wanted to see if there was much rumble or organising to do with Your Party.

Zarah did well to openly say the party will not compromise on trans rights, but I found most of the conference very disappointing. Jamie spoke about how Labour has carried on the same as the Tories, rhetorically asking why - before explaining that it was all a “political choice”, and saying that all we need to do is to get the right person (presumably that’s him) elected in Newcastle, and then all the correct “political choices” would be made.

The whole “political choices” rhetoric seems to completely ignore any understanding of how capitalism and the state actually works, as if everything that happens is just because of bad people making bad decisions, and we simply need to replace the bad people with good ones. It feels extremely individualist and utopian to me.

I don’t know why Jamie and other figures on the left like him continue to ignore this plain reality. You don’t have to have read all of Marx to see this - experiences like that of Syriza in 2015 show without a doubt where the real power lies in society, yet Jamie apparently refuses to learn from this.

It always seems to be the figures that pick up some local traction like Jamie who are stuck on this kind of politics and it’s extremely frustrating: you have a whole room full of regular people who want some positive change, you hold an authority over them and you stand and feed them things that are blatantly incorrect. It’s genuinely sad, feeling like I’m seeing all of these people being misled and fed the ‘same old same old’.

**Matt Hutch**  
Email

**CPGB clarification**

Just to clarify in response to comrade Carla Roberts’ letter (September 4): obviously the Provisional Central Committee is keen on growing the CPGB. What I wrote in my aggregate report was a reference to the illusions of comrade Roberts, who is convinced that those inspired by Mike Macnair’s book, *Revolutionary strategy*, would join the CPGB if only we changed our “culture” (‘Political clarity vital’, August 28).

I was trying to explain the position put forward by comrade Macnair on such issues. Unfortunately her illusions on such matters lead to frustration and any attempt at explaining the problem with such false hopes fails to convince her.

As for the alleged inaccuracies regarding “movementism”, I am sure that, in reading the Zoom transcript, the comrade must have seen her own comment defining herself as part of a “faction for action”. I cannot find a better definition of movementism.

**Farzad Kamangar**  
email

**ACTION**

**Marx Memorial Library open day**

**Saturday September 13, 11am:** 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](http://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](https://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](https://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](https://www.eventbrite.nl/o/accountability-without-borders-114884242501).

**No sackings, no deportations**

**Wednesday September 17, 8am:** Protest outside the Home Office, Marsham Street, London SW1. Nearly 200 Transport for London workers are facing deportation under new immigration rules. Organised by RMT London Transport Regional Council:  
[www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1224078786190289](https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1224078786190289).

**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](https://stopwar.org.uk/events/trump-national-demonstration-against-state-visit).

**What is communicated by leftwing jargon?**

**Thursday September 18, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Oxford Town Hall, St Aldate’s, Oxford OX1. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society:  
[x.com/CCSoc/status/1945206861013094717](https://x.com/CCSoc/status/1945206861013094717).

**March with striking Birmingham bin workers**

**Saturday September 20, 9.30am:** Assemble outside Unite office, 30 Jennens Road, Birmingham B7. March to Council Chambers, Victoria Square B1. The strike continues - government-appointed commissioners scuppered a deal that could have ended the dispute. Organised by Unite the Union: [www.facebook.com/unitetheunion1](https://www.facebook.com/unitetheunion1).

**Billionaires have broken Britain**

**Saturday September 20, 12 noon:** National demonstration. Assemble Portland Place, London W1. Three demands: tax the super-rich; protect workers, not billionaires; make polluters pay. Organised by Make Them Pay: [www.makethempay.org.uk](https://www.makethempay.org.uk).

**Rally for rent controls**

**Monday September 22, 6pm:** Lobby of MSPs, Scottish Parliament Building, Horse Wynd, Edinburgh EH8. Tenants need rent controls across Scotland. Don’t allow landlords to water down the legislation. Organised by Living Rent:  
[www.livingrent.org/rally\\_for\\_rent\\_controls\\_2025](https://www.livingrent.org/rally_for_rent_controls_2025).

**Sounds of solidarity with bin strikers**

**Friday September 26, 6pm until late:** Family-friendly live music event, Nortons Bar, Meriden Street, Digbeth, Birmingham B5. Help raise funds for the strikers and support their fight. Tickets £5.50. Organised by West Midlands Fire Brigades Union:  
[www.facebook.com/events/1347621353738705](https://www.facebook.com/events/1347621353738705).

**Building anti-capitalism in the new left party**

**Saturday September 27, 1.30pm:** Public meeting, Methodist Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1. Discuss how to make Your Party democratic, anti-oppression, for class and community power, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist. Organised by Manchester RS21: [revsoc21.uk/events](https://revsoc21.uk/events).

**Hands off Cuba!**

**Sunday September 28, 5.30pm:** Rally and fundraiser, The Casa, 29 Hope Street, Liverpool L1. Defend Cuba’s internationalism and raise money for the Cuba Vive medical appeal. Free entry. Organised by Cuba Solidarity Campaign:  
[www.facebook.com/CubaSolidarityCampaign](https://www.facebook.com/CubaSolidarityCampaign).

**Genocide abroad, democide at home**

**Monday September 29, 12 noon:** Protest outside Labour Party Conference. Assemble at Wheel of Liverpool, Keel Wharf, Liverpool L3. Labour policies are killing disabled people. Organised by Disabled People Against Cuts: [dpac.uk.net](https://dpac.uk.net).

**Perspectives on human origins**

**Tuesday September 30, 6.30pm:** Talks on social and biological anthropology, UCL Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: ‘How to resist alpha males’. Speakers: Chris Knight and Camilla Power. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group:  
[www.facebook.com/events/761259880199352](https://www.facebook.com/events/761259880199352).

**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.



## PALESTINE

# We will not be silenced

Both the 30th national demonstration against the genocide in Gaza and the protest against the proscription of Palestine Action were peaceful and disciplined, writes **Ian Spencer**, yet the police arrested 890 people under terrorism legislation

On September 6 the day started as any other. The demonstrations have been going on so long that the usual stalls were up and running before most of the marchers arrived. The political groups were all in place, papers at the ready. But this, the 30th national demonstration organised by the Stop the War Coalition, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, etc, was to be one of two. The other, in Parliament Square, featured people holding up placards such as: "I oppose genocide, I support Palestine Action" in defiance of the organisation's proscription under the Terrorism Act 2000.

This smaller demo was called by Defend our Juries, which has been organising peaceful civil disobedience in defence of the right of juries to acquit a defendant according to their conscience. Jurors, of course, have had a tendency to find PA activists not guilty when they argue, naturally enough, that, by vandalising Israeli arms factories, or RAF reconnaissance aircraft, they are helping prevent a far bigger crime: genocide.

Such acquittals have occurred despite judges frequently ruling that juries are to ignore defendants' reasons for their actions and stick to 'the facts', which do not, of course, include the fact that the weapons used by the IDF kill civilians, two thirds of whom are women and children.

According to the StWC, there were 300,000 on the main demonstration. As usual, it was the very model of peaceful protest. The police, ever present, were low key and not out in particularly in large numbers. After all, most of them were needed to deal with the people patiently waiting to be arrested in Parliament Square!



Just following orders ...

## Proscription

On July 5, the day the ban on PA came into force, 29 people were arrested at a demonstration in support of the non-violent direct-action group,<sup>1</sup> while another 71 were arrested at similar demonstrations across the UK on July 12.<sup>2</sup> A further 100 were arrested on July 19, including an 81-year-old former magistrate.<sup>3</sup> At a larger demonstration in London on August 9, the figure was 532 arrested - 521 of them for holding an offending placard.<sup>4</sup>

On September 6 around 1,500 held some illegal, usually hand-drawn placards, 857 of whom were arrested under the Terrorism Act. Amongst them were Sue Parfitt, an 83-year-old retired priest, and 62-year-old Mike Higgins, who is blind and in a wheelchair. The Met Police were at pains to point out that a further 33 were arrested for other offences.

Among the placards and T-shirts of protestors not yet ready to be arrested were a range of inventive ways of saying they support PA - most common of which was the face of Morph, the 1970s 'stop motion animation' figure. This is because on August 18 Miles Pickering was arrested for wearing a T-shirt he had designed, using the PA font, saying "Plasticine Action" (!), the 'o' of which contained a picture of the animated figure, with thumbs up, and had the subheading: "We oppose AI-generated animation". Whether the arresting officer was overcautious or dyslexic is not clear. However, it was not long before Miles was 'de-arrested' - and since then he has gone on to sell thousands of the T-shirts on his website in support of Medical Aid for Palestinians.<sup>5</sup>

The Met also managed to arrest (I suppose, strictly speaking, confiscate) a mannequin! One of the protestors in Parliament Square had brought a shop dummy to hold the placard!<sup>6</sup> But my favourite hand-drawn placard of the day was a piece of cardboard held by a woman, which read, "Seems like a good day to remind everyone that 'I was only following orders' was rejected as a defence at the Nuremberg trials!"

It seemed clear to many observers that the police were not enjoying their titanic battle with the frail, elderly and inanimate, especially in the face of demonstrators chanting "Shame on you!" and "Who do you serve?" But that did not stop the Met Police from claiming to be the victims in all of this!

They alleged that that there had "been a coordinated effort to prevent officers from carrying out their duties, which escalated to violence", with "an exceptional level of abuse, including punches, kicks, spitting and objects being thrown, in addition to verbal abuse".<sup>7</sup> However, photos and video footage showed the Met wielding their batons and aggressively arresting non-violent people. At least one young man was injured and required treatment following a police assault.

However, the principal weapon employed by the police was boredom. The Parliament Square protest started promptly at 1pm, but the bulk of the arrests did not begin until about 5.30pm - presumably in the hope that people with trains to catch would drift off home. But many of the demonstrators were made of sterner stuff and waited to be escorted or carried from the square to be

processed in a street facility, made up of gazebos, to cope with the large numbers. Protestors were typically kept waiting for hours to have their details taken before being released, without having to see the inside of a police station.

The StWC leadership did eventually send a contingent with a banner to show solidarity with the Defend our Juries demonstration, but that was after 4pm, by which time many of those who had attended the main demo had heard the speeches in Whitehall and started to drift off home. Just imagine what might have happened if the next stop for the main demo had been total solidarity with those waiting to be arrested in Parliament Square.

## Success

The author of the ban on PA, Yvette Cooper, has, of course, now been reshuffled (off to the foreign office) and her replacement is the one-time advocate of Palestinian rights and direct action, Shabana Mahmood.

In 2014 Mahmood lay down outside a branch of Sainsbury's in Birmingham city centre. She said, "We lay down in the street ... to say we object to them stocking goods from illegal settlements - and they must stop. We managed to close down that store at peak time on Saturday. This is how we can make a difference."<sup>8</sup>

For that, Mahmood, the MP for Birmingham Ladywood, not only got a telling-off from Labour Party bureaucrats, but was accused by the *Jewish Chronicle* of encouraging "mob rule" in her support for

the campaign against the Zionist state.<sup>9</sup> She subsequently released a cringeworthy retraction, although on her website Mahmood still describes herself as a "passionate supporter of Palestinian rights". But then in the 2024 general election she had a greatly reduced majority when she was challenged by the independent candidate, Akhmed Yakoob, whose campaign focused on Palestine. She clearly knows which side her bread is buttered and identifies with the Blue Labour faction of the party.

In the meantime, PA can claim to have had some success. Elbit Systems, Israel's largest arms manufacturer, has taken the decision to close one of its Bristol plants, which had been repeatedly targeted by PA. Elbit's latest accounts show that it made an operating loss of £4.7 million last year - compared to a £3.8 million profit in 2023. Last year it sold its West Midlands-based subsidiary, Elite KL, after its operating profit fell by 75%, primarily due to increased 'security' costs. However, that is small beer, when one considers that Elbit Systems UK is part of a consortium close to winning a £2 billion contract that would make it a "strategic partner" of the ministry of defence.<sup>10</sup>

Back to Palestine Action. On September 4, the court of appeal ruled that the home office can attempt to block a move by PA to have its ban overturned by judicial review. While the legal wrangles continue, so does the genocide, the proscription and the fact that some PA activists are languishing on remand in prison. The judicial review of the PA ban is currently scheduled to be heard during

a three-day hearing in November.

Huda Ammori, one of PA's founders, said: "The political misstep by Yvette Cooper has led to hundreds facing prosecution under the Terrorism Act, leading to a much wider chilling effect on the freedom of speech." She added that, in "doubling down" in her attempt to prevent the judicial review, the home secretary was "trying to avoid scrutiny of her decision."<sup>11</sup>

But the people of Gaza cannot wait and Defend our Juries will not wait: they are already planning a bigger demonstration to make the proscription of PA unworkable.<sup>12</sup> Imagine if it was not just 1,500, but tens of thousands! ●

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## YOUR PARTY

# Reject this dog's dinner

Team Corbyn is postponing the launch conference. When it eventually happens, participants will be chosen by lot, things will be run under tight control and serious debate will not get a look-in, says **Carla Roberts**

Your Party's launch conference has been pushed back to 2026. That is pretty much the only thing that is currently clear. We have also been told that those at the top have opted for a convoluted system of sortition plus "online OMOV voting" plus regional meetings and a set of pre-prepared "conference statements". Not that any of the 800,000 signatories have been told any of this. While proto-branches are springing up everywhere, there is only eerie silence from above.

We have to rely on rumours, leaked information and speeches given by the likes of former South African MP Andrew Feinstein, who told a meeting in Bristol last week that the conference would be held "probably within two or three months after November".<sup>1</sup> At the AGM of Jamie Driscoll's curiously apolitical Majority UK, Zarah Sultana pleaded for "patience", explaining: "I am just as desperate to get this going, but it will take time to make sure democracy is at the heart of it. It needs to be reflective of the movement; it can't just be MP-led."<sup>2</sup>

Sultana knows what she is talking about. She and those close to her (including Feinstein and Salma Yaqoob) have been locking horns with 'Camp Corbyn' for many months now. Corbyn's inner circle is still furious with her for 'jumping the gun' in early July to announce that she was leaving the Labour Party to co-lead a new party. Clearly, a move born out of frustration with the slow pace and secret nature of developments. In return, Corbyn's right-hand woman, Karie Murphy, kicked Sultana, Feinstein, Yaqoob and others out of the WhatsApp group of Collective, the forerunner of Your Party.

## Anti-Zionism

Neither camp will tell us what the conference hold-up is about and what the political differences between the two factions are. In his forensic analysis of the main players in Your Party on the website of the *Prometheus* online journal, Archie Woodrow comes to the conclusion that "it's not clear that these are on the basis of clear or consistent divisions on any of the above substantive political questions."<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the different attitudes on the subject of Zionism are certainly telling - and hugely important. Sultana has declared online: "The smears won't work this time. I say it loudly and proudly: I'm an anti-Zionist". Andrew Feinstein posted a similar proclamation and recently said in Sheffield that "we cannot be making the same mistakes again, when it comes to the anti-Semitism smear campaign. We absolutely must learn that lesson."<sup>4</sup>

Quite right. Corbyn, on the other hand, was famously filmed umming and ahing his way through a question on the issue.<sup>5</sup> Not an oversight, as Asa Winstanley points out in a useful article<sup>6</sup> - those at the top of the Corbyn Party seem not to have learned any lessons from their defeat.

But there can be no doubt that such smears will once again be hurled at us by the bourgeois establishment, their servants in the mainstream media and rightwingers everywhere. Compromising on this issue is political cowardice and, as Corbyn should have understood by now, it does not work in any case. Every single time he rolled over, trying to appease the witch hunt, it just got stronger. Thousands of socialists



With media minder Oly Durose

were sacrificed in the process. We cannot make the same mistake again.

Sultana is clearly to the left of Corbyn and not just on this issue. We understand that she is inspired by the relatively open culture of the Democratic Socialists of America and recently addressed one of their meetings in New York (where she also arranged to meet up with one of our comrades in the Marxist Unity Group).

Her evolving politics might explain why she and the whole 'Team Zarah' have now been "effectively frozen out", as we have been told by one of her supporters (the other side claims she is "boycotting proceedings"). In any case, we know she has been opposing the plans of Murphy and James Schneider to make YP into a tightly controlled, top-down organisation with inbuilt 'special' powers for the big names, the MPs, the councillors, a few celebrities and with *some* local groups and 'parties' being allowed to affiliate. We hear that Murphy is thoroughly opposed to the "Marxist sects" playing any role.

Zarah Sultana seems to reject that, and quite right too. But she is in danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater by supporting 'one member, one vote' (OMOV) - which is the most democratic decision-making mechanism locally and in smaller meetings, but turns into the opposite when it is applied to making national conference decisions. It isolates and atomises comrades, who are watching and voting at home. Such a system clearly favours a bureaucracy which

can choose the options, how they are presented, who gets to speak, etc.

We can only guess what kind of OMOV comrade Sultana has in mind, because neither she nor any other key figures write or speak openly about their plans for the future of YP in any detail. Some comrades argue that voting to elect conference delegates is *a form of OMOV* - and if that is what comrade Sultana has in mind, then we agree with her!

Marxists demand that local branches decide who attends conference by a straightforward STV system. Members would explain their political views to each other. Delegates would be accountable to the branch that elects them, they would be questioned afterwards and, if they voted in a way the branch did not like, they should not be elected next time. This would create vibrant branches, make all members into genuinely active participants and create an informed culture.

## Sortition + OMOV

Alas, we hear that Camp Corbyn has now settled on an altogether less democratic method for the launch conference: participants are to be chosen via lottery. (This is *not* the 'sortition +' method that Max Shanly has been arguing for in his recent article<sup>7</sup> and in the Online Communist Forum of August 31.<sup>8</sup> The comrade was arguing for additional representation for factions and political platforms, but that is not going to happen.)

Anyone interested in participating throws their name into a virtual

sortition pool and then X numbers of conference participants are drawn: not at random, but "balanced for gender, region, etc" (certainly not balanced for political views!). The hall will be filled with people who are certainly interested, yes, but are by definition not as experienced, as tough or as convincing as those socialists who put themselves forward to become accountable delegates. We want the best fighters in a conference, not the so-called 'representative' ones (who are, by definition, average).

We have no doubt that there will also be special spaces reserved for 'the great and the good', including Corbyn himself and a spattering of celebrities and famous faces. We cannot expect *them* to be chosen by lottery, can we? Some people are clearly deemed to be more equal than others.

And what exactly will conference be voting on? There will be a set of pre-written "conference papers", which have, elsewhere, been described as "proclamations". Those papers will be published on an interactive "online portal", which will allow "comments and amendments". Will delegates, branches or political platforms be able to move their own motions? Alternative programmatic proposals? A different constitution? It appears not.

Who exactly will be able to comment and amend is still unclear. In one set of leaked notes, we read that the "online portal [is] for *selected delegates* to submit amendments to founding documents and rank documents in order for debate in conference".

Does that mean only the sortition participants would be able to move amendments to the pre-written papers? Or is there supposed to be yet another set of specially "selected delegates"? Are branches going to be able to move amendments? First they would have to be recognised and supplied with all local sign-ups. In a true OMOV-style set up, of course, every single member would have to be able to move amendments and complexity would thereby go through the roof.

Clearly some kind of selection will have to take place in any case. This puts the bureaucracy in a very powerful position. They control the online platform, they can decide which amendments are acceptable and how they will be presented and moved. It seems the plan is that the 'delegates' present in the hall might then be allowed to put those pre-approved proposals in some kind of order and maybe even speak on some of them. But the actual voting will be done not by those "delegates", but through "full online OMOV" - ie, by isolated and atomised individuals half-watching proceedings on their computer screen.

After the 'conference papers' have been voted through (with minimal changes, no doubt), "nominations open for the national committee and leadership". This sounds like they will be voted on *after* conference, probably again via OMOV. An online beauty contest that obviously favours well-known names and faces.

Perhaps because those at the top of Your Party are aware of how undemocratic this set-up is, the launch conference is to be preceded with 12 to 20 "regional meetings", which James Schneider already outlined in an interview with *Novara Media* on July 25.<sup>9</sup> Do not expect anything serious though - or even time to discuss or amend the pre-written "conference papers".

No, we read that they are going to be "big, bold, fun, participatory, non-sectarian, half-day affairs, with breakouts, food, arts, and lots of note taking". We didn't vote on anything in these four hours, but my goodness, we had a jolly good time.

If such regional conferences do indeed take place, we will argue that participants radically open them up, rip up any restrictive agendas, do away with time-wasting breakout sessions or jazz hands and instead make them as democratic as possible, with binding votes. Just as thousands of Your Party supporters have taken matters into their own hands and are organising proto-branches all over the country, members should take hold of regional meetings and make them into something actually useful.

## Sudden conversion

As something of an aside, in his July 25 interview Schneider did *not* argue for sortition. We do wonder what role the growing popularity of comrade Shanly's proposals played in this sudden conversion. More and more left and even revolutionary groups were getting behind comrade Shanly's plan - not because they believe it is the most democratic system: they know it is not. But because they share his assessment that it would be 'less bad' than what either Camp Corbyn or Team Sultana are planning.

That is not the job of Marxists. We should always and openly fight for what is *needed*, not for what we think might be the lesser evil - because it might turn out to be the greater evil after all, as has happened here. Yes, comrade Shanly's proposals were slightly better, in that he wanted 10% of the seats at the launch conference reserved for political platforms, with delegates chosen according to each platform's support within the membership. But Schneider and Murphy can now turn around and claim that they have listened to concerns from below and have changed their mind. See how democratic we are!

We are hoping comrade Shanly and his supporters now ditch their ill-advised support for sortition and join us in the fight for a system of elected and accountable delegates. With the launch conference having been pushed back, arguments around time constraints no longer hold water. Let us use the time to make things fully democratic.

For example, we should fight for members (or groups of members, branches and platforms) to be able to move motions, not just "amendments" to pre-written "conference papers". For a start, we clearly need an unequivocal statement that commits Your Party to a position of opposition to Zionism. We suspect such a motion would go down very well with members ●

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**UKRAINE**

# Notes on the war

After eight months of diplomatic efforts there has been no deal with Russia. So now, especially with Russian drones over Poland, it is back to an intensification of sanctions and phasing into World War III. Meanwhile, there is a tincture of good news: the social-imperialists are riven with divisions. **Jack Conrad reports**

**B**efore he was elected, Donald Trump boasted that he would bring peace to Ukraine within 24 hours. Well, despite eight months of diplomatic efforts, including the Alaska summit with its red-carpet treatment for Vladimir Putin, there has still been no deal. Indeed Russia's slow-grind summer offensive looks set to continue into early autumn.

Meanwhile the missile and drone bombardment of Ukrainian towns and cities has reached new levels of intensity. And with some 19 Russian drones violating Polish airspace, Donald Tusk warns of being closer to military conflict "than at any time since World War II".

In short, those, including on the left, who proclaimed the Russo-Ukraine war all but over have not only proved themselves to be wrong: they have proved themselves to be politically bankrupt.

Not that the pro-Kremlin, the Z left, is any better. This strange melange of Stalinites, Trotskyites, Kimites and Posadites celebrates Russia's 'special military operation' as a just, anti-imperialist war aiming for the "demilitarisation and deNazification" of Ukraine. The "Banderite regime" in Kyiv is pictured as facing imminent defeat and, along with that, there is the OTT claim that "US global hegemony is over". Nonsense which testifies to self-delusion.<sup>1</sup>

First, it should be noted, Volodymyr Zelensky has not been pleading for a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement. Quite the opposite, in fact. Zelensky used to speak of wanting "everything back". That means the whole of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia and Crimea too. In other words, total Russian defeat. An uncompromising stance, which has only been put under wraps because of a certain Donald J Trump.

Secondly, Zelensky walks a political tightrope. On the one side, there is Trump's insistence on ending this "ridiculous" war.<sup>2</sup> On the other side, though, there are domestic considerations. While the number supporting a war till total victory has plummeted from 73% in 2022 to a mere 24%, few would accept Russia's terms.<sup>3</sup>

No less to the point, there is Ukraine's far right, the force that spearheaded the 2014 Maidan coup (organisations such as Svoboda, National Corps, Social National Party and Right Sector). True, the far right is at the moment virtually absent in the Rada. Nonetheless, in the form of the Azov brigade - and its various offshoots - it constitutes the spinal cord of Ukraine's armed forces.

A 'sellout' by the Jewish Zelensky would doubtless see the massive growth of the far right and a Ukrainian version of the 'stab in the back legend' (*Dolchstoßlegende*).<sup>4</sup> Would an Azov march on Kyiv follow? Quite conceivably.<sup>5</sup>

Anyway, no-one - no-one who is serious, that is - expected Ukraine to defeat Russia and drive it back to the 1991 borders. So failure to achieve that militarily impossible goal hardly amounts to defeat. No, on the contrary, continued Ukrainian resistance along what is essentially a frozen front line is, in fact, a Russian defeat. Three years of war, against a third-rate army, with, especially to begin with, next to no air cover worth talking about, has exposed Russia's armed forces as decidedly second-rate.



**Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin: "no limits partnership"**

Given that demonstrable *weakness*, why have Putin and the FSB regime not grabbed at Trump's deal? After all, whereas Joe Biden elevated Ukraine into a holy western cause, Trump expressed grave doubts. Moreover, he and JD Vance publicly humiliated Zelensky in the White House, demanded a huge compensation package *from Ukraine* and offered to accept the front line as the new international border.

## Ill-gotten gains

Russia would thereby get to keep all its ill-gotten gains: ie, around 20% of pre-2014 Ukrainian territory. Its navy once again operates *safely* out of Crimea's Sevastopol and thereby allows free access to the warm waters of the Mediterranean. Putin might arguably claim an historic victory - a victory he could compare with Catherine the Great and her first, 1768-74 war with the Ottoman empire. And, of course, western sanctions would be lifted and there is even the tempting possibility of reviving the G8 and Russia being otherwise incentivised away from its 'no limits partnership' with China.

What remains of Ukraine is, however, protected along an agreed buffer zone by some 100,000 Nato troops - supplied and paid for by the European countries - and provided with an overarching US security guarantee. From an American point of view such an arrangement makes perfect sense. Russia and Europe are strategically locked into an antagonistic standoff. Meanwhile tribute pours into US coffers via all the extra European arms spending, and efforts can be squarely focused on the main enemy: China.

Looked at from a Russian angle, though, it is clear why Putin did not cave. Leave aside Nato troops stationed along Russia's soft underbelly (perhaps defended by US air cover), one might guess that Ukraine will be armed to the teeth. A sort of eastern European Israel, but much, much bigger. Far from that being a Russian victory, Putin's factional rivals and potential replacements would seize their moment. The *siloviki* would, likely, quietly retire him to a sanatorium ...

or, as with so many other members of the Russian elite, there is the fall from a very high window. Understandably, leave aside Russian national interests, Putin - who jokes about living till he's 150 - wants to avoid such a fate.

Speculation aside, Trump comes not only bearing an olive branch: he carries a big stick too. In other words, while Trump has undoubtedly been seeking some kind of accommodation with Russia, failing that, there is the "phasing into World War III" he once warned against. To begin with, however, that means more sanctions (on Russia and its trading partners). Similar threats have been made before. In late July Trump blustered about 'shock and awe' sanctions ... but nothing came of it. Now his officials talk about going from stage one to stage two and even stage three sanctions, pushing the Russian economy to the "brink of collapse" and forcing Putin into serious negotiations.<sup>6</sup> Frankly, there are good reasons to be sceptical.

True, Russia has been hurt by the cutback on European energy imports, its banks being ousted from the Swift system and its oligarchs having their assets seized. The original promise was, of course, bringing Russia to the brink of collapse ... or words to that effect. Biden confidently promised, back in March 2022, that the Russian economy was "on track to be cut in half"; Annalena Baerbock, Germany's then foreign minister, claimed that sanctions were "hitting the Putin system ... at its core of power"; and Ursula von der Leyen boasted that the EU was "working to cripple Putin's ability to finance his war machine".<sup>7</sup> George Soros even foresaw the "dissolution of the Russian empire".<sup>8</sup> Well, not so far.

When it comes to sanctions, the model is unmistakably Germany and its defeat in two world wars. Rubber, iron ore, nickel, manganese, aluminium, oil, cotton, tea and food were all put in short supply, as a blockaded Germany was cut off from the world market. It was not just the unmatched power of the Royal Navy, but British control over global shipping, insurance and money markets. Of course, for woolly-

minded liberals, sanctions are often regarded as a civilised alternative to war. In fact, sanctions are the modern version of medieval siege warfare. Indeed, American president Woodrow Wilson credited sanctions with being "something more tremendous than war".<sup>9</sup>

But Russia is no Germany. It is a continent in its own right and behind it there lies the 'no limits partnership' with the world's second largest economy. So, predictably, Russia's electronic and car industry tanked and there is still an acute shortage of high-tech chips, castings and connectors - vital in modern weapons systems.<sup>10</sup> But after an initial plunge the rouble was successfully stabilised and all manner of loopholes in the sanctions regime found and exploited. As a result, though Russia's GDP shrank by some 1.4% in 2022, it *grew* in 2023 by 4.0%, by 4.1% in 2024 - and is expected to grow again in 2025, albeit at a modest 1.4%.<sup>11</sup>

Crucially, Russia has sold, sold and sold again discounted oil and gas: to China, India, Turkey. Indeed after much lobbying by Putin, Xi Jinping agreed to the signing of a memorandum of understanding to build the much delayed Power of Siberia 2 LNG pipeline through Mongolia. Though it will take more than 10 years, once completed it will be responsible for supplying "as much as a half" of China's LNG needs.<sup>12</sup> China and Russia will thereby be ever more closely tied together.

## Plans and abilities

Russia has certainly ploughed huge resources into upping military production and adapting economically to the needs of a slow, grinding war. The country spent an estimated \$149 billion, or around 7.1% of its GNP, on its armed forces in 2024. A lot, but nothing compared to the UK's *total war economy* between 1939 and 1945: in GDP terms 15.3% in 1939, 43.8% in 1940, 52.7% in 1941, 55.3% in 1943, 53.4% in 1944 and 53.0% in 1945. Britain could achieve such spectacularly high levels of expenditure fundamentally because, firstly, it possessed a world empire and, secondly, it could rely on

abundant US support (in exchange for handing over world hegemony).

Over six years of war, there was a net flow of £10 billion into Britain. Of this £1.1 billion came from the sale of assets; £3.5 billion was made up of new borrowing, of which £2.7 billion was contributed by the empire's sterling area. Canada, for example, gave C\$1 billion in gifts and loans on easy terms. Above all there was though American money, loans and Lend Lease grants worth £5.4 billion. This funded massive British purchases of munitions, food, oil, machinery and raw materials. There was no charge for Lend Lease supplies delivered during the war.<sup>13</sup>

Russia has no such options available to it. Ukraine does, but within definite limits. Spending some 34% of its GDP on its armed forces in its own right, Kyiv has received a significant level of western support, \$380 billion in total as of March 2024.<sup>14</sup> But, of course, with Trump 2.0 US arms are either paid for directly by Ukraine itself or by America's, mainly European, Nato allies (for reasons that can perhaps be explored in another article).

However, things could radically change, especially if the increased sanctions do not, as we should expect, have their desired effect. Everything will be carefully calibrated. After all, the US does not want a generalised nuclear exchange with Russia and therefore mutually assured destruction. Trump could easily junk the Kellogg-Fleitz peace plan and opt instead for Zelensky's old victory plan. There are those from Trump's first administration who are gung ho for taking such a course. Mike Pompeo - former secretary of state - has called not only for tougher sanctions and creating a "lend-lease" programme worth \$500 billion to allow Ukraine to purchase US weapons.<sup>15</sup> He wants all restrictions on their use lifted too. This would allow for pinpoint-accurate Atacms to strike deep into Russian territory. If enough of them were delivered, this would cause Russia real difficulties.

Essentially what Pompeo proposes is a beefed-up version of the Biden administration's policy of supplying Ukraine with enough military hardware to check, drain and exhaust Russia ... in the hope of forcing Putin to sue for peace. A rollback strategy proclaimed by Jimmy Carter in January 1980 that worked like a dream in Afghanistan (the Soviet Union scuttled in February 1989 and collapsed in December 1991).

Then, at last, conditions would be ripe to bring about regime change in Moscow: a colour revolution; launching anti-Russian 'national liberation wars' in Belarus, Moldova and Georgia; promoting separatist movements within the Russia Federation itself - in particular amongst the Chechens, Ingush, Dagestanis, Crimean Tatars, Yakuts and Volga Tatars (options all surely under active consideration).

If the US state department could get its man into the Kremlin - a modern-day Boris Yeltsin - there could well be an internationally negotiated settlement. But it would be Russia's Versailles. The *defeated* country would face war crimes tribunals, crippling reparations, termination of its high-end arms industry and being reduced to an oil- and gas-supplying neo-colony. China would then find itself short on energy



supplies, effectively surrounded and next in line for break-up: Tibet, inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Hong Kong. In this new unipolar world order the US would be able to “manage” at last the Eurasian world island - as envisaged by Zbigniew Brzezinski.<sup>16</sup>

Naturally enough, Xi Jinping has other, bipolar, plans for a new world order. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting and the lavish commemoration of the 1945 defeat of Japan were both demonstrations of China’s growing power - and ambitions. Not only does Xi have the Russian Federation and North Korea on board as close allies: India, angered by Trump’s sanctions over its purchases of Russian oil and gas, has drawn closer to China.

Then there is Brics+. True, this accidental bloc has little in common - apart, that is, from a general chafing against US hegemony. But it does give China allies, or at least sympathy, amongst what it calls the “global majority”: those who want in, or have been invited in, include Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. On the other hand, Aukus has been established and Japan and South Korea bolted on. This has broken Australia from its natural trading partner, China, and secured it firmly in the US-UK camp. At the end of the day the US can perhaps still rely on India to be antagonistic to China, and perhaps even Vietnam (not least over the South China Sea).

There is, meanwhile, the danger of the three great powers - the US, China and Russia - being dragged into conflicts over Iran, Israel-Palestine, Syria, Korea, etc, etc, with all manner of unintended consequences. Note the EU, despite its economic strength, is politically a ramshackle Ruritanian conglomeration and therefore incapable of doing anything serious in global terms. (A united Europe under German domination would be a different matter entirely).

Anyway, in this context, bear in mind the long ‘sleepwalk’ towards World War I.<sup>17</sup> Enemies became friends and friends became enemies. Clearly there is more than a whiff of pre-World War I about the current situation - ie, great power military conflict seems all too possible - but with the added danger of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

**Social-imperialists**

Naturally, Trump 2.0 and a willingness to contemplate territorial concessions horrified the social-imperialists. In the form of Chris Ford’s ghastly blue and yellow Ukraine Solidarity Campaign that meant doubling-up on Ukrainian nationalism. Hence the demand for “full sanctions” against Russian “imperialist aggression” (ie, siege warfare), the claim that the Putin regime is “attacking democracy globally” and that Ukraine should get all the “arms necessary to liberate the country, from wherever possible and without conditions”.<sup>18</sup>

The internationalisation of ruling class ideology is unashamed and unmistakable. It is “Putin’s dictatorship” which is “linked to neo-fascist and authoritarian forces around the world”, not Zelensky and his Banderite Azov army. It is Nato which is democratic and under threat. Despite that, moans the USC, “most western countries have been slow in providing arms”. Therefore the plea for supplying Ukraine with massively increased supplies of the most up-to-date fighter aircraft, tanks and missiles ... out of national self-interest.

Effectively this ‘Arm, arm, arm Ukraine’ line poses a ‘guns or butter’ choice in Europe ... with the social-imperialists demanding guns. Perhaps the best known use of this particular phrase was, of course, Joseph Goebbels in a speech on January 17 1936. The Nazi propaganda chief

stated: “We can do without butter, but, despite all our love of peace, not without arms. One cannot shoot with butter, but with guns.”<sup>19</sup>

Across Europe there is an aggressive drive by mainstream bourgeois politicians, opinion makers, arms manufacturers and the top brass alike to win an increasingly reluctant public to accept ever bigger military budgets in the name of ‘not letting Russia win’. Already Poland spends 4.1% of its GDP on the military, Estonia 3.4%, Greece 3.1% and the UK, Finland, Latvia, Denmark and Romania around 2.3%.<sup>20</sup> But the trend is upwards and the commitment is to reach 5% of GDP by 2035.<sup>21</sup>

The choice of guns over butter should be openly admitted by the social-imperialists. Understandably however, some prefer mealy-mouthed formulations: eg, Branko Marcetic, a *Jacobin* staff writer, opposes the delivery of “offensive weapons”.<sup>22</sup> The more honest, the more brazen - eg, Stephen R Shalom of the Mandelite ‘Fourth International’ - rightly say that the distinction between offensive and defensive weapons is meaningless.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, we stick with Wilhelm Liebknecht’s time-honoured slogan, “Not a man and not a penny for this system!”<sup>24</sup> Socialists - genuine socialists, that is - take no responsibility for the ‘defence budget’ of capitalist governments. We maintain that position, it should be stressed, because of political principle, because we are a party of extreme opposition, not out of economic calculation.

After all, it is argued that military expenditure (milex) stimulates economic activity - a line taken by military Keynesians and self-proclaimed Marxists, such as Paul Baren, Paul Sweezy, Michael Kidron and Ernest Mandel. Doubtless the profits of the arms companies, such as Britain’s BAE Systems, are boosted with increased state orders for the means of destruction. However, the main burden is borne by taxpayers, not least other sections of the capitalist class. Dan Smith and Ron Smith conclude that the effects of milex are “complex and contradictory”: it maintains capitalism, but suppresses overall economic growth.<sup>25</sup>

What seems likely at the moment is that economic activity in Europe is being suppressed by the Ukraine war: eg, cutting off cheap Russian oil and gas supplies and the range of other costly sanctions. However, in the US, the world’s biggest arms manufacturer, Ukraine has probably acted as an economic stimulus.

Reuters reports that “US weapons sales abroad hit record high” ... the main factor being the Ukraine war. Overseas sales surged by 29% in 2024 compared with 2023, reaching a total of \$318 billion.<sup>26</sup> As for the US itself, the milex budget in 2024 amounted to \$997 billion - dwarfing rivals such as China (\$314 billion) and Russia (\$149 billion).<sup>27</sup> What is for sure is that the extra orders have been a goldmine for US companies such as Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Boeing and General Dynamics. They are awash with money.

However, everything else being equal, increased milex means reduced local government grants, sickness benefits, transport projects, etc. The social-imperialists ought, therefore, to be made to take full responsibility for that choice next time they march with their Banderite friends. ‘Arm, arm, arm Ukraine’ should be accompanied with calls to ‘Cut, cut, cut ... services and welfare’.

Naturally, the social-imperialists claim that support for Ukraine is no different from supporting Palestinian self-determination: “Being leftwing means being on the side of the oppressed, whether in Palestine, Kurdistan or Ukraine. That is why the EU must continue to supply weapons to Kyiv and allow attacks

on Russian territory.” So said Die Linke MEP Carola Rackete.<sup>28</sup> This is the sort of screwball logic that, during World War I, led the ‘father of British Marxism’, Henry Hyndman, to, on the one hand, “applaud those like Karl Liebknecht, Mehring, Ledebour, Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg and Bernstein, who have remained true to the faith” by opposing the German war effort, and, on the other hand, support Anglo-French imperialism - that though it had allied itself to “Muscovite tsarism”.<sup>29</sup> Germany posed the greatest threat to democracy and socialism, he argued.

There is amongst the social-imperialists a wilful refusal to engage in joined-up thinking. Both Ukraine and Israel serve as US proxies. Imperialist support for Ukrainian self-determination cannot, therefore, be separated from other wars and conflicts, not least Israel’s genocidal denial of Palestinian self-determination.

The idea, therefore, that the US, UK, Germany, Italy, France, etc are supporting a “just war” in Ukraine, and an “unjust war” in Gaza, is a stupid, hopelessly opportunist muddle, to say the least. States which are committed to anti-trade union laws, restrictions on civil rights and the continuation of class exploitation at home pursue those same *class interests* abroad. If a war is supported by *our* capitalist state, then it follows that such a war is a criminal war.

Sympathising with ordinary Ukrainians who have been killed, injured, lost loved ones, fled abroad, etc, is perfectly natural. War is horrible. War is beastly. But for ‘socialists’ to call for Ukraine’s victory is not to see the wood for the trees. In Russia it might well be the case that we would ‘prefer to see a Russian defeat than its victory’. To state the obvious, however, we are not in Russia. No, here today, in countries such as the US, Britain, Germany, France and Italy, supporting ‘heroic Ukraine’ is akin to supporting ‘brave little Belgium’ and ‘plucky little Serbia’, while not acknowledging that what was going on between 1914 and 1918 was a blood-drenched inter-imperialist struggle over global domination. It had nothing to do with protecting the rights of little nations. The great powers used all manner of excuses to alibi their right to rob, plunder and exploit the colonial and semi-colonial countries where the vast majority of the world’s population lived.

Ukraine cannot be seen in isolation. Behind it there stands the unmatched might of the dominant imperialist bloc. The US violently yanked Ukraine out of the Russian orbit with the 2014 Maidan coup and then, step by step, established it as a pawn in the great game to dominate the Eurasian ‘world island’ and upend what Xi Jinping calls the “irreversible” rise of China.

**Divisions**

Interestingly some telling differences have surfaced in the USC. Hardly unimportant, considering that big unions, such as Unison, the GMB, PCS, Aslef and UCU, are affiliated. Various MPs also count as supporters: eg, Carla Denyer (Green Party) Nadia Whittome (Labour) and John McDonnell (Labour-suspended). Then there are the ‘socialist organisations’: Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, Anticapitalist Resistance, Labour Representation Committee, RS21 (which I have heard of) ... and the Republican Socialist Platform and the Real Democracy Movement (which I haven’t).

Well, in the aftermath of the Corbyn leadership debacle in the Labour Party, the LRC seems to have winked out of existence. *Labour Briefing* has long since stopped publishing. As for RS21, it formally disaffiliated after an internal struggle - which remains to this day a closed book. There are,

unfortunately, no reports of majority and minority votes, the position of well-known individuals, etc. Typical, it has to be said, of an organisation rooted in the unhealthy political culture of the SWP. Apparently, though, it is now clear that the Ukraine war is a Nato proxy war. Comrades, it was *always* clear ... dating back to 2014!

It should also be added that the USC has, as testified by a former insider, “murky origins” in CIA false-flag operations during the cold war.<sup>30</sup> So what the hell was RS21 doing affiliating in the first place? Why did your organisation *actively* support an out-and-out social-imperialist outfit? Leave aside the CIA origins, today the USC is financed by a trade union bureaucracy which manifestly betrays the most elementary working class principle - the main enemy is a home. Honest answers, not evasion - that is surely what is required, if we are to take RS21 seriously even as an anti-imperialist organisation. Till then, RS21 must be regarded as an unprincipled *right centrist* lash-up.

Now, almost laughably, there is the AWL. After an executive vote (none against), this far-right of the far-left organisation, has decided to lapse its USC membership. Why? It was repelled by the *close* political relationship between USC secretary Chris Ford and Yuri Levchancko. Who he? Levchencko is an “ex-longstanding-Svoboda leader” - and also, note, a 2014-19 Rada MP.

Svoboda, is, of course, not only far-right: it is an out-and-out fascist outfit, which is directly responsible for murderous attacks on Russian Ukrainians, communists, socialists, trade unionists, gay and lesbian activists, etc. Without renouncing his past, Levchencko has set-up a “people’s party” in Ukraine: Narodovladdia. An organisation founded by “veterans, volunteers, social, trade union and environmental activists”, which is, so it states, primarily committed to helping out “front-line units and civilians affected by the Russian invaders”.<sup>31</sup>

Despite such tell-tale signs of a continued fascist mind-set, we are told that Chris Ford has been helping Levchencko “get a hearing and a platform on the left”.<sup>32</sup> Too much for USC chair Fred Leplat (ACR and the Mandelite ‘Fourth International’). He, therefore, proposed a motion at the USC steering committee to break links with Levchencko and Narodovladdia. That failed. Instead there was the commitment to “proceed cautiously” with Levchencko/Narodovladdia (moved by the USC trade union liaison officer and ex-AWLeR, Sacha Ismail).

A fudge which proved too much even for the AWL. Nonetheless, the AWL promises to “work with USC in future, on practical matters, where we have common ground”. Eg, ‘Arm, arm, arm Ukraine’.

**Footnote**

By the way, there can be no doubt that Azov founder and first commander Andriy Biletsky is an out-and-out Nazi racist. In 2010, he reportedly said that Ukraine’s national mission is to “lead the white races of the world in a final crusade ... against Semite-led *Untermenschen*”.<sup>33</sup> True, Biletsky denies ever stating that, but such words are entirely in character. In a 2007 article, Biletsky declared that “Ukrainian racial social-nationalism” was the ideology of his Patriot of Ukraine outfit.<sup>34</sup> Speaking as the ‘Main Commander of the Organisation’, at its February 13 2009 general meeting, he rhetorically asked:

How then can we describe our enemy? The general regime in power are oligarchs. Is there anything they have in common? Yes, one thing in common - they

are Jews, or their true bosses - Jews - are behind them. Out of one hundred published richest people in Ukraine 92 are Jews, and some others of Tatar origin.<sup>35</sup>

Being in the eye of world public opinion since 2014 and entertaining presidential ambitions has seen Biletsky tone down his language. That said, he still rails against LGBT people and multiculturalism. Biletsky has described his ideology as “Ukrainian racial social nationalist”. Naturally, therefore, he opposes migrants from African and Asian countries.

Doubtless, when it comes to Biletsky, the USC will likewise “proceed cautiously”! ●

**Notes**

1. Ian Donovan’s Consistent Democrats, the New Communist Party, Posadists Today and Gerry Downing’s Socialist Fight signed a joint statement - see [www.newworker.org/statements/statements2022/js202203/victory-to-the-anti-fascist-forces-of-donbass-and-their-allies.html](http://www.newworker.org/statements/statements2022/js202203/victory-to-the-anti-fascist-forces-of-donbass-and-their-allies.html). See also *The New Worker* August 29 2025.
2. Voice of America, January 22 2025.
3. [www.russiamatters.org/blog/polls-show-ukrainians-increasingly-want-end-war-not-under-russias-terms](http://www.russiamatters.org/blog/polls-show-ukrainians-increasingly-want-end-war-not-under-russias-terms).
4. Germany’s far right - crucially the high command - insisted that they had not suffered defeat on the battlefields of 1914-18. No, instead they had been betrayed on the home front by communists and social democrats. Almost instantly, the idea was given an anti-Semitic twist, not least by Adolf Hitler and his chief ideologue, Alfred Rosenberg.
5. Such a scenario has been haunting liberal minds for quite a while. Oleksandr Merezhko - chair of the Rada’s foreign affairs committee and a member of Zelensky’s Servant of the People party - warned that far-right forces pose a very real threat - and one that could stand in the way of any attempt to negotiate an end to the war. “There will always be a radical segment of Ukrainian society that will call any negotiation ‘capitulation’,” he said. “The far right in Ukraine is growing. The right wing is a danger to democracy” (*Financial Times* September 30 2024).
6. [www.reuters.com/world/europe/trump-ready-phase-two-russia-sanctions-over-ukraine-conflict-2025-09-07](http://www.reuters.com/world/europe/trump-ready-phase-two-russia-sanctions-over-ukraine-conflict-2025-09-07).
7. Quoted in *The Guardian* February 20 2023.
8. Voice of America, February 16 2023.
9. See N Mulder *The economic weapon: the rise of sanctions as a tool of modern war* New Haven CT 2022.
10. [www.politico.eu/article/the-chips-are-down-russia-hunts-western-parts-to-run-its-war-machines](http://www.politico.eu/article/the-chips-are-down-russia-hunts-western-parts-to-run-its-war-machines).
11. [www.statista.com/statistics/263621/gross-domestic-product-gdp-growth-rate-in-russia](http://www.statista.com/statistics/263621/gross-domestic-product-gdp-growth-rate-in-russia).
12. [www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3324749/china-russia-pipeline-would-be-shock-global-Ing-trade-analysts](http://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3324749/china-russia-pipeline-would-be-shock-global-Ing-trade-analysts).
13. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Kingdom\\_home\\_front\\_during\\_World\\_War\\_II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_home_front_during_World_War_II).
14. [www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/2504\\_fs\\_milex\\_2024.pdf](http://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/2504_fs_milex_2024.pdf);
15. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_military\\_aid\\_to\\_Ukraine\\_during\\_the\\_Russo-Ukrainian\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_military_aid_to_Ukraine_during_the_Russo-Ukrainian_War).
16. *Wall Street Journal* July 25 2024.
17. Z Brzezinski *The grand chessboard* New York 1997, p30.
18. See C Clark *The sleepwalkers: how Europe went to war in 1914* London 2013.
19. [ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org/2024/09/11/ukraine-solidarity-conference-declaration](http://ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org/2024/09/11/ukraine-solidarity-conference-declaration).
20. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guns\\_versus\\_butter\\_model](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guns_versus_butter_model).
21. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-44717074](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-44717074).
22. [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49198.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49198.htm).
23. B Marcetic *Jacobin* March 27 2022.
24. SR Shalom *International Viewpoint* April 22 2022.
25. See Wilhelm Liebknecht’s November 30 1893 speech to the Reichstag during its debate on the imperial budget: [www.marxists.org/archive/liebknecht-w/revolt/11-not-one-penny.html](http://www.marxists.org/archive/liebknecht-w/revolt/11-not-one-penny.html).
26. D Smith and R Smith *The economics of militarism* London 1983, p100.
27. [www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/ukraine-related-demand-sends-us-arms-exports-record-2024-2025-01-24](http://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/ukraine-related-demand-sends-us-arms-exports-record-2024-2025-01-24).
28. [www.statista.com/statistics/262742/countries-with-the-highest-military-spending](http://www.statista.com/statistics/262742/countries-with-the-highest-military-spending).
29. [ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org/2024/10/04/being-left-means-being-on-the-side-of-the-oppressed](http://ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org/2024/10/04/being-left-means-being-on-the-side-of-the-oppressed).
30. P Houston ‘A toxic operation’ *Weekly Worker* March 24 2022: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1388/a-toxic-operation](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1388/a-toxic-operation).
31. [www.narodovladdia.com](http://www.narodovladdia.com).
32. [www.workersliberty.org/story/2025-08-30/final-reply-sacha-ismail-awl-and-ukraine-solidarity](http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2025-08-30/final-reply-sacha-ismail-awl-and-ukraine-solidarity).
33. *The Daily Telegraph* August 11 2014.
34. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andriy\\_Biletsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andriy_Biletsky) - see note 44.
35. Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union Association, October 1 2009: [www.helsinki.org.ua/en](http://www.helsinki.org.ua/en).



## POLEMIC



Eating its own tail: Ouroboros by Lucas Jennis, in the 1625 alchemical tract *De Lapide Philosophico*

# Tailing the tailists

We are for the existence of factions where there are substantive differences. They can aid political clarity and the educational quality of debates. But what Carla Roberts proposes is that the CPGB should follow the standard far-left path. This is liquidationist, argues **Mike Macnair**

**T**his is a reply to Carla Roberts' letter of last week ('YP inaccuracies', September 4), which was itself a criticism of Farzad Kamangar's report of the CPGB's recent aggregate meeting ('Political clarity vital', August 28<sup>1</sup>). It is not an official reply from the Provisional Central Committee, but simply my own response.

I begin with the very basic point that the disagreement is not about "glaring inaccuracies": that is, that comrade Kamangar's report made

factually false claims. It is about what is the right *political interpretation* of the proposals made by comrade Roberts and others to the aggregate.

The next step is the question why the PCC (through comrade Conrad's report to the aggregate) "described those moving various amendments as risking being viewed as a 'rightwing and liquidationist' faction". Comrade Conrad's point in his report was that the final amendment in particular (which was not put to the vote, consideration of the substance being deferred to the

next aggregate) proposed to insert, among other points:

Ensure the *Weekly Worker* plays a leading role in cohering communist forces in [Your Party]. Proposals to achieve this should be presented to the next aggregate by the editorial team for review, amendment and adoption. The editorial team could consider co-optation and providing structured access to pages for comrades outside our ranks, always ensuring we retain full control.

Comrade Conrad pointed out that the phrase "could consider co-optation" would only be meaningful if what was really intended was "should consider co-optation" - and that this would imply giving editorial responsibility for the *Weekly Worker* to 'friends' who did not accept party discipline, pay dues, etc.

I can add that the proposals seemed to PCC comrades at our meeting before the aggregate to be a diluted form of one previously made in connection with the Forging

Communist Unity discussions - and in particular of the objections to the CPGB's supposed "bad culture" discussed in those discussions and more than once at Communist University - that overcoming the *Weekly Worker's* supposed 'bad culture' would benefit from co-opting onto the editorial team opponents of it who were otherwise politically close to the CPGB.

I also added in the discussion that the penultimate amendment, linked to the final one, proposed to replace the bulk of section 11 of the



resolution as passed<sup>2</sup> - which offers a summary cross-reference to the CPGB's *Draft programme* as giving our political orientation for Your Party (aka the Jeremy Corbyn Party) - with "We fight to equip the YP with a Marxist minimum-maximum programme, while also making specific propaganda around some of the key political questions that are likely to encounter us in the YP - see 'What communists fight for in Your Party, point 16'." This amendment - 'What communists fight for in Your Party, point 16' - I argued, is a *sub-minimum* programme of the sort commonly put forward by left groups to form broad-front projects (albeit a relatively left version of such a sub-minimum programme).

In other words, what "risks being viewed as ... liquidationist" is that the penultimate and final amendments proposed to commit the CPGB to the *sort of* project conducted by the SWP, SPEW, Counterfire, RS21, Anticapitalist Resistance, Workers Power ... and so on, and to make the *Weekly Worker* into a political outlet of the same sort as the papers and websites of the majority or 'normal' far-left groups. These are tailored to their broader-front alliance projects and (as RS21 on one occasion said explicitly) try to avoid open polemic with other far-left groups.<sup>3</sup>

Action faction

Comrade Roberts' joke that "this alleged faction would have to be called the 'action faction' ..." was a bit of a blast from the past for me. Fifty years ago, or thereabouts, supporters of the leadership majority in the International Marxist Group argued for an orientation in student work to what they tagged as the 'action faction' among the student left - leftists who sought to organise demos and occupations round 'bread and butter' issues - as opposed to the other part of the student left, whose tag I cannot now recall (perhaps 'theory faction'??), who sought to campaign around exposing the pro-capitalist commitments in the university curriculum and around international solidarity issues.

This approach has been broadly the common ground of the far left ever since the 1970s (it has earlier roots). Once upon a time there was

theory that underlay it: very roughly, that people radicalise 'in action' rather than 'by propaganda', and the task of the left is therefore to set broad forces in motion by *initiatives in action*, whose aims are adapted to the *current* level of consciousness. Tony Cliff's version was 'moderate demands, but militant action'; the Trotskyists offered versions of 'transitional demands' and the 'transitional method' and so on. Nowadays, it is merely the *common sense* of the far left. Failure to pursue it may be variously accused of being 'sectarian', 'passive' or 'propagandist'.

When comrade Roberts says that "there were no practical proposals from the PCC", she is in substance saying that the PCC did not propose 'initiatives in action' of this sort. In reality, it was not that the comrades who proposed the amendments looked at the PCC proposals and found them inadequate: comrade Roberts proposed the initiative and the drafting of a sub-minimum platform for a 'Communist Platform' to the PCC by email on August 10; the PCC then elected to draft our own motion (on the basis of a discussion on August 18), because we disagreed with the method of comrade Roberts' proposals; the proposals then resurfaced in a partially toned-down form in the later part of the amendments proposed.

Comrade Roberts' argument for this approach is at the end of the day the same as the argument against the CPGB's supposed "bad culture" - that is, for toning down the polemics in the *Weekly Worker*. It is the idea that turning to this sort of approach is the only way in which the CPGB can grow.

It is certainly true that the majority of the far left *has* been able to grow by pursuing its policy to recruit and to build organisations of some hundreds, and in a few cases of a few thousand. In high moments of class struggle, groups like the Italian Lotta Continua, or the Chilean Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria in the early 1970s, or the Iranian Fedayeen-e-Khalq in the revolution of 1979-81, could grow much larger. But, remaining trapped in the *ways of thought* of groups of a few hundred or a few thousand, they

could not lead a struggle for power.

*Why* has this policy enabled the creation of groups of a few hundred or thousand, but not further to the creation of a real mass party? On the positive side, the first ground of *partial* success is the combination of, first, the syndicalist refusal of 'electoralism', giving a social base in the most elemental sort of low-level class politics (militant but apolitical trade unionism). The second ground is the particular dynamics of student leftism, in which it is genuinely possible for the leadership to 'elect a new membership' if the existing members fail it (as is apparent with the SWP's recovery after its 2013 crisis). A succession of 'initiatives in action' aimed at newly radicalising activists on the basis of their existing level of political consciousness can produce a sufficient stream of recruits to keep the organisation young and active and to grow it up to a point.

Must be wrong

The CPGB is a very small minority, and is not currently recruiting numerous youth. From the standpoint of the majority far left, that proves that we 'must be wrong'.

The trouble with this line of argument is that those who make it against us are *also* small minorities, relative to the majorities they disagree with. Talking About Socialism seems to be even smaller than the CPGB. RS21 has a few hundred members and an irregularly updated website. The SWP reports 2,628 subs-paying members as of November 2024 and produces a weekly newspaper (and other publications). If being the minority proves you are wrong, RS21 is wrong against the SWP. The British organised far left in total adds up to something under 10,000 people. The Labour Party has 333,325 members as of the end of 2024 (as well as major trade unions affiliated and commonly voting with the party right).<sup>4</sup> Your Party claims over 800,000 sign-ups; the very large 'silent majority' of these numbers will be claimed, as was the case for the smaller Momentum, as backing forms of plebiscitary means of centralised bureaucratic control, and 'proving' that the organised left is wrong.

Labour won the 2024 general election with 9,708,716 votes (33.7% of the popular vote). The Tories obtained 6,828,925 or 23.7%, while Reform UK obtained 4,117,610 votes (14.3%). The Lib Dems, who last time there was a hung parliament went into coalition with the Tories, and who are led by 'Orange Book' pro-capitalist Ed Davey, obtained 3,519,143 or 12.2%. *Labour* is thus a minority. If being in the minority proves that you are wrong, *all forms of leftism* are 'proved wrong'.

The negative side of the 'action faction' policy is that the policy of 'initiatives in action' *necessarily tendentially entails* bureaucratic centralism, which drives splits. It does so for reasons I explained last year in criticising Steve Bloom's arguments.<sup>5</sup> If the primary job of the organisation is to take 'initiatives in action', time is of the essence and democratic modes of decision-making are objectively time-wasting. Moreover, such an organisation's work needs to be resolutely aimed outwards, and internal arguments are a distraction. And 'initiatives in action' require central *control*, so that there need to be centrally appointed local organisers and the micro-management of branches and sectoral organisations (trade union fractions, and so on) to secure united action round the latest policy.

Further, since every group seeks to seize the initiative, the inevitable result is a multiplicity of *competing* 'broad front' initiatives. Thus - for

example - SPEW's National Shop Stewards Network, RS21 and others' Troublemakers at Work ...

The flipside of this story is that the commitment to adapting to the political 'offer' to the target audience in practice, with a view to mobilising action, results in making yourself a political tail for currently dominant political ideas, whether liberal or nationalist-patriarchal. Several US cartoonists have pointed to this dynamic between 'moderate' Republicans and Democrats: as the Democrats 'meet the Republicans halfway', the Republicans move further right, and then offer again to 'meet halfway'. The *organisation* gradually acclimatises itself to more rightwing politics.

But, in addition, the organisation trains the youth it recruits in the 'meet halfway' approach - and the upshot is that the majority of recruits, who do not become fully integrated in the core cadre, come out at the end of the process, after some years' membership of the group, as moderate trade union officials, as social democrats or as Eurocommunists or other 'identity politics' opponents of the organised left.

What is involved is a *package* of politics. Comrade Roberts asks: "How will we try to win over those people who are, for example, inspired by Mike Macnair's book, *Revolutionary strategy*, but who remain wedded to projects that are weak on the anti-Semitism smear campaign and/or gravitate towards social-imperialist positions on Ukraine?" The problem is that 'initiatives in action', bureaucratic centralism, anti-factionalism and the demand for limited 'action programmes' and for avoiding 'insulting' potential allies are all *interlinked*.

It is not the *specific* issue of RS21 comrades who like *Revolutionary strategy* being in unity with social-imperialists in RS21 that makes it premature to propose organisational unity with the comrades at the level of participation in editing the *Weekly Worker*. It is the *method*. I pointed out in an exchange of letters with comrade Archie Woodrow in 2024, when he said that *Revolutionary strategy* was useful, but the *Weekly Worker's* polemical culture was

undesirable, that a paper that rejected the *Weekly Worker's* polemical culture would never have published the articles that became the book.<sup>6</sup>

Comrade Roberts celebrates the fact 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?"

But she does not seem to understand that these strengths of the CPGB are *possible* because of our insistence on the party as a *political voice* based on a programme and a press, and with a view, when we can do it, to electoral intervention. This conception of the party is *opposed* to the conception of the party as having as its main role organising initiatives in action on the basis of *less than* the minimum programme.

It was not an insult or a misrepresentation for the PCC to argue that comrades who had coordinated to submit a body of amendments to the PCC's proposed motion for the aggregate were acting as a faction. We are *for* the existence of factions where there are substantive political differences. They aid political clarity and the educational quality of debates.

'Liquidationist' reflects the point that - as PCC comrades argued at the aggregate and I have argued here - the major proposals of the 'action faction' would, if carried into operation, turn the CPGB into just another of the far-left groups ●

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Notes

- 1. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1550/political-clarity-vital.
- 2. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1550/make-the-party-now.
- 3. revsoc21.uk/2023/02/15/on-counterfire-and-trans-oppression.
- 4. www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce83jgnx4w5o.
- 5. 'Fetishising revolutionary crisis' September 26 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1508/fetishising-revolutionary-crisis) (the last third of the article).
- 6. 'Marxist polemic' February 8 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1477/letters), replying to comrade Woodrow's 'Depressing', February 1 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1476/letters).

Fighting fund

To the rescue?

With the fantastic success we've seen over recent months in raising good money towards the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund, last week stands out as a bit of a contrast.

Over the last seven days a mere £258 has come our way towards our £2,750 monthly target. I think you can say that's a bit below the going rate! In fact it's the lowest weekly amount I can recall for quite a long time, taking our running total up to just £726 with exactly a third of September gone.

But, while that's a disappointment, I've been writing this column long enough to know that these things happen - a very low amount is often matched by exactly the opposite very soon after. So, hopefully, lots of our readers and supporters will come to the rescue in the next few days - don't worry, I'll let you know next week!

It wasn't as though we had fewer comrades than usual coming up with donations - it's just that the amounts were lower than usual, with the

highest contributions being the £30 received from CG, DV and NH. While, of course, £30 is a generous and very much appreciated sum to receive, there are usually two or three contributions of £100 or more. But I've got the feeling we'll see one or two of those over the next week!

Anyway, thanks also to comrades OG (£28), RG (£25), IS and RD (£12 each), as well as SM and PM (£10), who all made their donations by bank transfer or standing order. Then we had comrades ST (£20), AB (£11), MH (£10), JN and GP (£5 each), whose donations came via PayPal, and, finally, IR, who sent us a cheque for £15.

So now let's see if my optimism is justified next week! ●

Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are name: Weekly Worker sort code: 30-99-64 account number: 00744310 To make a donation or set up a regular payment visit weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate

Online Communist Forum



Sunday September 14 5pm  
Drones over Poland and phasing into World War III - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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

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

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



## REFORM

# Nigel prepares for power

Reform's so-called conference saw its big beasts play the hits and rile up the base. But Paul Demarty wonders how long they can keep their lead over the historically established Tory and Labour mainstream

In the event, Reform UK's annual conference was rather overshadowed by events elsewhere: eg, the resignation of Angela Rayner as deputy prime minister.

Yet, on reflection, Nigel Farage, Lee Anderson and crew will not worry too much: Labour chaos is hardly unhelpful to them. They could get on with celebrating: where the government has lurched from crisis to crisis in its year in power, and the official opposition is all but invisible, Reform remains triumphant. There have been rough patches - the bust-up between Farage and the even nuttier Rupert Lowe, with Lowe backed from afar by Elon Musk, being the most notable. But the show is still on the road. Reform leads every opinion poll by crushing margins. Farage has since been dragged into a similar property-purchase scandal to Rayner, but it seems unlikely to seriously wound him.

What, then, was this conference? Access cost you £55 (£25 for the youth), for which sum you got the right to listen to lots of speeches, go to fringe events and "networking opportunities with other attendees", whatever that means. A business class ticket would set you back £600, in return for which there seemed to be some kind of airport-lounge-type arrangement (literally sponsored by Heathrow) and a special reception. The high rollers could buy a 'platinum ticket' for £2,500, whose principal benefit was a "champagne breakfast" with Farage.

Nowhere on the convenient pricing palette on the conference website<sup>1</sup> is there any reference to *voting*. It would have been quite astounding, of course, to discover that this was a *decision-making* conference, even if that phrase ought to be tautological. (Surely a conference is where one *confers* ...) Reform remains, in official legal reality, a limited company. It is worth taking that status literally: what we have is effectively an alternative media corporation with a small parliamentary fraction.

## Whoop and holler

The job of attendees, therefore, was to show up, whoop, holler and clap like trained seals. The job of the bigwigs was to play the hits. Andrea Jenkyns, indeed, literally performed a dreadful song she had apparently written herself, dressed in a ridiculous sparkly jumpsuit like a stage magician's assistant. (Farage stuck to his city-boy outfit, albeit with a jaunty tie.) There was a great deal of hot air about free speech - occasioned by ultra-Terf Graham Linehan's admittedly ridiculous arrest for intemperate tweets, and naturally not by the mass arrests of Palestine Action sympathisers that would have been taking place concurrently, but for police delaying tactics. Net zero was to go on the fire. Aseem Malhotra, a doctor in the RFK Jr stable, attracted some controversy for repeating idiotic anti-vaccination conspiracy theories.

Farage promised to end the small boats 'problem' within two weeks of taking power. (He later had to walk this back slightly - it would be within two weeks of the relevant legislation taking force, which under our dilatory legislative process means years, but who's counting?)



Speaking in the House

Diatribes against the European Convention on Human Rights were fulsome, as they always are; so too the UN convention on refugees.

## Triumphalism

The overall picture, then, was one of triumphalism, of unity of purpose (with the Lowe fiasco well in the rear-view mirror). That is what you get by organising your 'conference' as, in reality, a rally, which I suppose is one reason it is so popular nowadays. Decisions are still, in some formal sense, made at Labour conferences; but the decisions have been obviously dead letters for at least half a century. Tory conferences are mere occasions for speechifying and rallying the troops; what decisions are made are taken backstage - in the no longer smoke-filled rooms. It is not merely a British phenomenon - it is many a year since the Democratic and Republican national conventions in the States have had any more actual business before them than rubber-stamping the results of presidential primaries and formally agreeing election platforms that nobody reads.

The downside of doing things this way, of course, is that it is a little too easy for the real powerbrokers to get high on their own supply. Last year's Democratic national convention, after all, produced a whole flood of sunny prospects of a Kamala Harris victory. American liberals succeeded in convincing themselves that yet another glamorous, celebrity-driven campaign totally void of politics would carry the day. We know how that one turned out - with Trump back in the White House and the Democrats in debt to the likes of Oprah Winfrey to the tune of millions of dollars in appearance fees.

Is Nigel Farage at risk of the same overconfidence? After all, the numbers do not lie: Reform's poll lead has been pretty unshakeable since their rampage in local elections earlier this year. The evisceration of several Conservative councils will make Tory campaigning in those

constituencies harder: councillors double up as organisers, and there is precious little other infrastructure to rely on. Conservative Associations are not what they were; nor is the Church of England - once the Tory Party at prayer and an important component of British politics at the capillary level, but now much shrunken and politically ambiguous.

This wastage of the Tories' sinews of war, however, has not come with a decline in the popular grievances that have historically given the world's oldest political party a platform to stand on. Popular sentiment towards immigration is divided, but negative overall, with ever larger minorities treating it as the central political issue. Reform is, for obvious reasons, well placed to reap the benefits, and attempts by the government to neutralise it have instead had merely the effect of raising the salience of the issue and therefore *recommending* Reform to voters.

On the other hand, it must not be underestimated how hostile the British constitution is to new challengers. Reform knows the truth of this already, having got roughly the same vote as the Liberal Democrats in 2024, but a 10th of the seats. The effect of their good day at the office was merely to punish the Tories and inflate Labour's majority.

In order really to replace the Tories, Reform would have to take over the broad function served by this party: to mobilise popular sentiment in favour of government in the interests of the core of the capitalist class. The Tories throw some meat to the oiks (in the form of splashy, but basically shallow, anti-migrant and more generally suburban-reactionary policies), so that things can go on to the benefit of the City. Reform is doing a good job of capturing popular resentment, but can it serve as capital's first eleven?

Brexitism (from which all this ultimately stems) did have some support in high finance, specifically in the hedge-fund industry, well placed - thanks to the nature of its *métier* -

to profit from general chaos. Hedge funds, however, are not enough. The success of the British economy is based on fair Albion's ability to serve as a global financial centre, which in turn entails its integration into the world system and its subordination to the global hegemon.

Farage will happily take orders from a Donald Trump, and sell it to his rabid fans as so much reflected glory. Will he happily take orders from, say, Gavin Newsom? Can *that* be sold on? More importantly, do the real players - the large-scale institutional investors - believe him?

## Economics

It is hard to know either way, partly because things are so much in flux. Trump is currently chipping away at the independence of the Federal Reserve - central bank independence being, heretofore, an important gesture of government subordination to the requirements of big capital. The issue has already been raised, indeed, in this country, with the Bank of England's effective defenestration of Liz Truss. (Its independence, in any case, is a far more recent thing, having been put in place by Tony Blair.)

Reform's economic policy lacks even the coherence of the Liz Truss/Kwasi Kwarteng regime, such as it was. It is too much the product of grievances hastily stapled together: the anomie of the deindustrialised north and the Nietzschean impatience of the hedge fund bros; the isolationism of nationalist die-hards and the Atlanticism of Farage and other such products of the City.

It is a little too easy to see the politicians of the mainstream parties as *simply* idiots. The strange, directionless flailing of the Starmer government seems incompetent - as, of course, did the white-hot flameout of Truss, and the endless comedy of Rishi Sunak's ill-fated reign. No doubt many government ministers of the years since the great financial crisis have been idiots - it is beyond my ken to find excuses

for Matt Hancock or Chris Grayling. Yet they have confronted a situation which is not terrifically amenable to solution. With no serious threat from the working class, austerity was inevitable; concessions are made only to save the skins of the elite. Life was, for the vast majority, destined to get worse; all that remained on the table was to redirect the resulting anger onto targets other than the auto-cannibalism of capitalism in a prolonged period of stagnation.

The trouble, as I have argued often, is that (to take the pertinent case) migrants are bluntly not the problem. Indeed, the ability to use them to undercut wages becomes more and more necessary to keep basic functions of the state going. The splashy announcements pile up; nothing ever changes. A great leap into the unknown, even, is lined up, in the form of Brexit; the result is merely that Romanian migrants are supplanted by Nigerian migrants.

In No10, Farage will face these same choices; submitting to a punishment beating from global markets, or else behaving himself and thereby betraying his base in one way or another. He does so as America, under Trump, moves in the direction of an openly extractive and exploitative policy towards its thralls - unlikely, in my view, to be reversed in a future Democratic administration. He too will be made to look like an idiot.

## Left alternative

Not that this gives the left much comfort. After all, we do *not* currently offer a thoroughgoing alternative, which would have to be internationalist in outlook simply to confront the problems before us in anything like their true scale. Without that, the overall political effect is a ratchet to the chauvinist right: each failure to reduce migrant numbers, or even just to restore some of the lost social fabric (reduce NHS waiting times, fill potholes, etc), paradoxically demands *more* of the same 'medicine'. There will always be someone available to promise to do it all again - but this time 'for real'. (Hell, even Truss is still angling for an implausible political comeback.)

So, whether or not Reform can make its success last and win a general election, the default expectation is for politics to become more Reform-like, before ultimately exceeding it in degeneracy. And that is the word - what we saw last weekend was, in the end, a contemptible display of political infantilism. Idiotic magical thinking on migration and the economy is cheered to the rafters. Net zero is to be rejected not because it is an empty target barely taken seriously by the people who came up with it, but because climate politics as such interferes with self-gratification. A man who merely repeats his audience's prejudices back to them is hailed as a truth-telling hero.

Communism aims to raise the common man and woman to a ruling position; Reform-ism and analogues prefer to reduce them to the infants of Freudian psychoanalysis - mere agglomerations of unsatisfiable drives on a collision course with the reality principle.

That is the true choice before Britons - and indeed everyone ●

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## Note

1. reformpartyconference.co.uk.



## ORWELL

# The road from Eton College

Seventy-five years after Orwell's death, Paul Flowers turns to his ideas on collectivism and socialism in the third of a series of articles

George Orwell's anti-war stance disappeared, as World War II drew near, although his shift to what can be best described as a revolutionary defencist standpoint was not so drastic when the underlying rationale is examined.<sup>1</sup>

As we have seen, he considered that the drift towards war would see the imposition of a totalitarian regime in Britain. However, when war broke out in September 1939, Britain was still a parliamentary democracy, and so, on the logic that even an imperfect democracy was preferable to fascism, he considered that the war against the Axis powers had to be supported.<sup>2</sup>

As Orwell moved from opposing a future war to supporting one in the present, he passed the 'official communist' movement travelling in the opposite direction, as it took an anti-war stance in the aftermath of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on August 23 1939, and this intensified his already strong antipathy towards it.<sup>3</sup> The pact dealt a heavy blow to the popular front bandwagon, and further popularised the already common view that the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were "rapidly evolving towards the same system", as Orwell put it in a review of Franz Borkenau's *The totalitarian enemy* - a book which not only claimed that Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were practically identical societies, but considered that the world faced a collectivist future, and that the quest for power was the driving force behind totalitarian regimes - ideas that Orwell shared.<sup>4</sup>

Orwell subjected to a withering critique the intellectuals whose sympathies had gravitated towards Stalinism. They, he contended, had merely exchanged their British patriotism and Christianity for another set of orthodoxies: "All the loyalties and superstitions that the intellect had seemingly banished could come rushing back under the thinnest of disguises." Disillusioned with crisis-ridden Britain, they found in the Soviet Union "a church, an army, an orthodoxy, a discipline ..., a fatherland, a Fuehrer ..., patriotism, religion, empire, military glory ..., father, king, leader, hero, saviour": that is, "*something to believe in*". This was the "patriotism of the deracinated", the substitution of the seemingly dynamic, vibrant Soviet Union, thrusting ahead, brushing aside all obstacles, for the capitalist world which was struggling to pull itself out of economic slump, with country after country descending into fascist obscurantism.

It was easy for middle-class youngsters to see in the Soviet Union all the certainties that Britain provided their fathers and grandfathers, but which it could no longer supply. At first, Orwell tended to view pro-Soviet attitudes amongst British intellectuals as the result of their naivety, that they could "swallow totalitarianism", because they had "no experience of anything except liberalism".<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, his understanding that they recognised that, compared to the ineffectual floundering of Britain's rulers, in Moscow there was an elite which could *really* rule, prefigured his subsequent conviction that they possessed a predilection for authoritarianism - a decided tendency towards power-worship which was no different to that expressed by supporters of Hitler or Mussolini - with a "cult of power", which was "mixed up with a love of cruelty and wickedness for their own sakes". Later on, he made the telling point that "it was only *after* the Soviet regime became unmistakably totalitarian that



BBC statue

English intellectuals, in large numbers, began to show an interest in it".<sup>6</sup>

Although Orwell recognised that there was no immediate danger of totalitarianism arising in Britain, he became ever more convinced of its likelihood in the not too distant future: "Almost certainly we are moving into an age of totalitarian dictatorships - an age in which freedom of thought will be at first a deadly sin and later on a meaningless abstraction. The autonomous individual is going to be stamped out of existence."<sup>7</sup>

He noted the repression and degradation that was required for the establishment and maintenance of a totalitarian regime: "So it appears that amputation of the soul *isn't* just a simple surgical job, like having your appendix out."<sup>8</sup> We then arrive at Orwell's most perceptive observation on the subject of totalitarian regimes:

Totalitarianism has abolished freedom of thought to an extent unheard of in any previous age ... It not only forbids you to express - even to think - certain thoughts, but it dictates what you *shall* think, it creates an ideology for you, it tries to govern your emotional life ... The peculiarity of the totalitarian state is that, though it controls thought, it does not fix it. It sets up unquestionable dogmas, and it alters them from day to day. It needs the dogmas, because it needs absolute obedience from its subjects, but it cannot avoid the changes, which are dictated by the needs of power politics. It declares itself infallible, and at the same time it attacks the very concept of objective truth.<sup>9</sup>

Orwell considered that the elimination of objective truth - the removal of the ability of a person to obtain accurate information and thus be able to interpret and change society - was perhaps the most sinister aspect of totalitarianism. Moreover, he insisted that anyone who was "fully sympathetic" to the Soviet Union

needed to "acquiesce in deliberate falsification on important issues" - not merely in respect of present-day events, but also when discussing its past: *history itself needed to be infinitely malleable*.<sup>10</sup>

Flowing from this, Orwell was insistent on the need for free expression of ideas: "Any Marxist can demonstrate with the greatest of ease that 'bourgeois' liberty of thought is an illusion. But, when he has finished his demonstration, there remains the psychological *fact* that without this 'bourgeois' liberty the creative powers wither away."<sup>11</sup>

Orwell was adamant that socialism had to be built upon the gains of the capitalist era, and could not reject them without courting disaster.

This idea of preserving the better aspects of today's society emerges in Orwell's wartime strategy of revolutionary defencism. Its main thrust was that Hitler had to be defeated, but this was not possible unless a far-reaching social transformation took place in Britain; in short, a socialist revolution was necessary to win the war.<sup>12</sup>

Far from being 'king and country' flag-waving, Orwell's patriotism was based upon two factors that were central to his concept of the struggle for socialism. Firstly, he considered that an internationalist appeal was ineffective, especially to the middle-class people whom he wanted to win to socialism; and, secondly, he wanted to defend those aspects of British life that he felt were worth preserving, including what he saw as the "gentleness" of British civilisation, the "liberty of the individual" and "the respect for constitutionalism and legality". He recognised that these factors were a product of Britain's specific historical development, rather than springing from innate national characteristics, and were basically contingent upon objective factors, as he recognised that the British ruling class would act like any other, were its power and privileges threatened. As he considered that the aim of socialism was "a world-state of free and equal human beings" and not any kind of nationally oriented affair or peculiarly British venture, it is clear that he saw these aspects as necessary features of a socialist society on a global scale: that is, in all countries.<sup>13</sup>

So how would the fight for socialism fare in a world seemingly hurtling towards totalitarianism? In *The lion and the unicorn* Orwell repeats his call for a new socialist party, and then calls for the state ownership of "all productive goods" - that is, land, mines, ships and machinery - plus "approximate equality of incomes ..., political democracy, and abolition of all hereditary privilege, especially in education", whilst recognising that "centralised ownership has very little meaning unless the mass of the people are living roughly upon an equal level, and have some kind of control over the government". Yet he does not elaborate upon this "kind of control". Indeed, Orwell goes so far as to say that, once the "productive goods" are the property of the state, the "common people" will feel that "the state *is themselves*",<sup>14</sup> thus virtually associating collectivism *per se* with socialism - something with which no Stalinist or social democrat would disagree.

The crucial issue of the *control* of the "productive goods" and the state machinery - the only way that collectivism can escape a totalitarian fate - remains vague: would this be possible via existing parliamentary

structures, or would some other form of organisation, such as workers' councils, be necessary?<sup>15</sup>

Once again, Orwell had painted himself into a corner ●

## Notes

1. Some commentators have viewed Orwell's shift on the war as a fundamental change: V Richards (ed) *The left and World War II: selections from the anarchist journal, 'War Commentary', 1939-1943* (London, 1989), p5; *Socialist Standard* May 1997.
2. Orwell explained his change of heart to Tosco Fyvel, stating that he realised that there was no danger of fascism in Britain: TR Fyvel *George Orwell: a personal memoir* London 1983, p100.
3. Orwell considered that the CPGB was led by people who were "mentally subservient to Russia", and whose real aim was to "manipulate British foreign policy in the Russian interest". Hence, when calling for an Anglo-Franco-Soviet alliance, a Stalinist was "obliged to become a good patriot and imperialist" (G Orwell *Inside the whale* London 1940, pp164-66. Orwell's conception was one-sided, especially when compared to Trotsky's ideas. Trotsky recognised that this growing domestic patriotism had deeper roots and was leading to tensions between communist parties and Moscow (L Trotsky 'A fresh lesson' *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1938-1939* New York 1974, p71. Perhaps this is why Orwell did not comment upon the remarkable episode when the CPGB's general secretary Harry Pollitt and *Daily Worker* editor Johnny Campbell maintained their pro-war approach and voted against the Comintern's anti-war line in October 1939 - even though this event, including their subsequent public grovelling and disingenuous self-criticisms (classic examples of what Orwell later called 'doublethink') was publicly known.
4. G Orwell, 'Review' *Collected essays, journalism and letters* Vol 2, Harmondsworth 1984, pp40-41; F Borkenau *The totalitarian enemy* London 1940, pp7, 32, 253. The prevalence in Britain of such theories of convergence is discussed in my *The new civilisation? Understanding Stalin's Soviet Union, 1929-1941* London 2008, pp131-38, 184-200.
5. G Orwell *Inside the whale* London 1940, pp166-69. On the other hand, Orwell considered that, unlike the intellectuals, the "common people" still believed in decency, fair play and the idea of "absolute good and evil" (G Orwell 'Raffles and Miss Blandish' *Dickens, Dali and others* New York 1946, p218.
6. G Orwell *James Burnham and the managerial revolution* London 1946, p18.
7. G Orwell *Inside the whale* London 1940, p185.
8. G Orwell 'Notes on the way' *Collected essays, journalism and letters* Vol 2, Harmondsworth 1984, p31.
9. *The Listener* June 19 1941.
10. G Orwell 'The prevention of literature' *Collected essays, journalism and letters* Vol 4, Harmondsworth 1984, p85. As an example of viewing the past, Orwell pointed to a pamphlet from 1918 in his possession by Maxim Litvinov on the Russian Revolution that mentioned Trotsky and other "non-people", but not Stalin, and asked what a present-day pro-Soviet writer would make of it.
11. G Orwell *Inside the whale* London 1940, pp172-73.
12. He argued this most succinctly in his essay, 'Patriots and revolutionaries', in V Gollancz (ed) *The betrayal of the left* London 1941, pp234-45. This position was shared by various leftwingers: for example, T Winttingham *The politics of victory* London 1941.
13. G Orwell 'The lion and the unicorn', *Collected essays, journalism and letters* Vol 2, Harmondsworth 1984, pp78-81, 93, 102.
14. *Ibid* pp100-01, 120.
15. Orwell did raise this again, writing: "The whole question is who is to be in control." Would it, he continued, be "wealthy men and aristocrats" or "representatives of the common people"? But once more this crucial matter is not resolved in any clear manner: G Orwell 'London letter to *Partisan Review*', April 1941 *Collected essays, journalism and letters* Vol 2, Harmondsworth 1984, p143.

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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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# weekly worker

## Bell Ribeiro-Addy's hopeless deputy bid

# From freebies to stamp duty

The deputy leader was found guilty of violating the ministerial code, but the subsequent government reshuffle will fail in trying to out-compete Nigel Farage on anti-migrant rhetoric, writes Eddie Ford

So far, six people have entered the race to replace Angela Rayner as Labour's deputy leader, and all of them female (even if Jess Phillips and Lisa Nandy decided to opt out). Bridget Phillipson, the current education secretary, has been widely touted as the frontrunner, as she is likely to be seen by MPs as No10's *de facto* candidate and hence will secure much of the 'payroll' vote. Initial figures released by the Parliamentary Labour Party showed Phillipson leading the contest, Lucy Powell second and the others trailing quite a bit behind.

Giving us a slightly different picture, exclusive polling of Labour members for the LabourList by Survation shows that, after Phillipson, Emily Thornberry is the second most popular candidate - she has stated that "we've made mistakes" and has condensed her platform to: "Welfare. Gaza. Wealth tax. Changes to come". However, she is a longstanding member of Labour Friends of Israel, who at the Balfour 100 banquet in 2017 strongly defended the country's "right to exist" and said it "stands out as a beacon of freedom, equality and democracy, particularly in respect of women and LGBT communities, in a region where oppression, discrimination and inequality is too often the norm". Sick words, given the continuing genocide in Gaza.

Hopefuls need the nominations of 80 MPs (20%), and those who reach the threshold must also receive nominations from at least 5% of constituency Labour parties, or about 30 in total, or at least three official party-affiliated bodies, of which at least two must be unions. This second stage will run from September 13-27, with the electronic ballot of party members - who must have been in the party for at least six months - taking place from October 8-24, and the result being announced on October 25.

One thing is for sure, the Socialist Campaign Group's Bell Ribeiro-Addy will not get past stage one. Her intention is, though, not to replace Rayner. It is to become the recognised leader of the Labour left. Frankly, a fitting choice. She embodies the parliamentary left's political and moral bankruptcy.

This "life-long socialist" followed the now standard route of the Labour career politician. Having cut her teeth in NUS politics, she worked as Diane Abbott's chief-of-staff before successfully fighting the 2019 general election and becoming an MP. Jeremy Corbyn made her shadow minister of immigration.

Her political platform is little different from that chancer Thornbury: 'Gaza. Welfare cuts. Winter fuel payments. Change'. Vacuous. Moreover, only a short time ago she was to be found on the bottom end of the government's greasy pole. Till she was sacked, Ribeiro-Addy served as the PM's trade envoy to Ghana - she is of Ghanaian descent. An unpaid role, but there are the generous expenses, not least for travel. But what the hell



Backstories are about marketing. What matters are class loyalties

was this "life-long socialist" doing accepting a government post in the first place?

Anyway, the extremely tight timetable with just a couple of days to secure MPs' nominations has been described as "the mother of all stitch-ups", which seems accurate. In a display of control-freakery, the leadership is sidelining anyone even mildly 'off message' and evading discussion on Gaza, disability benefits cuts, winter fuel payments, etc. Keir Starmer is taking no chances.

## Entitlement

This follows, of course, Angela Rayner being found guilty of violating the ministerial code by ethics adviser, Sir Laurie Magnus, who nonetheless said in his ruling that she had "acted with integrity and with a dedicated and exemplary commitment to public service" (like all upstanding members of the establishment). But he concluded in no uncertain terms, wearily shaking his head, that Rayner underpaid £40,000 in stamp duty on her Hove seaside flat.

In his slightly mournful handwritten response to her resignation letter, Starmer said that Rayner would "remain a major figure in our party" and "continue to fight for the causes you care so passionately about". The Labour leader no doubt regrets her downfall, because he could always present her as an 'authentic' voice of the working class that legitimises his deeply anti-working class administration - the most rightwing Labour government we have ever had (which is saying something after the Tony Blair experience).

But the long and short of it is the fact that Rayner was caught bang to rights for claiming that she had received written tax advice, before completing her £800,000 purchase, saying she was entitled to pay the lower amount, as it was *only property*, when actually her conveyancer stated that they had not provided any such advice and completed her stamp duty return using the HMRC calculator

based only on information provided by the deputy leader. So clearly her story does not add up.

Obviously Angela Rayner did not ask too many questions and ignored the advice she received - she turned a blind eye and broke the guidelines. Hardly corruption on a grand scale, true, but it still reeks of a grasping sense of entitlement. But how can anyone be surprised? Right from the beginning, we condemned the petty corruption of Starmer and his ministers - all the freebies, the fancy glasses, London accommodation, the holidays, the dresses, power suits, concert tickets, corporate boxes at football matches, personal shoppers, and so on.<sup>1</sup> As for Rayner's backstory of being from a humble background and getting pregnant at the early age of 16, you can to some extent understand why she would treasure her meteoric rise and new-found middle-class lifestyle. But she still had her snout in the trough like all the rest of them.

Yet it is doubtful whether it is the end of her career - we can expect the memoirs, high-profile interviews, TV appearances, a column in *The Sun* or *Daily Mirror* ... and generally making pots of money on top of what she has already made. Frankly, her unique selling point as a professional northerner who liked to parade her origins was deeply off-putting - though Phillipson has an element of that too. Communists do not care about someone's sociological origins: rather it is your *class loyalty* and who you are fighting for - which means that Rayner spectacularly fails the test. That is not changed by her longtime friendship with Rebecca Long-Bailey - once the great hope for the Labour left in her bid to succeed Jeremy Corbyn.<sup>2</sup>

Essentially, as we have seen countless times, bourgeois politicians are buyable - it comes with the territory. If you want to look at a particularly successful example, it is Tony Blair, of course, whose personal wealth is estimated to be between £30 million and £60 million.<sup>3</sup> Where does he get

all that from? Not from corruption while he was in office, though he did plenty of dodgy things, but afterwards basically selling the advantages he accumulated and the contacts he had made (Gordon Brown did the same, albeit not so successfully - selling his services to the highest bidder). In Blair's case his institute is up to its neck in Donald Trump's 'Riveria' plan to 'resettle' Palestinians to make way for a Greater Israel - ie, ethnic cleansing and genocide. Blair keeps talking about a two-state solution, like many other bourgeois politicians, but that is a lie and he knows it. As well as being buyable, bourgeois politicians are infinitely malleable when it comes to the truth.

## Appease

Rayner's resignation triggered a major government reshuffle - which must be fascinating if you are a Westminster journalist, given to endless speculation about who is rising in terms of junior ministers and all the rest of it. The hand of Morgan McSweeney, the prime minister's chief of staff, has been seen across the reshuffle, and it obviously represents an even further move to the right. With the departure of Rayner, energy secretary Ed Miliband becomes one of the few cabinet members on the party's extremely soggy soft 'left' still in post (apparently he was heavily pressurised to go, so the party can row back on its net-zero promises in a bid to attract Reform-minded voters).

The most significant development, at least when it comes to a shuffling at the top of the existing pack, is the moving of the odious Yvette Cooper - responsible for the Palestine Action ban - to the foreign office and her replacement as home secretary by Shabana Mahmood, not to mention making David Lammy deputy prime minister, justice secretary and lord chancellor. Mahmood is coming in as getting tough on migrants - as opposed to Cooper, who is seen in government circles as a bit of a soft touch (tell that to pro-Palestinian activists), and

what you got from the new home secretary is the instant announcement that asylum-seekers will be put into disused or converted military barracks, not hotels - a matter which has become a rightwing *cause célèbre*.

One government source said "nothing is off the table" for Mahmood in her new brief - she previously signalled a willingness to look at the reform of the European Convention of Human Rights within domestic law, after it was confirmed on September 8 that more than 30,000 people had crossed the Channel in small boats so far in 2025. That is a record for this point in the year - something which Reform and the Tories have pounced on.

In her first official announcement as home secretary, Mahmood proposed cutting the number of visas granted to countries that delay or refuse returns of their citizens who have been deemed to have no right to remain in the UK, and in fact it was one of several proposals discussed at a meeting of the 'Five Eyes' countries (made up of the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand). Back in June, Sir Keir said he favoured a more "transactional" approach to the UK's use of visas.<sup>4</sup> On the ECHR, Mahmood declared that the "balance" between human rights and secure borders "isn't in the right place at the moment" - it goes without saying that Reform has already pledged to leave the ECHR entirely, along with other international conventions it regards as preventing "mass deportations" - a wet fantasy seeking to ape Donald Trump and his ICE agency.

All these measures are designed to appease Reform, of course. The reality is that, if you look at the figures, what needs to be highlighted is not the illegal migrants that have crossed the Channel or come over by some other means, but the sheer number of migrants who entered the country directly after Brexit with the full connivance of Boris Johnson and then successive Tory prime ministers. But what you actually get amongst a swathe of the population is no distinction between illegal or legal migrants, or for that matter *historically established* migrants - we are, after all, in a wave of English/British chauvinist reaction. Quite obviously the Labour Party is feeding a toxic agenda, having the advantage of being in government, and being able to actually do something.

Nonetheless, there is no way that Shabana Mahmood, Sir Keir or any other minister is going to outshine Nigel Farage on that one. Their actions will only make him more popular, as he is clearly more consistent on this question ●

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## Notes

1. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1508/snouts-in-the-trough.
2. politicshome.com/news/article/momentum-members-back-rebecca-long-bailey-and-angela-rayner-labour-leadership-team.
3. iliketodabble.com/tony-blair-net-worth-2025.
4. bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c39zk7pp29ko.