

weekly worker



**Latest tranche of Epstein material
not only exposes Mandelson but the
whole stinking, rotten establishment**

- Letters and debate
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- China's embassy
- Australia's unity

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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Russia's 1905 dress rehearsal:
mass demonstrations, barricade
fighting and general strikes



LETTERS



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

No convictions

After eight full days of deliberation, the jury has acquitted Charlotte Head, Samuel Corner, Ellie (Leona) Kamio, Fatema Zainab Rajwani, Zoe Rogers and Jordan Devlin of the most serious charge they faced - aggravated burglary - for damaging the property where weapons for Israel are produced.

The jury did not convict Charlotte Head, Samuel Corner and Ellie Kamio of violent disorder and acquitted Fatema Zainab Rajwani, Zoe Rogers and Jordan Devlin of the same charge. The jury also "refused to convict" any of the defendants of criminal damage, despite five of them admitting in court to destroying Israeli weapons and equipment belonging to Israel's biggest weapons firm, Elbit Systems.

Samuel Corner was also not convicted of grievous bodily harm with intent for striking a police officer, or any lower offence available to the jury to convict on. In total, none of the defendants were convicted of a single offence. The defendants were acquitted (or not convicted) of all offences levelled against them, including alleged violent offences. It appears the jury agreed that the defendants' sole intention was to use items, including sledgehammers, as tools to disarm Israeli weapons to "prevent violence".

These verdicts put to bed the deceitful accusations from ministers that these brave activists are "violent criminals". We have said all along: Free the Filton 24! Shut Elbit down! Lift the ban on Palestine Action!

Defend our Juries
email

Troubling reports

There are troubling reports of direct interference by Karie Murphy in the current Your Party leadership elections. She apparently leaned heavily on independent candidates to convince them not to stand against Corbyn's The Many slate. Deborah Faulkes, standing for the central executive committee in the North West, writes in her blog: "... in January, I attended a Zoom meeting for a small subset of a WhatsApp group I belonged to, with staff member Karie Murphy and one other office member, in which those of us who were independent candidates in the CEC elections were asked to stand down in order not to 'split the vote' for the Corbyn slate."

As Murphy is also running Your Party's HQ, there is more than a touch of 'conflict of interest' here. Not only has The Many slate access to all the data, all the money: it basically has HQ running the campaign for it. For comparison, this is the section from the 'First year organisational strategy' document (section 6), which was, remember, written by HQ itself:

"i ... The elections will be run in an honest and transparent manner, with strict safeguards against nepotism. To this end, the elections will be run by an independent and professional third party.

"ii This team will also manage organisational tasks related to the election of the leader (if relevant) and the central executive committee, ensuring that processes are clear, fair and inclusive. Furthermore, they will work in a transparent manner to facilitate the election and development of the executive leadership team (CEC and leader). This team must be strictly neutral,

and must not be candidates or actively support any candidates in these elections."

As communists, we do not have any illusions that those in power would run things 'fairly', but this blatant breach of the party's own rules really does stink to heaven and we would not be surprised if some members decide to put in official complaints (not that we expect them to go anywhere, seeing as the complaints department is probably run by Karie Murphy too).

In this forthcoming leadership election, which starts on February 9, the choice really could not be clearer. Unless the Grassroots Left wins a majority on the CEC, the Corbyn clique will take the final steps of turning YP into another totally inadequate, undemocratic sham of an organisation in the mould of Momentum.

The very few bits of policy that The Many does come out with underline that: not only does Corbyn want to become the "parliamentary leader" (a position which doesn't even exist in the constitution), but there are proposals for "members' policy commissions" and a "socialist leadership programme" to "identify and train up the socialist leaders of the future". How about we send those little wannabe careerists to sit on the members' policy commission, where they can decide the policy for us?

Both things are presented as totally "new" initiatives. They really are not. They have been copied straight out of Labour's and Momentum's playbook. Jeremy Corbyn surely must remember that it was Tony Blair who outsourced policy-making to the National Policy Forum as a way to gut conference and disenfranchise the members and branches. The fact that he would want to repeat that in Your Party really is a damning indictment.

Matt Rubens
email

Scotland debate

On January 29 I took part in an online debate billed as 'Socialism and Scottish independence', chaired by Peter Kennedy of the Forth Valley YP proto-branch. I was up against Richard Green of the Radical Independence Campaign and the debate followed from an article in the online journal *Heckle* by Green and Bob Goupillot entitled 'Your Party: forging a new Scottish socialist party'.

The article calls for "a Scottish party which is both unequivocally pro-independence for Scotland and is itself a fully independent Scottish party". But they somehow claim this is not a nationalist position nor that its aim is to have the forthcoming YP Scotland conference declare UDI.

They spend a lot of the article - as did Richard in his opening remarks - on the very long-in-the-tooth claim that the Labour Party and Labourism are dead. Apparently Corbyn's leadership didn't gain traction in Scotland because "he did not understand the national democratic question" and was a "blip", said Richard.

In reply I proposed that, far from posting yet another funeral proclamation, we needed to recognise that the Labour Party still remains a site for class struggle, even under Starmer, and indeed during the Corbyn era was the most important site for class struggle in Britain since the miners' strike. The ruling class well understood this.

That supposed 'lack of traction' was not something to be celebrated, but a sign of just how deep-fried

nationalism has become in the left in Scotland. As Matthew Jones said in the ensuing debate, almost the entire left in Scotland has abandoned the working class and now looks to solve things through a small capitalist state, becoming a recruiting sergeant for the Scottish National Party.

I was surprised that there were very few in the debate taking sides with Richard, but this certainly reflected what they admit in the article: "It is difficult to judge what the balance for and against independence is amongst those who have come together in YP so far."

The democracy that they claim to hold dear seems to only work one way - from their entirely Scottish nationalist perspective that there must be no "fence-sitting" or "halfway house" on the issue of independence, whatever the forces who have joined what was clearly a British-wide party initiative may think.

We shall see at the forthcoming Scottish conference just how deep-fried that nationalism is and whether there's a mortal wound for YP in Scotland. It certainly offers nothing to the working class in Scotland except a diversion and a driving down of living standards, just like that other recent nationalist pipe dream - Brexit.

Tam Dean Burn
Glasgow

YP republicans

Republic Your Party put forward a slate of candidates in England for endorsement to enter the election for the central executive committee (CEC) of Your Party. These were - John Tummon (North West), Jordan Craw (North West), Chris Williamson (East Midlands), Steve Freeman (London) and Mike Hope (East of England)

The total number of endorsements for RYP in England was 96. However, these were distributed unevenly between four regions. We failed to secure any candidate for the CEC elections, given the regional barrier of 75 endorsements. We suffered a major setback when Chris Williamson, the candidate for East Midlands, was barred from standing for the CEC. Chris was the former Labour MP for Derby North and was Jeremy Corbyn's most vocal supporter in the Parliamentary Labour Party. He was victimised for campaigning to make MPs accountable to their members through open selections, and for opposing the Zionist witch-hunt against grassroots activists and prominent members like Ken Livestone, Jackie Walker and Mark Wadsworth. He was eventually prevented from standing for Derby North in the 2019 general election, even though his suspension from the party had been ruled unlawful by the High Court in October that year.

As a dual member of YP and the Workers Party of Britain, Chris Williamson should have been allowed to stand. In our view, given his record, he would have had every chance of securing the necessary endorsements. However, it should have been for East Midlands members to decide this, not unelected officials.

Republic YP began our campaign without supporters in Scotland and Wales. It was a major step forward, when Republic YP (Scotland) was established and Left Unity (Cymru) endorsed our platform.

Republic YP highlighted three issues:

■ Your Party has no programme agreed by members, no democratic means of drafting one and no conference planned to debate and agree it. Your Party is not a party

united around a programme, but rival platforms fighting over the kind of programme and party we are seeking to build.

■ Republic YP was concerned about the anti-democratic implications of the barring of Chris Williamson, Dave Nellist and others. On January 25 we wrote to Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana, as leaders of the two main platforms, to complain about the barring of candidates. So far we have not had a reply. This matter should not be a factional issue. All members throughout the party should unite in defence of democratic practice.

■ Republic YP argued that a republican programme is necessary to address the 'crisis of democracy' in the United Kingdom and provide the means for uniting the left. We are in favour of a dialogue with all working class political organisations. This includes the Workers Party of Britain, the largest socialist organization outside Your Party. WPB is not popular with sections of the left. It is therefore the acid test of whether YP is serious in seeking to overcome sectarian attitudes in the interests of the working class. We are in favour of 'dual membership' to help break down sectarian barriers.

The Republic YP campaign had some obvious weaknesses. First, we are standing against the dominant ideology of the English left in Labourism (ie, social monarchism and unionism). Second, as a new platform we were unknown to most members. Third, we were hampered by the relatively high barrier (75 endorsements) against standing and the disqualification of our most widely known socialist candidate. Fourth, we did not have information about branches, meetings and members necessary to mount an effective campaign. Fifth, we did not have the social media presence necessary to explain our ideas. Sixth, we did not have the backing of any of the socialist or Marxist groups and newspapers.

As stated, the result of the first stage of the fight for a republican programme was that one of our candidates was barred and four did not achieve the required 75 endorsements. So the struggle enters a new stage, with Republic YP now outside the 'democratic tent', where candidates will present their politics.

Before moving to the second stage, we want to thank those comrades who gave us any assistance. This would include Crispin Flintoff for giving RYP an opportunity to make our case, all members of the RYP WhatsApp group who helped us, those independently minded comrades who took the time to consider our proposals, and finally all who gave us their endorsements.

Platforms are plans and proposals for the future of the party, its programme and its constitutional processes. A platform is likely to be 'permanent' until its aims are achieved. It puts, or should put, politics first. Politics comes before votes. Votes should be the consequence of a platform winning political arguments for its politics. Opportunism puts winning votes, seats, power and influence before politics.

Slates are a set of candidates standing together for election purposes. Slates dissolve once the election is completed, but platforms will continue. The following platforms put forward a slate of candidates (ie, more than one) across the English regions, Scotland and Wales:

■ The Many.

■ Grassroots Left.

■ Democratic Bloc (14).

■ Republic YP (5), including one barred.

■ YP Muslim Network (2).

■ LGBT+ Socialists (2).

Outside the two main platform/slates, the Democratic Bloc was the largest alternative. The Democratic Bloc says it is not "participating in any slates and we are not running our own slate". Despite this, 14 candidates were openly identified as Democratic Bloc. DB members secured sufficient endorsements for four of its 14 supported candidates (Eastern England, North West, West Midlands and London).

There were a significant number of self-identified independents standing for the CEC. These are not a platform, but began to cooperate and support each other. In effect the indies became a slate, seeking to act as a third force separate from The Many and Grassroots Left. Crispin Flintoff can be considered the unofficial 'leader' of the indies who helped organise to get indie candidates endorsed.

RYP is a republican platform taking inspiration from Tony Benn's 1992 republican Commonwealth Bill. We are not a Marxist-communist platform. We have support from working class people from both the social democratic and communist traditions. We are not supported or endorsed by any of the Marxist groups in YP, such as the Socialist Workers Party, Counterfire, RS21, Socialist Party, CPGB and Socialist Alternative. (Of course, we are not a sectarian platform and welcome support from any such groups in or outside YP.)

Republic Your Party is a 'programme and process' platform. Our central concerns are the democratic programme across the UK and democratic processes inside YP. We are distinguished from 'sectarian democracy', whose sole interest is in YP internal democracy. The RYP slate dissolved on January 29, when the endorsement period ended. RYP will continue as a platform, but has no slate of candidates in the CEC election.

Republic Your Party
email

Matgamnaites

Looking at the last (January 24) issue of *Western Solidarity*, the paper of the 'Atlanticists for Workers' Loyalty' (Alliance for Workers' Liberty), I came across the following curious observation in Matt Cooper's discussion of the Your Party election: "In theory [the Socialist Unity Platform] could have been a forum for a broad left to cohere. In practice it became dominated by a strange double act: Max Shanly (a former student Labour-left type, now billed as DSYP, but who may not genuinely represent DSYP) and the tiny and previously semi-dormant CPGB (*Weekly Worker*)."

What on earth could have led Mr Cooper to suppose that CPGB was "semi-dormant"? After all, we continue to publish weekly, while the AWL has gone fortnightly ...

The reality is that dishonesty and self-deception is baked into the Matgamna tendency - far deeper than its more recent Zionism and anti-anti-imperialism: going back to their original commitments to following James P Cannon's 1930s 'raiding entry' policy of dishonest manoeuvres to destroy 'centrist obstacles' - from the International Socialists (later SWP), to Workers Power, to the *Socialist Organiser* purported united-front Labour left paper, to the Workers Socialist League ... Mr Cooper's comment is merely a recent example of the normal dishonesty.

Mike Macnair
Oxford

EPSTEIN

Rotten to the very core

Peter Mandelson, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor and Sarah Ferguson are just the tip of the iceberg. The latest tranche of Jeffrey Epstein material contains more shameful embarrassments for royal houses, governments, tech billionaires and rich and powerful people of all kinds, writes **Paul Demarty**

With the release of another three million pages of text and photographs related to the Jeffrey Epstein scandal, an army of professional and amateur sleuths has predictably swarmed into action.

With a narrowly British lens, there are a couple of big losers. One is, of course, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, who simply must have another great heap of embarrassment put on him, like clockwork. Though there is little new in his 'randy Andy' antics really, the matter of a series of cash payments to ex-wife Sarah Ferguson, allegedly to cover debts, raises the eyebrows a little, especially in the light of certain other items on the news agenda.

Which brings us to Peter Mandelson, who appears in numerous pictures that are impossible, alas, to unsee, and also a great deal of correspondence with the financier and industrial-scale sex pest, Epstein. Some documents have emerged, implying that Mandelson - or at least his husband, Reinaldo Avila da Silva - received \$75,000 from Epstein. Elsewhere, private documents from the then-Labour government were forwarded to Epstein, which would allow him to indulge in a little insider trading. Jumping before he was pushed, Mandelson resigned from the Labour Party, but really this is surely a *criminal* matter. Expect Morgan McSweeney to follow him in the attempt to save Sir Keir.

I am not often to be heard praising the Scottish National Party, but its decision to report Mandelson to the police rather got to the point. Reform UK copied the idea later on January 2. Sir Keir Starmer - obviously embarrassed, but quite plausibly genuinely enraged - handed a dossier of evidence to the Met. By the end of the following day, Mandelson was facing a formal police investigation for misconduct in public office. He has resigned from the House of Lords, and steps are underway to strip him of his title (which requires primary legislation).

His downfall - long overdue - must surely have knock-on effects. Close allies include Morgan McSweeney, Starmer's hatchet man, and Wes Streeting, Starmer's most likely replacement. That is to say nothing of Starmer himself, who made a scandal out of this by appointing him US ambassador last year. Mandelson has been a mascot of the Labour right continuously since the Blair government, no matter how high the scandals piled up. He is now an extraordinary liability.

Reckoning

Yet none of this is really earth-shattering stuff. That has been a big part of the story, really. Andrew and Mandelson are two of very few Epstein associates to have suffered any serious consequences: Andrew because he is, to be frank, a very stupid man, who dug his own grave with enthusiasm and application over the years; and Mandelson, presumably, because he is a dab hand at making enemies. The Epstein saga is like an overstretched 'mystery box' TV series - the revelations pile up, but, on the whole, seem inconsequential. Except for one or two individuals, there is no reckoning to be had. If Mandelson does end up going to jail



Peter Mandelson: 'intensely relaxed about filthy rich'

over this, it seems that he may be the only one apart from Epstein himself and Ghislaine Maxwell.

Much of the overall picture has been plain for many years. Epstein was a phenomenally wealthy, well-connected man. He had his pecuniary interests to pursue, of course, but he also fancied himself as a bit of an intellectual, though from his emails he appears barely literate (or perhaps severely dyslexic). His world outlook was not terribly interesting, but is increasingly typical of tech billionaires - and his own class of hedge-fund people especially. These men believe, and Epstein believed, that they are the true movers and shakers of history, and that these characteristics are heritable (hence Epstein's mania for impregnating young women and desire to cryogenically freeze his own penis); that technological development must be unleashed and made to serve them; and so on.

Not all attendees at Epstein's soirees would be on board with this, of course. Noam Chomsky, whose name is badly blackened by this latest tranche of documents, certainly was not; it is not very much the outlook of Steve Bannon either, who is also a recurring presence in all this. My feeling is merely that Epstein and his core group of financial and political contacts found them 'interesting'. They had bit parts to play, like the intellectuals and musicians invited to the salon of Madame Verdurin in Marcel Proust's novel, *In search of lost time*. Just like Verdurin's downwardly-mobile professors and shiftier pianists, they were viewed essentially as consumer objects by the hosts, Epstein and Maxwell.

The trouble is that there were other 'consumables' hanging around, too: armies of very young women, procured by Maxwell, and probably by Jean-Luc Brunel (an odious French model agency owner and likely pimp and rapist, now dead), and in due course by some of the girls themselves. This was no hidden thing: Jeffrey, again, was a generous man, who liked to share his good fortune with his friends.

Many of the women allege that they were abused sexually by these friends; all such allegations are hotly denied, and certainly none have been proven to a criminal standard in court. There have been out-of-court settlements, including on the part of Andrew. But, taken together, it seems highly probable that Epstein acted as a pimp, and a pimp of teenagers at that. In one of the new emails, he promises to introduce Mountbatten-Windsor to a smoking-hot Russian 26-year-old - all's fair between consenting adults, we assume. But for Epstein to have such 'services' on hand rather suggests that he was prostituting women as readily as he was writing cheques for thousands of dollars.

Impunity

The general air of befuddlement on the part of Epstein's friends, as the scandal has dragged ever onwards, is unmistakable. The explanation that springs to mind is pretty simple: these men move in circles in which, along with the high-end champagne and artisanal vol-au-vents, female flesh is more or less available on tap. Billionaires and their favoured political proxies enjoy a measure of impunity in such matters. Indeed, Marx and Engels referred to a similar phenomenon in the *Manifesto* almost two centuries ago (although it was altogether tamer in its content):

For the rest, nothing is more ridiculous than the virtuous indignation of our bourgeois at the community of women, which, they pretend, is to be openly and officially established by the communists. The communists have no need to introduce a community of women: it has existed almost from time immemorial. Our bourgeois, not content with having wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal, not to speak of common prostitutes, take the greatest pleasure in seducing each other's wives.

When details leak out to the public square, things are quickly hushed up

by the application of large amounts of money. There is simply no playbook for a scandal of this sort that *cannot* be buried, one that has become a political third rail.

If there is a political lesson in all this, it precisely concerns this impunity, illuminated by its momentary failure as if by a lightning flash. There are other politically relevant details, but these are not central. For example, it is clear that Epstein had close links to the intelligence world, American and Israeli, and indeed perhaps had done so from a very early stage in his life (he was hired, despite woeful lack of qualifications, to teach at the elite Dalton prep school by sometime Office for Strategic Services agent Donald Barr).

Yet there is nothing terrifically surprising about close links between the secret state and the business elite. Otherwise, what would Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo have to write about? Indeed, Marxist theory has wrestled with the question of the state and its relationship to class power as long as such a theory has existed - as has a great deal of bourgeois social science.

The questions posed by such research, and the answers proposed to those questions, are all somewhat abstract - they must be, in order to be any use. Any relationship between state and capital must, to be sure, ultimately find expression in specific, singular relationships between individual people representative of those institutions. Theory does not obviate the need for historical research into these singularities - nothing else could verify or refute theory, after all. But historical research - especially of the 'parapolitical' style - cannot substitute for theory.

Over-interpretation of Epstein's intelligence links has led to a regrettable renewal of conspiracy theorising on the left, on a scale unseen since the heyday of 9/11 trutherism. It is a temptation because we are confronted, precisely, with a *conspiracy* of very powerful men; but we must confront also the possibility that it is no grander a conspiracy than

it appears to be - a matter of back-scratching and mutual favours among the elite, a small and squalid affair in the end. What if Epstein's interest in Mandelson is no more than it appears to be this week: an opportunity to make a quick buck off secret documents from a well-placed friend? What in Epstein's personality demands we believe it is anything more?

There are, of course, really high-political conspiracies - think of Operation Gladio, *Propaganda due* and all that, for example. But even these can only be properly understood in relation to the class struggle, the system of subordination between countries called imperialism, and so forth (or some alternative set of higher categories).

Despair

To suppose that world history really is just a tissue of elite conspiracies is question-begging: so how did the elites get to be elites, anyway? Turtles all the way down? But it is also a counsel of despair. There can be no way out of such a succession of plots by the powerful: any attempt results in a new elite, with depressingly familiar appetites.

This is amply demonstrated by the ineffectual character of the Epstein revelations. Yes, interest in the case may have been successfully exploited by Donald Trump; but, of course, he is implicated too, and now he tries to squash it. The Democrats exploit it now to embarrass Trump - and will forget it if they regain power, because it implicates the Clintons and many influential donors. With this conspiracy laid bare, we finally have a test case for what happens if the truth of such a plot is finally unveiled, all the names named. And the answer is ... nothing of much consequence. It is fun to see Mandelson squirm, but he is no great man of history, and will be replaced by other fixers and operatives in bourgeois politics. Andrew's downfall - despite republican wishcasting - will not bring the house of Windsor down with it.

Conspiracy obsession is a messianism without a messiah. The day will come when all is unveiled, but what then? Who *acts* on the consequence of the unveiling? It may seem preposterous that anyone could have thought that *Donald Trump* would clean this up, but he was the available man on horseback, and some such agent is required to make good on the promise of liberation. For Marxists, the agent of change is the working class; but it can achieve its destiny only if it knows that the conspirators, as much as their victims, are subject to laws beyond their control - in short, only if it abjures conspiracy theory as an explanatory mechanism *per se*. Rather, conspiracies are objects to be explained.

We must face the likely reality that, but for future scholarship and perhaps a few more random defenestrations of embarrassing figures, the Epstein saga is essentially played out. What is still on the table is the future - a future that, absent the destruction of the power of the bourgeoisie, is certain to involve more naked corruption and unpunished depravity of the same sort ●

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LABOUR

While the vultures circle

Even before the election has taken place, Gorton and Denton is being touted as another humiliating blow for Labour and yet another triumph for Reform. **Eddie Ford** is not convinced. True, Sir Keir is on the ropes in parliament, but expect tactical voting

Nobody knows who will win the Gorton and Denton by-election on February 26, and that is exactly the point, when it comes to political calculations. Andy Burnham had to throw his hat into the ring if he wanted to retain any credibility as a potential alternative to Keir Starmer, otherwise he would be branded as a coward. He is the 'king of the north', after all, with Gorton and Denton at the heart of his Manchester empire, where he rules as mayor.

But equally Starmer had to block Burnham, and was always going to, with deputy leader Lucy Powell, also from Manchester, the only one on the 10-strong NEC panel supporting him - Shabana Mahmood, home secretary and NEC chair, abstained. Whatever we were told, the decision had nothing to do with the expense of running an election campaign for a new mayor in Manchester, or nonsense like that - it was down to *politics*, to state the obvious.

Yes, Starmer could have called Burnham's bluff. But precisely as we do not know what the election result will be, we could have had a situation where Andy Burnham enters the Gorton and Denton race, has to stand down as mayor of Manchester - and loses the by-election and finds himself out in the cold. That would be bad news for the Labour Party collectively too.

Now, Starmer might have thought - oh well, if that happens then one less bastard to think of. There is no way to know how seriously he takes the press talk of Burnham being a rival to his throne, if not an heir apparent. And with the Peter Mandelson scandal the vultures are circling: Not only Andy Burnham, but Wes Streeting, Angela Rayner, Lucy Powell ... and others besides.

Taking a hit

But when it comes to the king of the north, Starmer seems to have calculated that it is worthwhile taking a hit by putting a spoke in the wheel of Burnham's ambitions (for the moment). His action caused some 50 Labour MPs to sign a letter objecting to the decision to block Burnham, saying the move was a "real gift" to Reform - though you could say the same about him standing down as mayor of Manchester. But, of course, Sir Keir runs the risk of actually taking a double hit, as it was obviously *him* who blocked Burnham and, if Labour still loses Gorton and Denton, that would generate the inevitable recrimination: if only he had selected the high-profile mayor of Manchester as candidate, then the result would have been different.

Burnham, naturally enough, said he was "disappointed" that his bid to become MP was blocked and curtly remarked that the fact that the media was informed of the NEC decision before he was "tells you everything you need to know about the way the Labour Party is being run these days". Things getting nasty: a cabinet member anonymously briefed *The Times* that Burnham has "been handed everything on a plate for his whole career" and is now angry because people "won't make way for his second coming" - adding that "it's typical Andy".

The selected Labour candidate, Angeliki Stogia, is a "local girl" who has been a Manchester councillor representing Whalley Range since



Sir Keir's rivals are looking for their kill

2012. Yes, Burnham would have been more high-profile, but perhaps Stogia could be just as popular. For his part, Starmer is saying the by-election will be a referendum on "true patriotism" and arguing that only Labour can defeat the "poisonous division" of Reform UK. Indeed, he has presented the by-election as a straightforward two-horse race between Labour and Reform - exactly the strategy favoured by Morgan McSweeney, his embattled chief of staff. Scare the horses into voting Labour by brandishing the threat of Reform and Nigel Farage - him or us.

Never looking a gift horse in the mouth, the Labour leader has taken advantage of the fact that Tommy Robinson has endorsed Matt Goodwin as the Reform candidate, despite Farage declaring the anti-Islam agitator *persona non grata* (even though he has received Elon Musk's seal of approval, reinstating his X account!).

An academic who is now a GB News presenter, Goodwin recently caused uproar by making the explicitly ethno-nationalist statement that people born in the UK from minority backgrounds are not necessarily British, as it "takes more than a piece of paper to make somebody 'British'".² Robinson's intervention prompted a Labour spokesperson to say that "the stakes couldn't be higher" for the February 26 contest, as we have just been shown who Goodwin "really is and what he stands for".

Jeremy Corbyn and others are saying the most important thing is defeating "fascism". The SWP and its latest popular front, Together, is saying essentially the same thing. Of course, Reform is not fascist. So how to defeat Reform in Gorton and Denton? No unambiguous answer is forthcoming from either quarter. Others, though, say vote Green.

But on current polling they are not in the running ... and Labour will be urging tactical voting - well, yes: defeat Reform. At the last general election, Labour's Andrew Gwynne - whose resignation due to "significant ill-health" triggered the by-election - got 50.8% of the vote on 18,555 votes, with Reform getting 14.1% on 5,142, and the Greens 13.2% on 4,810.³

While Reform has a consistent lead over Labour in the *national* polls, the picture is a bit different in Gorton and Denton with a poll last week putting

Reform on 30%, Labour 27% and the Greens in a poor third with 17% (with the Tories way down on 6%).⁴

Hollie Ridley, Labour's general secretary, went further last week by declaring that the suggestion the Greens could win in Gorton and Denton was "bollocks", and various party figures have repeatedly emphasised that the Greens have no presence in the constituency - no councillors and no data. Obviously, we are in the midst of a huge propaganda war and it is difficult to discern the facts on the ground, but clearly Starmer has made an entirely conscious political decision: to throw all Labour has got at Gorton and Denton, reminiscent of the 2021 Batley and Spen by-election - another time when Starmer felt engaged in a high stakes game, maybe even had his leadership at risk, and threw everything at getting Kim Leadbetter over the line.⁵

As for the Greens, they have selected Hannah Spencer as their candidate - for all of the stupid talk from some about the Manchester-born Zack Polanski standing. That was never going to happen! Being the great leader of the Greens, dreaming of greater things, he wants a shoo-in of a constituency - not run the risk of losing to Labour or Reform and coming third. He is going to bide his time.

Critical

OK, what is the position of the CPGB? Nominations are now closed and there are 11 candidates. George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain stated that it had taken the "difficult decision" not to contest the by-election despite coming fourth in the general election with 10.3% of the vote, declaring that if Labour loses, Starmer must resign!⁶ Your Party, having no structure or proper branches, is not standing either. Logic and electoral arithmetic would therefore suggest a Labour vote ... though the Communist League is standing Hugo Wilis. The CL split from the shadowy Socialist Action in 1988 and has historically tailed the US Socialist Workers Party (today it is pro-Israel, condemns the BDS campaign as anti-Semitic and defends Ukraine from Russian 'imperialism').

We would certainly argue against backing the Greens on class terms, as it is a thoroughly petty-bourgeois party which could sharply swing back

to the right - its origins lying in a small group of businessmen inspired by Malthusian overpopulation theorist Paul R Ehrlich.⁷ It is quite legitimate to call for a *critical* vote for Labour - that would obviously have nothing to do with Starmer and the leadership, but rather the nature of Labour as a bourgeois workers' party - that is still the case despite Blair's counter reformation and the ditching of the old clause four.

Apparently, Angela Rayner, former deputy leader, has accumulated a million-pound "war chest" in so-called "firm pledges" to mount a leadership contest, and is "ready to go".⁸ This is not just tittle-tattle, as there is definitely a Labour left in *formation*, even if it is a rightwing one (!), but there you are. Andy Burnham. Angela Rayner, Lucy Powell, and you can bolt on the Socialist Campaign Group to that - this is what constitutes the left at the current period, in parliamentary

terms.

Yet, despite Mandelson, there is no contest at the moment, of course. Burnham is not an MP and Rayner is not even in the cabinet - rather, she had to resign because she was found guilty of violating the ministerial code by underpaying stamp duty.⁹ Then there was all the stuff about petty corruption, involving dresses, power suits, personal shoppers, a holiday flat in New York and so on. If she did challenge the leadership, the press would have a field day. So the idea that Angela Rayner or even Andy Burnham are saviours for a Labour Party mired in the polling doldrums is nonsense.

We have to ask - why are people going to Reform? No, it is not a trick question: it is because they are *dissatisfied*. Yet SWP comrades at the Palestine demonstration at the weekend handing out "Together - love, not hate" flyers for March 28 with backing provided by the likes of Sir Lenny Henry, Paloma Faith, Paul Weller, Leigh-Anne Pinnock, Greenpeace and Amnesty International - pass the sick bucket, please.

That is not the way to stop Reform. We must raise our horizons, chart a new course and organise, organise and organise - on the basis of independent working class politics ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. theguardian.com/politics/2026/jan/30/gorton-and-denton-labour-reform-candidate-matthew-goodwin-tommy-robinson-endorsement.
2. theguardian.com/politics/2026/jan/27/matthew-goodwin-gorton-and-denton-reform-uk-minorities.
3. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gorton_and_Denton.
4. pollcheck.co.uk/by-elections/gorton-denton.
5. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Batley_and_Spen_by-election.
6. bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crkprgvd0no.
7. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Party_(UK).
8. dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15516265/Angela-Rayner-secures-war-chest-Keir-former-deputy-PMs.html.
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Fighting fund

No let-up

Well done, comrades - you did it again! Yes, I'm talking about reaching that (occasionally elusive) monthly fighting fund target of £2,750.

Of course, as I said last week, we were only £32 short with a couple of days still to go, but five of our readers and supporters did us proud! Thank you, first of all, comrade BK, who donated a fantastic £100, as well as AG (£50), BH (£25), JD and MD (£10 each). Those five payments - all made by standing order or bank transfer - came to £195, taking the January final total up to £2,913. In other words, an extra £163 over and above the target into the *Weekly Worker* coffers!

So now let's see if we can keep up the good work in February. And, I have to say, we've made a pretty good start. With only four days gone, we've already received a very useful £547. Donations include another £100 contribution from comrade AC, while comrade

JM went £10 further! Other transfers/standing orders came from LC (£50), BO (£35), MM (£31), CG (£30), RG (£25), LM (£24), DL and MT (£20), CP (£16), AN and BG (£15), RM (£13), RP (£12), MM (£11) and finally DI (£10). On top of that, both TM and JN transferred a fiver to us using PayPal.

So now, as I say, we've got off to a good start - but, don't forget, there are only 28 days in February, so I'm not taking anything for granted! Please play your part if you can - I can't tell you how much we rely on your support, but there are all sorts of ways you can contribute to our fighting fund. Go to the address below to get more details ●

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

YOUR PARTY

Our politics needs light

Corbyn's clique does not recognise branches, refuses to release membership data, holds fake consultations, insists on secret meetings, demands confidentiality and is unable to issue a clear, unambiguous political statement on Gorton and Denton - all reasons why socialists should support the Grassroots Left, says **Carla Roberts**

Current Your Party leadership elections, and the coming by-election in Manchester, sadly show the deep trouble Your Party is in - and how the Corbyn clique continues to treat the organisation as their own fiefdom.

Jeremy Corbyn and Karie Murphy invited "representatives" from the various Manchester YP branches to discuss putting up an electoral challenge. Also there was the newly formed 'members oversight committee' - which has suddenly come into existence (more on that below).

Alas, it turns out that most of these "representatives" were at the meeting without the knowledge of their branch. Why? In the run-up to the meeting, Karie Murphy had approached the 'Greater Manchester branches network', invited one delegate from each branch - and swore them to absolute secrecy. Incredibly, most of them seem to have agreed to that outrageous demand. Why shouldn't members know about this meeting and its outcome? Such demands for 'confidentiality' serve the bureaucracy, not the membership.

Some of 'delegates' tried to square that particular circle by asking their branch, via WhatsApp, what the members' position would be on standing a candidate - but without explaining that they would take the view to a meeting with Corbyn himself. Other branches, who hadn't yet sent a delegate to that 'branches network', only heard about the meeting afterwards. Needless to say, the majority of YP members in Manchester are absolutely fuming, and understandably so.

The decision not to stand a YP candidate is hardly surprising. Despite inviting 'representatives' from branches, officially HQ maintains that these don't really exist. This is blatantly untrue, of course. Hundreds of branches have been meeting up and down the country - but they have no way of influencing what HQ is doing. The Corbyn clique has entirely sidelined them ever since the launch conference. They get no funds, no access to the data, no organisational support and certainly no response to emails. Branches were not allowed to elect delegates to the launch conference or even submit motions or send amendments. HQ has been running the show entirely top-down, without democratic norms, let alone transparency.

Stop fascism?

Having said that, there are over 1,200 YP members in Manchester (we know this from the temporary data breach) and we understand that many of the most active members across Manchester were keen to stand a socialist candidate, in the hope of using the election to turn things around. Some wanted YP to support Counterfire member Tony Wilson, who is currently leading a strike at Transport for Greater Manchester. He had been musing about standing.

A majority at a YP meeting of members in Gorton and Denton, however, decided that they do not have the capacity to stand (understandable, given the current condition of YP). However, they also came out in favour of supporting the Green candidate, Hannah Spencer. The branch had not met for many months - and there was a grand total of nine people present.



Zack Polanski: promoted by Ash Sarkar of Novara Media

Seven voted in favour of offering "tactical support for the Greens".

Supporting the Greens is a mistake in our view - but it certainly reflects the widespread view that the Green Party is some sort of semi-socialist organisation, thanks to the left talking Zack Polanski. The official YP statement is pretty mealy-mouthed about what it wants members to do - but manages to go against the views of the members in Gorton and Denton, as well as those in wider Manchester:

The single greatest threat to this country right now is a far-right Reform government. This danger is being actively facilitated by a failing Labour government which is prioritising the interests of the rich and powerful over ordinary people struggling to make ends meet. Your Party is currently holding our first leadership elections, after which the work of formally constituting branches will begin.

In this context, after consultation with local members, we do not believe that a Your Party candidacy would serve our collective goals in this by-election. It is imperative that Reform is defeated in Gorton and Denton and the far-right tide is beaten back. To that end, we will actively mobilise against the far-right, even as we continue to build a mass party that can elect socialist and anti-war candidates across the country.¹

The statement is as ambiguous as it is lame - it emphasises how impotent the party really is under its current, unelected, leadership. We much prefer the statement put out by the Grassroots Left:

Gorton and Denton by-election should have had a principled socialist candidate on the ballot.

Your Party members should have been allowed to democratically elect a candidate and branches should have been recognised months ago. Grassroots Left members on the CEC [central executive committee] will fight to immediately recognise Your Party branches and hand over local data and resources, so that such situations cannot be repeated. Grassroots Left will not lend unconditional support to the Green Party candidate, because the Greens are a pro-capitalist, pro-Nato party and have been enforcing cuts in councils all over the country.

We could quibble about some of the formulations in what is clearly a statement written by a committee, but in general it sums up the correct approach. The fact that there is no socialist on the ballot and that some think they have to support the Greens is down to the failure of the Corbyn clique to build the party and allow the branches to flourish.

Zarah Sultana has produced an additional, personal statement, in which she calls for "critical support" to Hannah Spencer "and the Green Party".² Contrary to what some leftist train-spotters believe, Sultana does not disagree with the GL statement, but wanted to go further. As the majority of members of both GL's CEC slate committee (which comprises all organisations involved in agreeing the slate's programme and its candidates) and our CEC campaign team disagreed with coming out for a vote for the Greens, she put out her own statement.

That is, of course, her right: the Grassroots Left is, after all, an alliance, not a sect. Though we must say, we much prefer the Zarah Sultana who stresses why we should *not* go soft on the Greens: "We are a class-

based party", she has said, and, unlike the Greens, Your Party should be an "explicitly socialist party: on many questions - when it comes to Nato, when it comes to our relationship with Israel, when we're talking about not overseeing austerity in local governments - we have different positions."³

Green Party

Quite right. Yes, there are many thousands of people who think of themselves as socialists who have joined the Green Party, mainly because they are fed up with the dithering Corbyn and they like Polanski's slick social media campaigns. But they are deluding themselves. The Greens remain a thoroughly pro-capitalist party, based politically on the petty bourgeoisie. We should point that out over and over again, especially as the Greens have been sucking in tens of thousands of people who would have joined Your Party, if it were not dysfunctional.

At the end of her statement, Sultana explains why she thinks a vote for the Greens is justified: "Ultimately, defeating fascism has to be our number one priority." We think this suffers from the same anti-Reform panic as the YP statement. The next general election is scheduled for August 2029. Even if Matthew Goodwin wins the seat for Reform, it is highly unlikely that Starmer would either resign or call for a snap election.

In fact, logically, it would make most sense for YP to call for a *vote for Labour* in Gorton and Denton, if the main imperative is to "defeat Reform". According to the latest polls, Reform are at about 36%, Labour at 33% and the Greens at between 17% and 20% - though all that might change.

We would also seriously dispute Sultana's implication that Reform constitutes a fascist party. Rightwing,

populist, nasty, dangerous - all true. As shown by the 1920s, 30s and 40s, fascism is something rather different. Today fascism is not knocking on the door. Our priority should not be to 'defeat Reform', but to build a serious working class party that can present a *real* alternative to this rotten system.

Members oversight

Readers might remember that the 'members oversight committee' was dreamed up by the Corbyn clique in response to the Socialist Unity Platform preparing an emergency motion for the launch conference, which would have seen the *election* of a group of returning officers to oversee the leadership elections. Instead, Murphy and co slipped into the final draft of their *One year strategy guide* this little paragraph, which, like most other rules, could not be amended or challenged:

For the short period between the founding conference and the election of the first CEC in February, a new members oversight committee, consisting of five ordinary members selected by sortition from the whole membership, is in the process of being established.⁴

Well, it took them about seven weeks to get it set up, but it now exists. Who are those five? Nobody knows. We do know somebody, however, who is *not* on that committee. Let's call her Elsie. She got a phone call from a certain Karie Murphy a few weeks ago, congratulating her on having been picked by sortition. Would she want to take up the job? So far, so acceptable - just.

They had a nice conversation in which Elsie asked a few, quite possibly too awkward, questions about what kind of powers that committee would have. She also let slip that she is a member of a small Trotskyist group called Workers Power. Karie didn't seem to mind that at all and the two carried on having a nice chat, after which Karie promised to send Elsie all the relevant details about her appointment.

Readers can probably guess the end of that story by now. Karie never called again. Elsie texted Karie, but got no reply. She even tried calling, but Karie would not pick up. Elsie has clearly been de-sortitioned because of her political views.

What about the committee members who have been deemed safe enough? How can we contact them to find out if they think things are being done 'properly' at HQ? Where are their reports? Do they agree with the YP statement on the by-election, for example? Perhaps they thought, like others in Manchester, that Your Party *should* stand a candidate? Where are the minutes of their meeting?

There aren't any, of course. It is an entirely secret body. And who oversees the overseers? Certainly not Your Party members •

Notes

1. [x.com/thisisourparty/status/2018408817923342594](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BhZBXUjYg).
2. [x.com/zarahsultana/status/2018741842729177106/photo/1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BhZBXUjYg).
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OUR HISTORY



Old tactics given new form

General strikes and insurrection

Marking the centenary of the 1926 General Strike, **Jack Conrad** looks at Russia's 1905 'dress rehearsal'. Following Bloody Sunday, the revolution took the form of mass demonstrations, general strikes, peasant uprisings, the formation of soviets and armed barricade fighting

Russia's first revolution started on January 9 1905 - a cold and terrible Sunday.¹ Partially through stupidity, partially through premeditated plan, tsarist troops were ordered to open fire on the huge march led by the Orthodox priest (and Okhrana dupe) Gregory Apollonovich Gapon. Pushed on by disgust with the futile Russo-Japanese war, economic deprivation and, beginning with the giant Putilov factory, a series of strikes in St Petersburg, he had intended submitting a half-humble and, because of socialist agitation, a half-threatening petition to the 'little father' in his Winter Palace.

Signed by some 135,000 working people, it listed a whole gamut of economic grievances, but included high politics too: workshops open to "draughts, rain and snow", excessive overtime, the eight-hour day, the withdrawal of the navy from abroad, land reform, separation of church and state and, crucially, convening a constituent assembly elected by "universal, secret and equal suffrage" - "our principle request". In its final peroration the famous petition ominously stated that there were only "two paths": one leading to "liberty and happiness, the other to the tomb".² Tsarism horrifically proved it was the path to the tomb. In the hail of bullets hundreds of men, women and children died, thousands more were injured.³

Gapon all of a sudden found himself world-famous. From afar his mix of Ezekiel and Marx made him appear to be some sort of new age prophet. After he smuggled himself out of Russia, Gapon was commissioned by publishers Chapman and Hall to write his life story - for a "very considerable sum".⁴ It went through repeated editions. Georgy Plekhanov and Vladimir Lenin welcomed him, when he came to Switzerland; Peter Kropotkin and Rudolph Rocker, when he came to London. The Second International's Bureau in Brussels even published his appeal calling for an end to the "chaos of divisions and conflicts that disrupt the socialist camp" in Russia (he was close to the Socialist Revolutionaries). Interestingly, Karl Kautsky - he became something of an honorary Bolshevik - strongly objected. What does "Pope Gapon"

know about socialism, let alone the basis for socialist unity?⁵ It is worth adding, after he returned to Russia, in late 1905, Gapon was executed by three members of the SR's combat organisation - he had revealed his links with the secret police.

Gapon was never going to be anything more than a historical footnote. Even while his "halo of indignation" dazzled progressive opinion in the west and his "pastor's curses" rained down on tsar Nicholas II's head, the two big factions of Russian social democracy, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, had already won the ear of the urban masses.⁶ Soon they were to exert a decisive influence.

Rolling strikes

January 9 provoked popular outrage and, spreading out from St Petersburg, a rolling series of strikes: Moscow, Warsaw, Lodz, Kiev, Baku, Finland, the Baltic states ... nationwide. One million workers took part, without any guiding strategy - in many cases without advancing any clear demands. Stopping, starting, "obedient only to the instinct of solidarity", for almost two months the "strike ruled the land".⁷

Of course, Gapon did not create this extraordinary revolutionary energy: he merely served to unleash what had been latent at least since the 1880s. In fact, Bloody Sunday destroyed all Gapon's plans, exposed them as totally inadequate, totally illusory. You cannot peacefully persuade an absolute monarchy to usher in a democratic republic: no matter how many signatures you collect, no matter how many you mobilise onto the streets, no matter how many you get to take strike action.

Unsurprisingly, Lenin suffered from no such misconceptions. From his Swiss exile, writing in late January 1905, he celebrated events in Russia as being of "the greatest historical importance". Workers in every country will find inspiration and be spurred on. Because of January 9, Russia's workers had been propelled into the global vanguard. They had, Lenin proclaimed, "received a momentous lesson in civil war; the revolutionary education of the proletariat made more progress in one day than it could have

made in months and years of drab, humdrum, wretched existence".

Lenin called upon his fellow social democrats in Russia to spread the news about the St Petersburg events. He called for "revolutionary committees" in every factory, every city, every village. Above all, Lenin called for the "arming of the people" - that is the "immediate task of the revolutionary moment." Only an armed people could defend the strikes from police and army attack. Only an armed people could split the police and army and bring them over to the side of the revolution - a revolution which, having overthrown tsarism, proclaims the "immediate convocation of a Constituent Assembly".⁸

A spontaneous general strike wave such as January and February 1905 could only but exhaust itself. No strike pay, no state benefits, no accumulated personal savings. Nor, without the hegemony provided by the party, is there any ability to think collectively in strategic terms. Therefore, no positive culmination.

The revolutionary situation, however, continued unabated. Breaking out here as peasant revolt, there as sailors' mutiny, and in every city as street demonstrations and clashes with police and troops, the decisive moment was coming. The October general strike was the herald. Beginning as an economic strike at Sytin's print works in Moscow and spreading to bakers, tobacco workers, furniture makers, metal workers, tram drivers, and railway workers, things quickly fanned out nationally. Just as quickly it became unmistakably political: 'Down with the tsar's government', 'Long live the democratic republic'. At its height there were some two million out on strike. Strike committees came together, at Menshevik initiative, to establish workers' councils or soviets - organs of struggle - and, as Lenin was soon to appreciate, "embryonic forms of a new revolutionary authority".⁹ St Petersburg and Moscow being the most important.

What was unconscious had, like the human embryo, become conscious nine months after conception. The religious banners and anthems were gone and replaced by red flags and singing the *Workers' Marseillaise*.

Now, there were no illusions in the tsar. Now, the revolution looked, not to the liberal bourgeoisie as allies, but the peasant masses. Now, the call for general strike was *combined* with *preparation* for armed uprising. Responsibility for this qualitative shift rested primarily with the RSDLP's Bolshevik wing.

To organise and make effective the sudden release of revolutionary energy, Lenin had quite rightly, almost straightaway, demanded the opening up of the party and mass recruitment, especially of young workers. That did not mean rejecting as wrong ideas of building the revolutionary party outlined in his celebrated 1902 pamphlet *What is to be done?* The party would still be built and directed top-down. But now centralism was to be complemented and completed with mass initiative and democracy from below. Soon the party - first the Mensheviks, shortly afterwards the Bolsheviks - adopted the term 'democratic centralism'. Perhaps a borrowing from Germany where the SDP rejected the previous model of directly elected 'labour dictators' and sought to exert control over Reichstag and other such deputies.¹⁰ Democratic centralism had nothing whatsoever to do with imposing some suffocating conformity and silencing awkward minorities: rather elections at every level, unity in action and accountability.

The fact of the matter is that objective circumstances had radically changed. The enemy's defences had been breached, its forces were in disarray and those of the workers in rapid advance. Tsarism could no longer rule in the old way. With every month that passed the party grew in leaps and bounds.¹¹ Exiles returned from Britain, Switzerland, France and Siberia as popular heroes. The tsar's October manifesto was a watershed moment: it promised civil liberties, freedom of assembly, made provision for indirect elections to the duma and somewhat relaxed censorship laws. Enough for mainstream liberal opinion. Nicholas II feared for the collapse of his regime.

Subsequently, the Mensheviks legally published the daily *Nachalo* in St Petersburg (Leon Trotsky contributed). Other Menshevik papers

included *Rassavet* and *Voprosy Dnya*. The Bolsheviks had *Novaya Zhizn* (Maxim Gorky helped out with the finances). Circulation ranged from between 50,000 to 80,000. Lenin took over as editor when he returned from Switzerland in November 1905. Despite the liberalisation of censorship, 15 of its 27 issues were confiscated before it was finally suppressed in December 1905.

Bolshevik strategy

Let us take the argument forward by going back to the actual theoretical foundations of the Bolshevik programme. From the outset - yes, since the Emancipation of Labour Group was established in 1883 - Russian Marxists (eg, Georgy Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich and Pavel Axelrod) were agreed: the country was not yet ripe for socialism - if by that one meant working class rule, leaving behind commodity production and the transition to the communist principle of 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their need'. The autocratic state, lack of capitalist development, domination of the economy by a woefully backward peasant agriculture - all that explains why the coming Russian revolution was conceived by all Marxists (Trotsky being no exception) as having two stages: the first, anti-tsarist, anti-feudal and democratic; the second, working class and socialist.

It was the anarchists and narodniks, and following them the SRs, who raised the slogan of socialist revolution - what exactly they meant by 'socialism' being a moot point. Either way, the call for a socialist revolution earned Lenin's withering scorn. In 1905 he writes: "Only the most ignorant people can ignore the bourgeois nature of the democratic revolution which is now taking place."¹² Note, the SRs, formed in 1902, advocated a programme that included the "expropriation of capitalist property and the reorganisation of production and the entire social system on socialist foundations"¹³ - in truth a utopian peasant socialism. Yet, though attracting a very considerable popular base, above all in rural areas, the SRs placed their hopes - well, at least initially - not, as might be expected, on waging a protracted guerrilla struggle,

but on individual terrorism and the assassination of tsarist officials.

What of the Mensheviks? They were committed to a theory of stages which inevitably resulted in tailism. According to the Mensheviks, the overthrow of tsarism had to be crowned by the class rule of the bourgeoisie and, in the best-case scenario, a western-style parliamentary constitution. It should be added that the ‘Menshevik’ label united an amorphous collection of factions, groups and trends - there were, for example, sceptics on the left, such as Jules Martov, who had no faith in the bourgeoisie playing its ascribed “revolutionary role” nor in its democratic credentials.¹⁴ Nevertheless, in step with the growth of capitalism, there is working class growth too. Eventually the peasantry is eclipsed in population terms. The working class becomes the majority. Only then does socialism come onto the agenda - a Menshevik proposition which owes more to sociology than Marxism.

No to power

Hence, in the midst of the 1905 revolution, the Mensheviks agreed (specifically in a conference resolution of April-May), that the working class and its party “must not aim at seizing or sharing power in the provisional government, but must remain the party of the extreme revolutionary opposition”.¹⁵ So, for *mainstream* Menshevik thinking, the immediate task of the working class was to align itself with the liberal bourgeoisie and edge, push or lift its party or parties into their predetermined position as leaders of the anti-tsarist revolution.

Participation in a revolutionary government was explicitly ruled out (obviously subject to a violent reversal after the collapse of tsarism in 1917). Why non-participation? Firstly, if the working class succumbed to the temptation of power, it would cause the bourgeoisie to “recoil from the revolution and diminish its sweep”.¹⁶ Secondly, without an already established European socialism, the working class party in Russia would be unable to meet the economic demands of its social base. Failure to deliver far-going changes would produce demoralisation, confusion and defeat.

If the anti-tsarist revolution proved successful, the workers’ party should, argued the Mensheviks, exit the centre stage, so as to allow the bourgeoisie to assume power. Obeying the ‘laws of history’, the workers’ party would then patiently wait in the wings until capitalism had carried out its preordained historic mission of developing the forces of production. Hence, for the Mensheviks, there had to be two, necessarily distinct, revolutions - the one separated from the other by a definite historical period.

What of the Bolsheviks? Lenin presented their strategy of “uninterrupted revolution” most fully in the pamphlet, *Two tactics of social democracy*.¹⁷ Written in Geneva over June-July, it was first published in Switzerland and then smuggled into Russia. There were multiple editions: eg, the Moscow committee of the RSDLP(B) printed 10,000 copies. This was a seminal work that mapped out the strategy which allowed the Bolsheviks first to lead the “whole people” for a democratic republic (eg, October 1917), and then “all the toilers and exploited” for socialism.¹⁸ The Bolshevik version of permanent revolution.

Incidentally, too often comrades who should know better identify permanent revolution exclusively with the name, Leon Trotsky. Of course, the phrase long predates him, going back to the “literature of the French Revolution”.¹⁹ From there it spread far and wide, becoming a common “programmatic slogan” of European radicals, socialists and

communists, including Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.²⁰ And, as Hal Draper helpfully explains, for Marx the word ‘permanent’ in ‘permanent revolution’ describes a situation where there is “more than one stage or phase” in the revolutionary process. He usefully adds that the expression “retains its specifically French and Latin meaning”. It does not mean perpetual or never-ending. It is employed by Marx to convey the idea of “continuity, uninterrupted”.²¹

Bearing this in mind, consider Lenin: “We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop halfway.”²² He wants to take the anti-tsarist revolution to the socialist stage through a process that does not halt at some artificial boundary. No, the Bolsheviks will take the revolution forward both from below and above.

While not including socialist measures in their minimum programme - shared, of course, in its first, 1903, form with the Mensheviks - Lenin and the Bolsheviks were resolutely opposed to handing power to the bourgeoisie, as the Mensheviks insisted. The bourgeoisie in Russia was both cowardly and treacherous. Despite occasional leftist posturings, their parties sought a compromise with tsarism, not a people’s revolution against tsarism. Their ideal was a constitutional monarchy. Russia therefore had no Cromwell, no Washington, no Robespierre. The only force capable of scoring a *decisive victory* over tsarism and pushing through the most radical changes objective circumstances permitted was the proletariat ... in alliance with the peasant masses.

So, whereas for the Mensheviks the ‘vital forces’ of the coming revolution were the working class, the urban middle classes and the capitalist bourgeoisie (a minority bloc of three classes), for the Bolsheviks it was the working class and the peasantry (a majority bloc of two classes).

Naturally, because Russia was overwhelmingly a peasant country, the Bolsheviks paid particular attention to their agrarian programme and securing proletarian hegemony over the rural masses. To neatly illustrate the point, there are far more references to the condition of peasants than the condition of workers in Lenin’s *Collected works*. In fact, for the Bolsheviks, peasant interests set the limit on how far the revolution could go. Landlord power could certainly be destroyed and the land nationalised and given, according to their wishes, to the peasants. This ‘black redistribution’ was, of course, not a socialist measure. It would uproot Russia’s semi-feudal social relationships and allow capitalism in the countryside to develop along an “American path”.

Hybrid regime

The fact of the matter is that the Bolsheviks were determined that the anti-tsarist revolution would see the fulfilment of the party’s *entire* minimum programme. Such a hugely advanced package, centred on the democratic republic, could only be delivered by establishing a *revolutionary* government, which embodied the interests of the great mass of the population. Lenin used a famous algebraic formulation to capture the essence of the majoritarian regime envisaged by the Bolsheviks: the democratic (majority) dictatorship (decisive rule) of the proletariat and peasantry. Such a hybrid regime could not abolish classes and bring full liberation for the working class. That was impossible. Economically Russia would have to progress capitalistically - albeit under the armed rule of the working class and peasants. That meant the continuation of wage-labour, albeit with workers taking over abandoned factories, the nationalisation of banks, etc.²³

How long was the hybrid regime going to last? Lenin admitted the *possibility* of a return of the Bolsheviks to being a party of extreme opposition. Given that the worker-peasant regime was going to be committed to implementing the *full* minimum programme of the RSDLP, we surely must conclude that it was expected to be relatively long-lasting. Why? Far from it being envisaged as a mere prelude to the bourgeoisie assuming power - as bonehead leftists argue today - in reality the party of the militant working class was committed to its bloc of two classes winning elections to a constituent assembly and from that salient of power acting in the most decisive manner to spread the flame of revolution to Europe.

Lenin seems to have seriously contemplated war for the “purpose” of “taking” the revolution into Europe. One of his key slogans was for a “revolutionary army”.²⁴ Depending on their success in furthering the *world socialist revolution*, the Bolsheviks looked towards a purely working class government in Russia and embarking on specifically socialist tasks. Before that, though, because the tasks of the worker-peasant government included eliminating every last vestige of tsarism, enacting sweeping land reform, putting in place full democratic rights, defeating bourgeois counterrevolution ... and maybe even fighting a revolutionary war in Europe, that explains why such a regime would have been expected to last not a few brief months, but years.

Socialist Europe

My main argument, is, though, that the Bolsheviks were not committed to handing political power to the bourgeoisie, as the Mensheviks were. Of course, for the Bolsheviks, the international dimension was crucial. The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in Russia could not survive for any *extended* period in isolation. It would - it had to - “rouse Europe” to carry through the “socialist revolution”.²⁵ The United Socialist States of Europe would then, in turn, help Russia move in the direction of socialism (which requires definite material conditions in terms of the development of the productive forces). And a revolution uniting Europe and half of Asia had a realistic chance of successfully spreading to every corner of the globe.

Inevitably, there would, within Russia, be a differentiation between the proletarianised rural masses and the emerging class of capitalist farmers. But *not* necessarily a specifically socialist revolution: ie, the violent overthrow of the state. Put another way, for the Bolsheviks there would not necessarily be a democratic stage and then a socialist stage at the level of regime.

Democratic and socialist tasks are categorically distinct, premised as they are on different material, social and political conditions. But particular aspects can evolve and assume dominance. The revolution could, given favourable internal and external conditions, proceed *uninterruptedly* from democratic to socialist tasks through the proletariat fighting not only from below, but from above: ie, using state power. The revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry thereby *peacefully grows over* into the dictatorship (rule) of the working class. As the size, organisation and consciousness of the urban and rural working class grew, so would the strength of the workers’ party. The necessity of a coalition government would at some point disappear. The tasks of the maximum programme then decidedly come onto the agenda.

With weapons

There is theory ... and then there is life itself. With October’s general

strike, *preparation* for insurrection became a matter of urgent necessity. That meant *practically* arming the people. The Mensheviks objected: “We have to arm the workers, not with weapons, but first with the burning consciousness of the necessity of arming themselves.”

The Bolsheviks gave an excellent answer: “You regard Russian workers as little children, you want to ‘arm them with consciousness’; but that time has passed. They have the consciousness; now they need to be armed with rifles to strike at the tsar and the bourgeoisie.”²⁶ Yes, only an armed people could defend themselves and their new won freedoms. Only an armed people could look to the future with confidence.

Political strikes had once more broken out across the country. Soviets began to arm workers and students. However, the tsarist state made its preemptive strike. Police surrounded the Imperial Free Economic Society HQ, where the St Petersburg soviet met, and arrested between 250 and 300 delegates, including its chair, Leon Trotsky, and executive committee. In response the remaining revolutionary leadership in St Petersburg issued a call for a general strike. While there were walk-outs, the strikes in St Petersburg soon subsided. Class confidence had been deflated.

The revolutionary centre shifted to Moscow. Its Bolshevik-led soviet had been getting ready for months. Workplace meetings had declared for an uprising. Fraternisation with the local garrison produced a soldiers’ soviet. Party cells were established in the army, weapons illegally imported from abroad, workers instructed in their use. Fighting detachments were formed ... things were ready.

Though members of Moscow’s Bolshevik committee were likewise rounded up, the decision was made not to hold back. On December 7 the insurrection began. Key buildings were seized. Barricades webbed the city. Fighters stood not waiting behind them, but used barricades to block main roads and establish liberated zones. Operating in groups of three or four, guerrillas would attack police and army soldiers and quickly disappear into nearby buildings. Against enormous odds, but with the active support of its proletarian population, a couple of thousand guerrillas broke the grip of tsarism in Moscow for nine splendid days.²⁷

Other uprisings broke out in Krasnoyarsk, Motovilikha, Novorossisk, Sormovo, Sevastopol, Kronstadt, the Donbas, Georgia, Finland and Latvia. The Moscow garrison vacillated. Sadly nothing more. Having concluded a humiliating loser’s peace with Japan, the tsarist government managed to bring in substantial reinforcements. They were free of Bolshevik contamination. Officers gave instructions to spare no bullets and take no prisoners. Artillery was used to smash and blast barricades and buildings. Morale among the population began to wane. The guerrillas fought on. But, without St Petersburg, lacking an authoritative directing centre, the uprising faltered and began to break apart into a series of disconnected defensive actions. The initiative was lost - a fatal weakness. Moscow was crushed. Other outposts of the revolution soon followed.

There are, however, defeats which are more valuable than victories - December 1905 being one such instance. Marxism learns. Instead of fetishising particular forms of struggle - ie, economic strikes and street demonstrations - there is concrete analysis and innovative tactical flexibility. So, while it was always right for both the First and the Second International to reject the general strike as a social panacea - that is, the idea that capitalism can

be overthrown in one fell swoop through the ‘holy month’ - social democracy gave primacy to elections as providing the best means to build the party. A ‘state within the state’ that patiently awaits its revolutionary moment. Nonetheless, as an auxiliary tactic, social democracy took up the *political* general strike, not least as a means to effect the extension of popular suffrage (Belgium in 1891 and 1893 being well known examples on the left, but not, however, the SDP’s planned “strike for suffrage reform” in Prussia on the eve of World War I²⁸).

The Bolsheviks were no less creative. Having been rendered totally antiquated in the 19th century due to the army’s much improved artillery pieces, they reinvented the barricade as a means of struggle. Moscow “proved”, in Lenin’s words, that the “open armed struggle of the people is possible even against modern troops”.²⁹ Above all, though, the Bolsheviks successfully used the political general strike as a means of readying the working class for armed insurrection ●

Notes

1. Before February 1 1918 the Julian calendar was in use in Russia. This is 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar. Therefore January 9 in the Russia of 1905 corresponds to January 22, according to the calendar we use.
2. www.marxists.org/history/ussr/events/1905/workers-petition.htm.
3. Exact figures are impossible to arrive at because the tsarist authorities did their best to suppress them. The dead were secretly buried. Certainly though, the number of dead ran into the hundreds; the number of wounded into the thousands.
4. G Gapon *The story of my life* New York NY 1906.
5. K Kautsky ‘Gapon and socialism’ *The International Socialist Review* May 1905, Vol 5, No 11.
6. L Trotsky *1905*, Harmondsworth 1973, p93.
7. *Ibid* p98.
8. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 8, Moscow 1977, pp97, 99.
9. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 10, Moscow 1977, p155.
10. See B Lewis ‘Sources, streams and confluence’ *Weekly Worker* August 25 2016.
11. On the eve of the revolution, in January 1905, the Bolsheviks consisted of no more than 8,400 members. By the spring of 1906 membership of the reunited Russian Social Democratic Labour Party stood at 48,000, of whom 34,000 were Bolsheviks and 14,000 Mensheviks. In October of that year membership exceeded 70,000 and in 1907 the figures given at the London congress show that there were 84,000 members (that did not include the Bund, and the Polish and Lettish sections). The Bolsheviks were still the largest trend, with 46,000 supporters, compared to the Mensheviks’ 38,000 (figures quoted in M Liebman *Leninism under Lenin* London 1980, p47).
11. L Trotsky *1905* Harmondsworth 1973, p98.
12. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, pp28-29.
13. community.dur.ac.uk/a.k.harrington/srprog.html.
14. Z Galili *The Menshevik leaders in the Russian Revolution: social realities and political strategy* Princeton NJ 1989, p36.
15. Quoted in VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9 Moscow 1977, p245.
16. *Ibid* p128.
17. *Ibid* pp15-130.
18. *Ibid* pp114.
19. “Kautsky describes the policy of the *sans-culottes* in 1793-94 as one of ‘Revolution in Permanenz’” - quoted in RB Day and D Gaido (eds) *Witnesses to permanent revolution* Leiden 2009, p537.
20. H Draper *Karl Marx’s theory of revolution* Vol 2, New York 1978, p204.
21. *Ibid* p201. Marx’s most famous use of ‘permanent revolution’ can be found in his 1850 ‘Address of the Central Authority of the Communist League’, K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 10, New York 1978, pp277-87.
22. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, p237.
23. See VI Lenin *CW* Vol 8, Moscow 1977, p208.
24. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9 Moscow 1977, p128.
25. *Ibid* p82.
26. Quoted in G Zinoviev *History of the Bolshevik Party* London 1973, p123.
27. James Connolly was particularly impressed by how Moscow had advanced barricade tactics. Writing in May 1915, he wrote how it was “wise” that, unlike the French revolutionaries of an earlier time, the Russians did not “man the barricades”, but used surprise tactics - attacking *only* when the enemy was in “range of their inferior weapons” (J Connolly *Selected Writings*, London 1988, p226).
28. The only serious study that I am aware of is Jens-Uwe Guettel’s ‘Reform, revolution and the “original catastrophe”: political change in Prussia and Germany on the eve of the First World War’. Thanks to Mike Macnair.
29. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 10, Moscow 1977, p152.

CHINA

More lies, more paranoia

Rightwing media outlets continue to denounce the new Chinese embassy building - clearly they take their cue from Donald Trump and his claim that it is “very dangerous” for the UK do business with China. **Mike Macnair** explores what lies behind the entirely artificial campaign

On January 20 the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Steve Reed, signed off on approval of an inspector’s report granting permission for a new Chinese embassy building at the former site of the Royal Mint (near the Tower of London). Publication was for some reason delayed.¹ The Chinese government had bought the site and obtained diplomatic approval in 2018, under the former Tory government. But for the last few years there has been an ascending chorus of claims in the rightwing media that the new embassy building is a ‘security threat’. This has not ended despite the approval.²

Meanwhile, Sir Keir Starmer’s visit to China on January 28-31 included a meeting with president Xi Jinping, and the government has announced a series of minor (and undetailed) agreements, under the headline ‘Prime minister unlocks new opportunities for British businesses in China’:

1. Cooperation on transnational organised crime and illegal immigration.
2. Establishment of a bilateral services partnership.
3. Joint feasibility study for a UK-China trade in services agreement.
4. Cooperation in the field of conformity assessment.
5. Exports from the UK to China.
6. Strengthening the work of the UK-China Joint Economic and Trade Commission.
7. Cooperation in domiciliary services and sports industries.
8. Collaboration in technical and vocational education and training (TVET).
9. Cooperation on food safety, animal and plant quarantine.
10. Health cooperation.³

Donald Trump, on January 29, offered an off-the-cuff denunciation: “Asked about the UK ‘getting into business’ with China, Trump said, “Well, it’s very dangerous for them to do that.”⁴ Kemi Badenoch followed Trump’s lead at the February 2 Prime Minister’s Questions, entertainingly accusing Starmer of being “virtually a communist most of his life”.⁵ Badenoch was probably not referring to Starmer’s Pabloism in his 1980s youth, but was following Trump’s habit of referring to his US Democratic Party opponents as ‘communists’.⁶ The story was widely syndicated under the headline, “UK’s Starmer faces backlash over China trip amid claims he was ‘tricked’”.⁷

Both these stories are essentially confected with a view to promoting hostility to China and (the converse of this) increasing US (and in particular Republican Party) control of British politics.

The Chinese embassy as a security threat is one of those ‘doh!’ points: of course embassies carry on spying (and have done since the Renaissance); the local state carries on counter-espionage operations. In this case the Secret Intelligence Service (old MI6) and Security Service (old MI5) declined to object to the new Chinese embassy; if anything, centralising Chinese operations on a single site will facilitate UK securocrats’ surveillance on Chinese spies - a point made by a former MI5 head.⁸

The Tories and their press are certainly right that the agreements reached from Starmer’s trip, as



Drive to war against China: real

reported by the government, are limited and vague. But... China is, in fact, the UK’s fifth largest nation-state trade partner after the USA, Germany, the Netherlands and France.⁹ Badenoch at PMQs admits that diplomatic non-engagement with China is not a serious option. What she claims to want is *more aggressive* engagement.

This is deeply unrealistic. The Chinese government faced down Donald Trump’s tariff war by ‘weaponising’ access to rare earths, but the UK has far less leverage than the USA to start with. Besides its military weakness, the UK is £47,996 million in deficit with China on goods trade, and only £9,389 million in surplus on trade in services. Hence the government - realistically - seeks to expand UK services’ access to Chinese markets, the subject of the majority of the reported (vague) agreements. For Starmer (or Badenoch imagining herself as PM; or Farage...) to take a more aggressive approach to China would thus result merely in a more complete brush-off from China.

There is one piece of reality among these fantasies. Trump’s “very dangerous” statement is not a warning of a Chinese threat to the UK: it is a US threat to the UK, that if it gets too close to China, the USA will retaliate. Since the USA is one of the few countries with which the UK is in overall trade *surplus* this threat is quite real. (Indeed, very minor alterations to US regulatory legislation could wipe out the British financial sector’s offshore business.)

Toward 1914

The pattern of fantasies of Chinese aggression reprises British ideology in the run-up to 1914. In 1903 Erskine Childers’ best-selling book *The riddle of the sands* was published. This told a story of holiday-making British yachtsmen uncovering a secret German plot to invade Britain across the North Sea, using a fleet of tugs and barges based in the East Frisian Islands. The plot is fantastical: Germany invading Britain with tug-drawn barges across 370 miles of the North Sea is a lot less militarily plausible than the unworkable 1940 plan, ‘Operation Sea Lion’ (to have been launched from Normandy); or than the ‘French invasion scare’ of 1859-60, or William Le Queux’s 1894 French invasion book *The great war in England in 1897*.

Nonetheless, *The riddle of the sands* dramatised for the British public the ‘German threat’. This was actually *not* a threat of a German invasion, but rather of German competition in arms and capital goods markets, plus competition in geopolitics for influence in Latin America and the Ottoman empire, and for colonial possessions in Africa and China. This was also reflected in German naval

expansion, as well as unwelcome ‘interference’ like supplying arms and partial diplomatic backing to the Transvaal and Orange Free State before their conquest by the British 1899-1902 South African War (in which Childers fought). The ‘German threat’, as dramatised by Childers’ novel, supported political backing for British arms-budget expansion and for the reversal of British alliances, symbolised by the 1904 Entente Cordiale with France. The book was thus a landmark on the road to 1914.

In the 21st century there are too many thrillers and alternate-history fantasies out there for the *open* production of fiction to have this sort of political influence. The fantasies produced to cover real commercial and geopolitical motives instead take the form of official announcements and ‘intelligence reports’, like the cases made in 2002-03 for the Iraqi Ba’athist regime’s ‘weapons of mass destruction’, or the story of ‘Russian interference’ in the 2016 US presidential elections. The stories of the Chinese London ‘mega-embassy’ as a security threat, and of Starmer being ‘tricked’ or ‘capitulating’ in his China visit are fantasies of the same type.

Around 1900, the UK as a declining world hegemon was trying to defend its interests and to ‘contain’ a rising Germany. The policy of increasingly aggressive encirclement of Germany and Austria-Hungary that followed led at the end of the day to World War I.

But, though 1914-18 led to the destruction of the tsarist regime, the Kaiser-Reich, the Austro-Hungarian empire and the Ottoman empire, 1919-39 showed that it had *failed* to resolve the underlying problem of the global economy, which was the declining British empire as a vampire, sucking financial tribute out of the world. It took the destruction of the UK’s strategic global position, through the fall of France, the Low Countries, Denmark and Norway in 1940, to force the UK to agree in summer 1940 to hand over world leadership to the US. This destruction of British world hegemony permitted the ‘long boom’ of the 1950s-70s.

Since then, the UK has been very clearly a *vassal state* of the US. Not a colony or semi-colony: the king’s or feudal lord’s vassals were his military sub-tenants, not his serfs. Between 1956 and the 1990s the UK had quite significant military capability, though decreasingly practically independent of the US; it could be considered as a US attack-dog in the colonial world. In Afghanistan and Iraq the vaunted counter-insurgency capability of the British military proved to be a paper tiger, and Libya in 2011 only confirmed how limited UK military capability was. The UK has now become not a US attack-dog, but a US

yap-dog: “Bark, bark, bark, bark... Until you could hear them all over the park.”¹⁰

From around 2000 the US’s policy has shifted, with GW Bush’s 2000 characterisation of China as a ‘strategic competitor’, Obama’s 2011 ‘pivot to Asia’,¹¹ followed by Trump’s open protectionism against China and Biden’s continuation of that policy. This is now followed by sharper anti-China (and also anti-Europe) rhetoric under Trump 2.0.

The new policy of the US is *not* a return of the ‘cold war’. That was a regime of ‘containment of communism’, on the basis of the long boom made possible by the destruction of British world hegemony, by a combination of siege warfare with concessions to the working class in the ‘west’ and to national capitals in the ‘south’. There is no new long boom, and no mass communist parties in the west; concessions to the working classes, and to national capitals in the ‘south’, continue to be withdrawn.

Rather, China’s policy of deploying *capital* for development has led it quite inevitably to entanglement in competition with the USA for overseas investments and for access to overseas raw materials. Whatever the subjective aims of its leaders, China is objectively driven towards the global position of the Kaiser-Reich in the late 19th to early 20th century, and the USA is objectively driven towards the policy of aggressive encirclement of China (like the UK’s aggressive encirclement of Germany), leading to a new 1914.

Independent

The workers’ movement needs an independent foreign policy. This is no novelty, but a point already made in the 1864 inaugural address of the First International.

In 1914, the Second International split along national lines: the major parties, with some exceptions, becoming tails and supports for their own national capitals. The former left wing of the Social Democratic Party of Germany split three ways. The modern far left memorialises the honour of the element round Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who opposed the war, and the betrayal of the SPD majority. It quietly fails to discuss the ex-left *Die Glocke* group round Alexander Parvus, which argued that a victory for the Kaiser-Reich would be historically progressive.¹² And it identifies Karl Kautsky solely with his refusal to split the SPD (until 1916) and omits that *in 1917* he came to believe in the justice of the Entente’s cause through seeing national self-determination as primary.¹³ hence Kautsky’s opposition to the Russian October revolution, as weakening the common front against Austro-German aggression.

These choices to tail-end one side or the other - ‘national capital’ against the world-hegemon or ‘democratic capital’ against what the liberal media calls tyranny - are still with us. The *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain imagines China as a new USSR, but the practical effect is to follow the *Die Glocke* approach of preferring the challenger state. The January 31-February 1 *Star* carries a three-quarter-page article from Yubin Du, a journalist for the Chinese state-owned English-language television station, CGTN, under the headline, “In an age of strategic fragmentation, Britain and

China should choose cooperation”. The content is an argument for the complementarity of *capitalist* UK with *capitalist* China - not any hope for socialism. Communists should not be defenders of the Chinese regime any more than Social Democrats should have been defenders of the Kaiser regime - which was also really in many respects more progressive than Britain in the late 19th to early 20th century, as the *Die Glocke* group argued.

Meanwhile, on the other side, the Mandeliste Fourth International has followed the Kautsky of 1917 into becoming a political tail for ‘liberal’ imperialism, through prioritising national self-determination over the recognition of inter-imperialist conflict. Ukraine is the centre of this political collapse, but the same line has now appeared on defencism towards the US semi-colony of Taiwan.¹⁴

Since it is *our state* and the empire of which we are vassals which seek to mobilise self-determination talk in the service of a war drive to defend US hegemony, this is less like being Kautsky (a Czech resident in Germany): more like Henry Hyndman or Arthur Henderson in 1914-18. We cannot be advocates, on the one hand, of the general liberation of humanity and, on the other hand, tail-end our own state’s war propaganda.

Our watchword needs to be Karl Liebknecht’s “The main enemy is at home”¹⁵ ●

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Notes

1. www.ftbchambers.co.uk/news/news-view/permission-granted-by-secretary-of-state-for-chinese-embassy (January 27). This includes a link to the decision letter.
2. Eg, parallelparliament.co.uk/debate/2026-01-26/lords/lords-chamber/chinese-embassy (House of Lords debate, January 26); www.youtube.com/watch?v=zShWwjaBplw; bisi.org.uk/reports/london-approves-new-china-mega-embassy-amid-protests-and-security-concerns.
3. www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-unlocks-new-opportunities-for-british-businesses-in-china.
4. www.euronews.com/2026/01/30/trump-says-very-dangerous-for-uk-to-deal-with-china-as-starmer-arrives-in-shanghai.
5. www.youtube.com/watch?v=MolFWmG-IVY.
6. Eg, www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/retread-scare-trump-and-other-republicans-evoke-another-era-by-calling-democrats-communists (June 19 2023); www.theguardian.com/global/commentisfree/article/2024/sep/05/communism-meaning-republicans (September 5 2024).
7. Numerous hits on googling ‘Starmer China visit tricked’, date-restricted to last week.
8. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/china-super-embassy-london-lord-evans-b2902712.html.
9. Figures for 2023 at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_the_largest_trading_partners_of_the_United_Kingdom (See Note 1). This leaves out the EU as a whole, which is way ahead of all other trade; here the comparison would be EU: £807,155 million, USA: £302,091 million, China: £92,676.
10. TS Eliot: allpoetry.com/Of-The-Awefull-Battle-Of-The-Pekes-And-The-Pollicles.
11. www.brookings.edu/articles/the-american-pivot-to-asia (2011); and foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/03/the-legacy-of-obamas-pivot-to-asia (2016).
12. See, for instance, M Macnair, ‘Die Glocke or the inversion of the theory: from anti-imperialism to pro-Germanism’ *Critique* Vol 42 (2014).
13. K Kautsky *Die Befreiung der Nationen* (www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/kautsky/1917/befat/index.html); *Serbien und Belgien in der Geschichte* (www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/kautsky/1917/serbelg/index.html).
14. Eg, internationalviewpoint.org/Preliminary-Theses-on-the-Taiwan-Strait-Crisis-and-Taiwanese-Self-Determination; compare also Duncan Chapel: redmole.substack.com/p/taiwan-is-not-israel-the-morning.
15. www.marxists.org/archive/liebknecht-k/works/1915/05/main-enemy-home.htm.

AUSTRALIA

We will not be silenced

After Bondi, Zionists are cynically attempting to link the December 14 massacre to the pro-Palestine movement. *Labor Tribune* editor **Marcus Strom** reports from Sydney

The adoption of new hate crime laws by the government of Anthony Albanese of the Australian Labor Party, the banning of demonstrations in New South Wales by the state government, and its parliament considering the prohibition of certain phrases - all represent a dangerous attack on democracy and the right to protest.

Even before the last funerals of the victims of the horrific December 14 anti-Semitic massacre in Bondi had taken place,¹ Zionists had mobilised to cynically try to link the attack to the mass democratic movement in Australia in solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

The Albanese-appointed 'special envoy to combat anti-Semitism', Jillian Segal, went so far as to say that the attack at Bondi "did not come without warning". Explicitly linking the massacre to the Palestinian protests, she said: "In Australia, it began on October 9 2023 at the Sydney Opera House. We then watched a march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge waving terrorist flags and glorifying extremist leaders. Now death has reached Bondi Beach."

Such a position should rule her out of having any publicly appointed role in Australia. But her views were echoed by the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. Stung by the mass support for Palestine and the horror at the ongoing Israeli genocide against the Palestinian people, Zionists in Australia have sought to turn the genuine outrage at the Bondi attacks to their political advantage.

Unfortunately, the Australian and NSW governments have fallen into line. This is to be capped off with the visit this week of Israeli president Isaac Herzog. Herzog has been cited in documents by the International Criminal Court as stating that all Palestinians in Gaza were "unequivocally" responsible for the Hamas attack on southern Israel on October 7 2023.

Herzog has also signed bombs destined to be dropped on Gaza during Israel's genocidal war against the Palestinians. His invitation to Australia is something the government should be deeply ashamed of. In ALP ranks, Labor Friends of Palestine has acted strongly and with principle to protest against the invitation, voicing members' concerns, but this has fallen on deaf ears.

The Albanese government is attempting to face both ways. It offers soothing words to the Australian National Imams Council and other community leaders about cohesion and respect, while simultaneously welcoming the president of Israel. This is not 'balance': it is moral duplicity.

In Adelaide, South Australia's capital, state premier Peter Malinauskas intervened to have a Palestinian writer excluded from the Adelaide Writers' Week for reasons of "cultural sensitivity". The ensuing political brouhaha blew the festival up, saw half the board and the director resign, only to have pro-Palestine writer Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah invited to attend next year's event by the new board.

The legislative response of the federal government was to seek to placate Zionists with new laws that accelerate long-running efforts to weaponise accusations of anti-Semitism against the Palestine movement. Nonetheless, Albanese seemed genuinely shocked at the



Bondi gunmen

lack of bipartisanship on these legal changes from the conservative opposition and its supporters on the rightwing of the Zionist movement in Australia.

Let us be clear. The Bondi attack was a shocking act of violence aimed at Jewish people. But it should not be exploited to ram through laws that seek to curtail political speech, expand ministerial powers and chill dissent. To do so is not about protecting Jewish communities: it is about protecting a foreign state and its ideology from legitimate political criticism.

Lawyers

Leading constitutional experts have warned where this path leads. Writing in *The Conversation*, professor Anne Twomey cautioned that the breadth and vagueness of hate-speech provisions risk curbing legitimate political communication. Twomey highlighted the fact that an amendment by former Green and now independent senator Lidia Thorpe that "criticism of the practices, policies and acts of the state of Israel, the Israeli Defence Forces or Zionism is not inherently criticism of Jewish people and is protected political speech, and not hate speech" was defeated 43 to 12. A disturbing result.

The first draft of the legislation sought to criminalise any individual engaging in hate speech that would "reasonably cause intimidation, fear of harassment or violence" in a person or group with a protected characteristic. Crucially, it was not necessary for anyone to actually experience such fear, just the acceptance that it could have that effect.

This provision was dropped after the Liberal Party and the Greens refused to support it in the Senate. Nevertheless, professor Twomey points out that "inciting racial hatred remains relevant to the other key provisions, which permit the banning of 'prohibited hate groups'." While the

banning of groups requires a number of steps before the minister can do so, she warns such protections could be "overcome by appointing politically motivated cronies to positions" or arguing that dissent "increases the risk of politically motivated violence".

Before the laws were tabled in parliament, the neo-Nazi National Socialist Network 'disbanded'. But, given their central role in mobilising the March for Australia rallies on January 26, it is clear the network continues underground. As NSW Labor MP Stephen Lawrence has argued of previous legislative drafts, "If the only thing that can save us from Nazis is unworkable laws banning them (that actually promotes them) then god help us." Another Labor MP noted: "Fundamentally, you can't ban an ideology."

Even the director-general of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, Mike Burgess, conceded that the new laws will likely see any proscribed or disbanded groups simply move underground. Burgess told a parliamentary inquiry: "Of course, individuals don't cease to exist: they're still there in society; and obviously the problematic ones we will continue to watch if they continue to be problematic."

The danger is that these laws are easily extended beyond their stated purpose, especially when combined with such heightened executive discretion and 'national security' rhetoric. This is clear in NSW, where the debate has descended into absurdity. Premier Chris Minns has manufactured a moral panic around the phrase, 'Globalise the intifada'.

However, as any regular attendee of the Palestine demonstrations will know and the Palestine Action Group has pointed out, this was not a slogan used on these marches. It only entered Australian political discourse when Minns himself imported it - cut and paste - from Britain's repressive

public-order push that has banned the non-violent Palestine Action group. Even so, the slogan itself cannot be construed as anti-Semitic - it is a call to support an uprising against Zionist colonisation, not against Jews.

False equation

At the heart of this agenda is the deliberate attempt to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism - a false and politically dishonest framing. However, the flipside of this is that Zionists and the state of Israel *do* seek to convey the idea that they speak for all Jews.

But this is not the case. Like any community, Jews in Australia are heterogeneous. While Zionism is supported by many, it is far from unanimous. And many young Jews from Zionist families are breaking from this racist ideology - appalled that a genocide is being undertaken in the name of all Jews.

Former director of the Adelaide Writers' Week, Louise Adler, has written to supporters of the Jewish Council of Australia on this matter. She says:

We must not allow the pro-Israel lobby to speak for Jews as a whole; we must not accept the racism being fomented in the aftermath of the tragedy at Bondi. As witnesses are called to give evidence to the [royal] commission, it is essential to present an accurate picture of the Jewish community in Australia. The *Australian Jewish News* once devoted its entire front page to the headline, 'One people, one voice'. You and I know that couldn't be further from the truth.

Her voice shows that very many Jews in Australia oppose the Zionist onslaught in Palestine. Many Jews - religious and secular - are anti-Zionist, this author included. To claim otherwise is to erase Jewish dissent,

while seeking to instrumentalise Jewish suffering to silence political opponents.

On the exclusion of Abdel-Fattah, she writes:

A long line of propagandists has deliberately argued that the mere *Palestinian-ness* of an author is a sufficient threat to the Australian Jewish community that they should not be permitted to participate in public life. They have, with great effect, convinced decision-makers that what is good for Benjamin Netanyahu and his murderous regime in Israel is good for all Jews in Australia also. They have already successfully inflected the Albanese government's so called hate speech legislation. What next?

Unfortunately, "next" is the ongoing push by Zionists to bury the Palestinian solidarity movement in Australia.

For example, anti-Semitism 'special envoy' Jillian Segal has appointed the former vice-chancellor of the Australian Catholic University, Greg Craven, to prepare 'report cards' on all universities in Australia and how they handle anti-Semitism. Craven's approach to this was made clear last week in an opinion article in *The Australian*, where he says the fight is now about "national defence". He claims, quite outlandishly: "As a nation we are faced not by the occasional act of terrorism, but a focused, armed insurrection."

Craven says that if you accept his framing that we are engaged in "defence of the realm", then legislative weapons are needed that are "typically used in times of war". He then casually says: "We are not talking about conscription, martial law or internment here, although a couple of decades' house arrest for Louise Adler is appealing. But it is entirely right that we are looking at carefully modulated restrictions on expression of hateful ideas and the suppression of hateful organisations." Clearly, Craven, under the auspices of a government body, will seek to silence and crush the Palestine solidarity movement on campuses and beyond.

Labor Tribune, and Marxists more broadly, are for unrestricted free speech - especially political speech. We oppose the banning of organisations. We oppose the criminalisation of ideas. We seek to overcome backward ideas through political debate, persuasion and organisation where necessary. And we reject the notion that democracy can be defended by narrowing the space in which people are allowed to speak.

Anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism. Consistent democrats oppose all forms of racism, chauvinism and indeed nationalism - ideologies that divide working people and sanctify state violence. Solidarity with Palestine is not hate: it is a democratic, internationalist demand for equality, freedom and justice. After the horror of Bondi, we will not accept a political settlement in which solidarity is policed and dissent criminalised. And we will not accept laws that outlaw critics.

We will not be silenced ●

This article first appeared in *Labor Tribune* - labortribune.net.au.

Notes

1. See 'Heroes amidst the horror' *Weekly Worker* December 18: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1566/heroes-amidst-the-horror.

UNITY

Factions, nameswitching and unity

Communist Unity is the relaunched Revolutionary Communist Organisation, and as a bonus it has the Spartacist Tendency on board as a recognised faction. **Mila Volkova** reports on conference discussions, alignments and votes

The applause was proud, as we concluded the fourth general conference of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation - soon to be relaunched as Communist Unity. My comrades, Christina and Anthony, recently published a short analysis of the conference in the RCO's magazine, *Partisan!* Though Christina is not a member of the growing faction to which I belong - 'The Mountain' - that article is a good abstract analysis of the events of the conference.

The conference, which took place on January 17-18 in Melbourne, signalled what comrade David Passerine termed "the end of the beginning". With this conference, the RCO has begun to break out of the immaturity which has characterised it since its founding in 2022. We have achieved unity with the Spartacist League of Australia (now called the Spartacist Tendency of the RCO). Cliques are becoming factions. Assumptions about the future have been exchanged for concrete strategic plans. Our programme has been cut down from a cumbersome 60-plus pages to a more concise, but still effective, 17. We have transitioned from a rag-tag group with political aspirations to a serious political organisation with around 80 members across the country.

But poor discipline and disorganisation indicated that the new still has some parts of the old in it. Some younger conference attendees have not yet grasped the sober and serious attitude of a good conference. Chairing was somewhat chaotic, and members were not used to being in an organisation where they do not know every other member by face and name. Conference documents are currently being edited and will soon be made publicly available.

The RCO conference had a delegate structure, where ordinary members can attend, speak and move motions, but only elected delegates may vote. RCO members sent 16 delegates to conference, one for every three cadre members, to represent them. Delegates were elected like they were to the Paris Commune: they were recallable and bound to the mandate that they ran on. Normally, this means delegates express their factional affiliations and aspirations for conference, and members vote to elect delegates based on this.

Of these 16, eight were members of The Mountain. This faction was formed last-minute by members supporting the republican communist RCO orthodoxy. A further three delegates were members of the Spartacist Tendency. The remaining five were swing voters, and included two self-identified Left Communists. In addition to running on a factional platform, delegates are required to seek the views of their members on all motions and vote in line with any instructions given to them - in a proportional manner, if the views of members diverge.

Day one

The day began with political reports on the international situation and the class struggle in Australia. These reports fed into the 'Communist perspectives 2026-2027' - a document containing our major, non-programmatic, theoretical and political resolutions. Political disagreement over the content of these reports and the perspectives document was minimal. Surprisingly, the Spartacists did not directly contest the resolution that China is a semi-peripheral and sub-imperialist power. Instead, they criticised the documents



Houseworkers, care workers, shop workers, unemployed workers, building workers: all working class

for being too abstract and not directly linked with plans of action. It is unclear if this was a tactical decision made to avoid a theoretical debate on the nature of the Chinese social formation or if the Spartacists simply oppose the adoption of purely theoretical documents altogether.

During this session, several motions were brought forward on building ties with Indonesian and New Zealand communists, as well as developing a base of RCO cadres in Pasifika states and Papua New Guinea. Though no-one disagreed with the goals outlined in these motions, some comrades - me included - argued against them on the basis that they had no concrete plan to achieve them. These passed with some amendments. The Spartacists put forward a motion committing the RCO to a China defencist position. This motion made no mention of 'multipolarity' as a strategy nor of the political economy of China and was vague on what a 'defence' of China would mean and in which contexts it would apply.

It is possible that this vagueness was intentional. It only committed the RCO to opposition to American imperialism and attacks on the standards of living of Chinese workers. These alone are uncontroversial, and the motion passed without much fuss. If this is part of a strategy to 'wedge' the RCO's membership towards what the Spartacists consider a more revolutionary position, watered-down motions such as this one will not succeed in doing so.

After lunch, the conference discussed two proposals for the

RCO's programme. First, we discussed the Spartacists' seven-page document, which contained a short description of the world conjuncture and three slogans: 'Break the working class from liberalism', 'Merge the socialist and workers' movements' and 'International unity against imperialism'. This is the crux of the Spartacists' strategic proposal. A defensive struggle of workers against imperialism and against further attacks on its conditions - led and agitated by militant cadres inside strategic industries, such as industrial production and infrastructure - can galvanise the proletariat against its poor leadership and develop international class consciousness. From this, the vanguard can expand its ranks and develop a base in the proletariat. Out of this, a party becomes possible. It is the lack of this base - ie, the focus of the current socialist movement on the "petty bourgeois" (the Sparts refer to professionals and students here) - that is the cause of sectarianism and the movement's isolation.

The non-Spartacist delegates did not necessarily disagree with this strategy. But the proposal was voted down in favour of the 'Docklands programme' (which is only a shortened version of the previous programme) because most RCO members do not consider the Sparts' proposal to be a programmatic one. For us, the programme does not set out a plan of action to take the RCO forward from where it is now to the creation of a communist party. Rather, it is a proposal to the entire Australian socialist movement for a programme

that we can all collectively accept and work under. As a plan of action for the RCO specifically, the Spartacists' programme is myopic. As a primarily tactical and rhetorical document, it contains no vision for the dictatorship of the proletariat (the minimum) nor for communism itself (the maximum).

Too narrow

I echo comrade David Passerine's criticism of this form of unity as simultaneously too broad (in the sense that one does not need to be a communist to agree with these tactics as the best form of struggle) and too narrow (in the sense that many communists do not agree that these tactics are the best form of struggle). Such unity is prone to collapse in the face of political shocks or to opportunistic and self-interested participation by sectarian groupings - participation which can easily be withdrawn if it becomes inconvenient. This is not to say that we reject tactical unity. Insofar as a political organisation needs to be united in action, we accept tactical unity. But this is only achievable in the context of unity around comprehensive political goals: ie, unity around a programme.

Day one ended with the presentation of three major 'theses' documents: one on the Labor Party, one on reactionary politics, and one on the Socialist Party. The third passed without any major disagreement. The second outlined the controversial perspective that Australia does not currently have the conditions for a reactionary political turn like that which the USA, UK and European

countries have experienced. This was justified by pointing out that Australia avoided the immediate fallout of the great financial crisis, that the regional and rural population is much smaller in Australia than elsewhere, and that the proportion of the Australian middling classes employed in, or with class interests aligned with, the liberal, democratic, imperialist and corporatist state is larger elsewhere. Many conference attendees did not disagree with these claims on the face of them, but cautioned against adopting a strong position which could be proven wrong, should circumstances change. The motion passed, despite Spartacist delegates voting against it on the grounds that the international liberal political order is collapsing and that reactionary politics would 'spread' from country to country. How this spread might concretely occur was not explained.

The theses on Labor led to the only disagreement at conference which was not 'had out' in an explicit manner. On this topic, there were essentially three positions: we should explicitly aim to split the Labor Party (this was the Spartacists' position), we should pursue a 'sacred lie', in which we work inside the Labor Party on a purely agitational basis, but expect a split (this was the Left Communist position), or we should aim to transform the Labor party into a democratically organised united front of the entire working class (The Mountain's position). After amendments, the theses on Labor adopted the third position aspirationally, while acknowledging the need to prepare for a split. But

whether the hypothetical communist party should aim to split the Labor Party was not explicitly resolved for or against. This is disappointing and this issue is likely to be the 'hot topic' in the lead-up to next conference.

Day Two

Day two was dominated by lengthy discussion of the RCO's organisational reports, the 'three-year plan' and 'organisational proposals'. The press, education and organisational building reports were passed without much contention. Though there was some discussion around the organisational building report - as some local sections contested the description of their successes and failures, as laid out by the outgoing CC - most amendments were relatively minor and the document passed without major rewriting.

The three-year plan and the Spartacists' alternative proposal for a "50% proletarian RCO" led to a lengthy back-and-forth in which the three-year plan ultimately passed. The plan committed the RCO to quadrupling its cadre membership within two years and for pressuring the entire Australian 'left' into the Socialist Party in the third year.

This is to be accomplished by developing a 'recruitment conveyor belt' - made up primarily of reading groups - which can bring potential recruits at all levels of political development into the RCO's orbit and transform them into sympathisers or members - as well as building cadre members into effective organisers, writers and theoreticians. These potential recruits are to be gathered by deepening and broadening the RCO's burgeoning socialist social activities, such as drinks, barbecues, public lectures and panel discussion events. Through setting up local cross-sect newspapers on local politics in all cities, the RCO plans to develop a proto-party infrastructure and connections between the RCO, other sects and the proletariat. The plan explicitly avoids organising in workers' economic struggles at the point of their workplace until the third year at the earliest. This is on the grounds that sectarian division

in the movement and the RCO's small size and resources make us unable to engage in such struggles as communists, as opposed to militant left Laborites.

It is this that the Spartacists took issue with, arguing against the plan. They advocated instead a full turn to industry, arguing that "the struggle is the best teacher". They stated, repeatedly, that the plan did not consider sufficiently the breakdown of the liberal international order. They did not explain how an analysis of this would have changed the plan. The Spartacists' motion, had it passed, would have committed the RCO to ensuring that at least 50% of its members worked in 'blue- or pink-collar' jobs, or 'unionised industries'. There was no timeline given to attaining this goal. The delegates were split down the middle on this issue, with seven voting against it and seven voting in favour (with two abstentions), leading to the motion losing by default. The following is a more detailed and thought-out reconstruction of The Mountain's arguments against the Spartacists' motion and for the three-year plan.

Survive and grow

The Spartacists' purely agitational strategy (ie, lacking in mass theoretical education), alongside their proposal for a purely oppositional programme (ie, without a vision for communism), will not succeed in reconstructing the socialist movement and the workers' movement. The Spartacists' application of Trotsky's transitional programme method will not produce the cadre-ised mass base that is necessary for a communist party to survive and grow in the long term. It instead produces a constituency within the working class that is motivated by emotional or moral resentment and kept together only by the activism of a small militant sect. Of course, all communist militants arrive at their politics for personal reasons like this. But if the resentment of the working class is not tempered with a comprehensive programme and clear and realistic theoretical analysis, then it is vulnerable to ideological manipulation, prone to

activist misadventures, and likely to demobilise following political defeats.

There is a link here with a difference in opinion regarding the definition of 'proletariat' between The Mountain and the Spartacists, which became clear during informal conversations beyond the conference floor. Whereas The Mountain defines it in the broad sense of all those lacking property of their own and thus reliant on the wage fund,¹ the Spartacists define the proletariat only as those employed in large workplaces under 'industrial' conditions. Though this, hypothetically, may be the most advanced section of the proletariat,² this definition is narrow and unscientific. It is unclear why they have adopted this definition, which excludes houseworkers and the reserve army of labour, considering that it is nowhere defined this way by Marx. Some Spartacists have claimed that baristas are petty bourgeois!

The Spartacists - perhaps implicitly - believe that it is possible for a defensive struggle by workers in a key industry to spread spontaneously to other sections of the class. This is a 'lead by example' approach. There are two problems with this. First, a defensive struggle simply will not galvanise a full class struggle except where there is broad and pre-existing penetration of the class by communist militants. Without this, such a struggle will be outmanoeuvred and defeated by the state apparatuses. Second, the Spartacists' strategy places too much emphasis on agitation and not enough on the achievement of concrete goals. In the current conjuncture, it is not possible for a meaningful defensive struggle to be won except on a national level at least. More likely, it requires coordinated international action. Communist cadres will lose the support of workers if we organise them towards a struggle which fails. The difference in definitions of the proletariat is important here. If you take the Spartacists' narrow definition of the proletariat, this is more conceivable. A strike by meat packers could potentially extend spontaneously into a strike by steel workers, but not a strike by hospitality staff or houseworkers.

In practice, the Spartacists minimise the role of theory in developing cadre and reject completely its role in mass-facing work. The Mountain agrees that theory and practice must be linked. There will come a time - as outlined in the three-year plan - when the RCO is larger and able to seriously engage in immediate economic struggle. But historical materialism is a science with a method and practice that is distinct from other forms of struggle.³ It cannot be grasped purely through organising industrial action: it must be taught and practised within its own distinct parameters. Yes, it must be linked to other forms of struggle, or else it is blind. But avoiding theoretical education in favour of committing to more intense struggle and agitation is similarly short-sighted. The Mountain believes it is possible for a mass communist party to exist which has hundreds of thousands of members in Australia, and in which each of these members is meaningfully engaged in scientific practice.

The conference ended with some changes to the organisational rules and the election of the new central committee. The arbitration and support committee, the organisation's internal disciplinary body and grievance manager, was re-formed to be selected by the CC directly, rather than elected by conference but subordinated to CC oversight. This was supported by the outgoing members of the ASC and, despite some reservations from delegates (me included), they spoke convincingly and the change was passed. The new CC contains four

members of The Mountain (of which I am one), one Left Communist and one Spartacist.

Communist unity

Beyond the implementation of the three-year plan, the most important development in the RCO following this conference will be the growth of its internal factionalism. Now that there are clear lines of political demarcation, thanks to the Spartacists, it is possible for RCO orthodoxy to grow - from an informal clique leading a sect without challenge, into a political faction of the multi-tendency socialist movement. Comrade Miki - a member of the outgoing CC and of The Mountain - pointed out to me that this will require that The Mountain develops a proposal for what the entire socialist movement should be doing right now - rather than just what the RCO should be doing.

This will require time and discussion. Nonetheless, and drawing on comrade Mike Macnair's *Revolutionary strategy*, I believe that this proposal should be: build a real opposition!

Before communists can meaningfully engage in a struggle that rebuilds the workers' movement and wins it to communist politics, we must cohere ourselves as a real opposition to capitalist civilisation. This does not mean a Maoist-style proposal to 'oppose everything the enemy supports and support everything the enemy opposes', as this would still be a form of politics dictated by the capitalists. Rather, it means to oppose capitalism at its core and comprehensively in its structure, and to work doggedly against it everywhere.

What the actionists - such as the Spartacists, Socialist Alternative, the Anarchist-Communist Federation and Solidarity - all get wrong is that they think of opposition to capitalist civilisation only in the forms of economic struggle and oppositional agitation. This is activism.⁴ They fail to recognise that activism is itself a product of the intellectual division of labour in capitalist society,⁵ which works to keep the proletariat dumb and obedient. Activism therefore maintains capitalist civilisation. For all the Spartacists' rhetoric against liberalism, they leave the ideological apparatuses of the capitalist state - embodied by social and mass media, the schooling system and the institution of the family⁶ - intact. They surrender one of our most important struggles to the bourgeoisie.

The Mountain's proposal must say to the whole Australian socialist movement: unite under our programme, oppose the ideological hegemony of the capitalists and organise the proletariat as it actually exists - not as sect dogma, imported from the mid-20th century, imagines it to be ●

Notes

- 1. F Engels *Principles of communism* Mumbai 2021.
- 2. K Kautsky *The class struggle* (Erfurt Program) New York 1971.
- 3. L Althusser *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and other essays* London 1990.
- 4. A Bordiga, 'Dizionarietto dei chiodi revisionisti: Attivismo' *Battaglia Comunista* 1952; P Freire *Pedagogy of the oppressed* London 2017.
- 5. A Nikos *State, power, socialism* London 2000.
- 6. L Althusser *et al, On the reproduction of capitalism: ideology and ideological state apparatuses* London 2014.

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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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Online Communist Forum



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The Mandelson scandal and Sir Keir:
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weekly Worker

Diplomacy might just avoid another war

Talks, threats and bots

War is not inevitable. But it is now a credible option. The US has its tariffs, missiles and armada in place. That is why there are negotiations, argues **Yassamine Mather**

After weeks of threats and counter-threats, negotiations between the United States and Iran are due to proceed in Oman (originally it was Istanbul). The first meaningful face-to-face engagement in months.

The US delegation is led by special envoy Steve Witkoff, while the Iranian delegation is headed by foreign minister Abbas Araghchi. Delegations from a long list of mediators will be attending too, including Turkey, Qatar, Egypt and, of course, Oman. The involvement of these states reflects their common fear of an uncontrolled escalation of war in the region, rather than confidence in diplomacy.

The significance of the meeting lies in the timing: it has been produced by pressure, not trust. By Donald Trump's gunboat diplomacy. His administration has revived its 'maximum pressure' strategy, but in a sharper, more immediate form, with ultimatums: time is running out and failure to reach an agreement will lead to "bad things". The ambiguity is deliberate. The message is aimed not just at Tehran, but at regional allies and domestic audiences.

Last week we saw the deployment of a major naval strike group, centred on the USS Abraham Lincoln, plus the reinforcement of air assets, including F-35s, EA-18Gs and B-52 bombers. The Pentagon is deploying additional air defence systems, including more Patriot missiles. There is confirmation that at least one nuclear-powered attack submarine, armed with Tomahawk missiles, has arrived in the region too. Clearly, this is not a symbolic deployment.

This configuration matters, because it shows what can be done. Three weeks ago, when Trump initially considered an attack against Iran, his military advisors pointed out they were not ready for war or for the possible repercussions of even a 'limited' strike. Such an operation might involve targeting senior members of the leadership or key facilities, but it would require secure basing, defence and regional contingency planning for retaliation. All that was simply not in place. It is now.

This does not mean that war is inevitable. It means that war is now a credible option, and this changes the negotiating dynamic entirely. Alongside military escalation, Washington has threatened new 25% tariffs on countries continuing with substantial Iranian trade - an attempt to further isolate the Iranian economy and signal to third parties that neutrality will be penalised.

Iran's shift

Following the violent suppression of nationwide protests in January 2026, the Iranian regime is much weaker than before. On February 3, president Massoud Pezeshkian instructed the foreign ministry to pursue what he described as "just and equitable" negotiations.

We can assume that the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei,



London January 31: Zionists promote Pahlavi

has approved all this. After all, he is determined to make sure the regime survives against all odds. So we can expect further flexibility - the continuation of the kind of policies that have allowed the Islamic Republic to survive for more than four decades.

Iran has already signalled conditional flexibility: a willingness to discuss uranium enrichment levels and a possible return to modified 2015-style nuclear constraints. However, so far Tehran has drawn firm red lines: the issue of ballistic missiles is non-negotiable, as is support for regional alliances. Foreign minister Abbas Araghchi has repeatedly emphasised that Iran's central concern is trust. From Tehran's perspective, the US is not a stable negotiating partner, but an episodic enforcer, whose commitments expire with the next administration.

So, despite the renewed talks, the gap between the two sides remains structural rather than technical. This is why diplomacy alone did not restart negotiations. That required a show of US force.

According to *Thomas Karat's Substack*, analysis of over 235 news headlines across 11 countries shows a familiar pattern: synchronised political messaging, legal justifications, market conditioning and an absence of serious dissent from major powers. This mirrors the preparatory phases seen before the invasions of Iraq and Libya.¹

However, there is an important difference: instead of closing off diplomacy, this pressure was used to allow direct talks. That does not make the media campaign benign. In fact, it makes it instrumental, as everyone is well aware of what will happen should negotiations fail.

It is well known that Arab states intervened in January to stop a US/Israeli war against Iran. Their position reflects fear, not alignment. Arab

states today are not the same as before October 2023. They have watched Israel act with impunity, and drawn a clear lesson: regime removal is contagious. Their concerns are not ideological sympathy with Iran, but rather fear of domestic unrest, oil market chaos, embargoes, refugee flows, and a prolonged regional war rather than a short strike.

Regime change

Contrary to all the hype, US potential plans for regime change in Iran do not include Reza Pahlavi, son of Iran's last shah. It is now clear that most of the publicity about the popularity in Iran of Pahlavi was fake news - exaggerated and manufactured by Persian-speaking TV stations, financed by Israel and other foreign powers.

On January 30, *Le Figaro* carried a report regarding the current atmosphere in Iran. The report reveals efforts by digital media to influence the Iranian public's mindset in favour of a "specific movement". The title is 'Fake accounts, 'likes' and the shah of Iran: Israel's digital war in the shadows'.²

In today's world, battles are not just fought with tanks, drones and missiles. War is also carried out through the silence of servers, behind anonymous accounts, and amidst hashtags and 'likes'. The *Le Figaro* report pulls back the curtain on one of these hidden battles: an organised digital operation aimed at influencing public opinion on Iran and its political future.

This operation advances through fake accounts, amplified content and targeted narrative-building. It demonstrates that the primary arena of political competition has - at least in one significant layer - shifted from the streets and organisations to the "social media space". In this space, what matters is not the number of

real supporters, but the "constructed image of public support" - an image that can be manufactured using digital tools. What we have is an orchestrated influence campaign paid for and in the service of the Israeli government, or entities close to it.

The methodology is simple: the operation utilised a network of fake accounts, AI-enhanced content and targeted messaging. Specifically, a large number of Persian-language fake accounts were deployed on platforms like X. These accounts were created in 2023, but their overt activity began in early 2025, indicating meticulous prior coordination and planning.

The profile pictures of many of these accounts were generated by AI, confirming their inauthenticity. These accounts systematically posted content designed to appear as though it came from real Iranian citizens, while in reality they were manipulating the 'truth' to shift narratives and instil specific messages. The goal was to promote an alternative. The campaign did not just broadcast messages: it attempted to stage-manage a sense of public support that appeared far more widespread than actual trends on the ground.

A core pillar of this campaign was the dissemination of content in favour of Reza Pahlavi. The objective was to frame him as the primary alternative to the Islamic Republic or to create a digital illusion of massive popular support for him in Iran.

Le Figaro notes: "Reza Pahlavi is an individual who has lived in exile for years and has attempted to introduce himself as a representative of democracy and freedom in Iran. However, among Iranians inside the country there is no widespread or realistic support for the return of the monarchy."

One prominent example highlighted in the report is the distribution of fake videos depicting an Israeli attack on Evin Prison in Tehran. These videos were circulated before any official news outlets reported such an event. It was later determined that the footage was created using AI tools. The objectives of such falsification include eroding legitimacy and intensifying feelings of distrust toward the government among citizens. Add to this emotional manipulation: steering emotions and narratives regarding internal Iranian events during sensitive political and social moments.

We also have research into the broadcasts of BBC Persian and Iran International, specifically regarding their alleged "exaggerated pro-Pahlavi" or monarchist leanings. Here we have a body of work by Swedish-based scholars and investigations by Swedish media that address this specific topic. According to a TV programme by a former *Voice of America* anchor interviewing a media analyst, two Persian language TV stations - Iran International and BBC Persian - exaggerated pro-shah slogans in recent protests by at least 83%!

Mazdak Azar presents a research report, indicating that Iran International and BBC media outlets heavily exaggerated pro-Pahlavi slogans in their coverage of the December protests, acting in favour of a specific faction.

The research documents that both media outlets, abandoning their journalistic duty, took steps to homogenise dissenting voices and unrealistically highlight a particular faction. According to the data, Iran International covered the protests with approximately 3,200 news items and the BBC with about 1,500 items on Telegram. In both cases, the proportion of coverage did not align with the statistical reality of the slogans in the digital space.

Eighty-three percent of the slogans focused on the following key themes:

- Opposition to the entirety of the system.
- Calls for its overthrow.
- Anti-system nature.

These real slogans shared a common goal and focused on fundamentally changing the entire political structure. They did not include pro-shah slogans, contrary to what Iran International and BBC Persian reported.

Another prominent researcher is Rouzbeh Parsi, a senior lecturer at Lund University and former head of the Middle East programme at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs. Parsi and his colleagues refer to the "nostalgic narrative" of the pre-1979 era. They argue that these TV stations project a sanitised version of the Pahlavi monarchy to appeal to younger Iranians, who did not live through it - often presenting the crown prince as a "convenient blank page" for various opposition grievances.

Swedish researchers have often cited external data to argue that pro-Pahlavi sentiment on social media - which is then reported as "news" by some Persian-language channels - is often artificially amplified by "hollow armies" of bots. They suggest that these broadcasts create an "echo chamber" that exaggerates the actual level of monarchist support within Iran.

Given all this, it is no surprise that even Trump has no illusions about Pahlavi's popularity inside Iran. The US administration is looking for alternatives within the country, and perhaps even within the regime itself. If a limited attack results in further weakening the regime, or if it leads to the removal of its leadership, it could open the possibility of negotiations with various factions of the Islamic Republic. This includes both the wealthy oligarchs associated with or part of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and former 'reformists' ●

Notes

1. See karat.substack.com/p/how-headlines-manipulate-you-into.
2. www.lefigaro.fr/international/faux-comptes-likes-et-chah-d-iran-dans-l-ombre-la-guerre-numerique-d-israel-contre-la-republique-islamique-20260130.