

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



**How Belgium's 1893 suffrage strike and Russia's 1905 revolution impacted on German social democracy. By 1914 plans were afoot**

- Letters and debate
- Gorton and Denton
- Spartacist polemic
- Your Party's first CEC

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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# DEFEAT US-ISRAELI AGGRESSION DEFEND THE PEOPLES OF IRAN



## LETTERS



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

## War wish fulfilled

In its September 2 2012 issue, the Weekly Worker published my article, 'Netanyahu's war wish', in which I explained the real strategic motives impelling the Israeli regime to wage war against Iran. The present brief note is an update to that article, in view of the US-Israeli onslaught launched on February 28 (I make no attempt to comment on Trump's motives, which are less readily amenable to rational analysis).

Most major Israeli actions - even those triggered by apparently unexpected events - are best understood in terms of two strategic aims laid down by the leaders of the Zionist project of colonisation in its early days. Zionism has been extremely consistent and exceptionally successful in pursuing these aims.

The first strategic aim is to get possession of as much as possible of the 'Promised Land'. This is preferably to be *vacant* possession, with the native Palestinians and other Arabs ethnically cleansed. The second strategic aim is to win, exercise and secure regional hegemony, so as to make the Zionist state a useful, fierce attack dog, serving the global hegemon - and nourished by it. In pursuit of this strategic aim, Israel seeks to weaken, subdue and fragment its neighbours.

Evidently, this second strategic aim has motivated Israel to attack Iran, the major regional state that has avoided subordination to US-Israeli hegemony. In this connection, the alleged actual or potential nuclear threat posed by Iran is a propaganda fraud, as I explained in detail in my 2012 article. In fact, Benjamin Netanyahu was so worried that the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) would remove this fictional threat, that he made every effort to get the US to kill the deal. He finally succeeded in 2018, when Trump withdrew from the JCPA. It remained to secure US active participation in a major attack on Iran - a task that Israel was unable to perform on its own. Successive US administrations, including Trump's first, resisted falling into this trap: they feared another Afghanistan or Iraq. But finally Netanyahu has got lucky with Trump 2.0, who has made lawless aggression his trademark.

Israel's wars also serve the first strategic aim: grabbing more land, of course; but also perpetrating ethnic cleansing, which is easier to get away with under the fog of war. The present war will, no doubt, see intensification of these activities: continuation of the genocide and tightening military control in Gaza, and escalation of the wave of pogroms committed by settlers and soldiers in the West Bank. Repression and intimidation of Israel's Palestinian citizens will also be stepped up.

At the time of writing it is impossible to predict how long this war will last and the shape of Iran in its aftermath. Israel's dream scenario is, of course, the fragmentation of Iran and its final elimination as an obstacle to the Zionist regime's regional hegemony. But, even if this were to materialise, it will not secure Israel's hegemony against new

threats. A new challenge is in fact looming, albeit underreported by the established commentariat: the challenger is Turkey.

Turkey straddles Europe and the Middle East. For decades, its geopolitical sights were directed westward. A key member of Nato since 1952, it made a strong bid to join the EU, but long negotiations ended in failure for a variety of reasons. Its European efforts rebuffed, Turkey's geopolitical ambitions pivoted in the 2010s to the Middle East. It has rediscovered its long roots in this region, which, for several centuries, was part of the Ottoman Turkish Empire.

Turkey's Middle-East assertiveness has been apparent, for example, in the decisive role it played in the overthrow of the Assad regime and installing its own protégé in Damascus. And Turkey is not another Iran: it is a formidable military state (its armed forces are the second-largest in Nato), treated favourably by the world hegemon. It is not going to bow the knee to the Zionist state, but will pose a serious challenge to its regional dominance.

Watch this space.

**Moshé Machover**  
email

## Trump vs Iran

In the interesting and important discussion on the Trump attack on Iran at the March 1 Online Communist Forum, there was an important aspect which I think could do with more attention: that is, the sheer size and relative invulnerability of the US military.

Dwight D Eisenhower famously warned about the 'military-industrial complex' and, of course, things have got a lot worse since then. Congress - which Eisenhower apparently included in his 'complex', but withdrew for 'constitutional' reasons - wants to give the Pentagon an extra \$500 billion this year. Allegedly, the Pentagon doesn't know what to do with all this money - though I'm sure they'll think of something.

Comrades may remember, a few decades ago, the Pentagon passing on some stuff to the US police forces: armoured vehicles, rifles, bulletproof vests ... I remember reading an interview with, I think, a small town sheriff.

Drug busts used to entail a couple of police with a search warrant knocking on the door. But, now the police have SWAT teams, they have to use them. So, surround the place, kick the door in, get the inmates on the floor (maybe accidentally shoot an innocent or two). This is ubiquitous now, and a popular TV and film scene or two. But small beer for the manufacturers.

We get tables in the press, mainstream as well as left, showing the expenditure on 'defence' (sorry, it's 'war' now, isn't it?) by the US, compared with everyone else. The US spends more than the next 10-12 countries combined.

What to do with all this military equipment? There's nothing better than war to empty the warehouses and keep the production lines going. It doesn't necessarily matter whose war it is - Israel and Ukraine will do, if the US hasn't got its own (though normally it can launch one).

We can do no worse than look at Tom Lehrer's words: "Once the rockets are up, who cares where they come down? That's not my department!" says Wernher von Braun."

So we have a massive military, with aircraft carriers, planes, bombs, missiles - what to do with them? They can circle round the South China Sea, poodle around in the Caribbean or, they can go to Iran - and then what? Apparently, senior military folk thought there might be some sort of plan. But Trump wanted to get on with things: after all he's a 'man of peace' - bomb them into obedience and then we'll have that peace.

But it's not just Trump and it's not just Iran. In general, if the US has gone in, allegedly to 'make peace', then they've made things a lot worse. The north and east of Africa provide many continuing examples. And now we have a US president of enormous ego and reckless narcissism, and the world becomes an even more dangerous place.

And why Iran? For Israel? For the Middle East and its oil? Long-term rancour over the 1979 embassy siege? For Trump, any or all of these. We can only be certain that he has no concern whatsoever for the Iranians who die for his adventure.

# Nur - a regional collective

Statement issued by **Moshé Machover** and **Yassamine Mather**

The existential crises currently engulfing Iran, Israel, Palestine and the surrounding Arab states - from the genocide in Gaza to the relentless annexation and ethnic cleansing of the West Bank - are not isolated tragedies. They are different fronts of a single, interlocking, regional conflict. In the current landscape, borders are tragically lopsided: they remain porous for the flow of global capital and the deployment of military force, yet they are rigid and lethal for the oppressed and the displaced.

Nur (Light) is a new multimedia project rooted in the tradition of revolutionary socialist internationalism. Co-founded by Moshé Machover, a pioneering figure in Middle Eastern socialist thought and a founding member of the Khamsin collective, and Yassamine Mather, an Iranian socialist and combatant for workers' struggles, we are building a platform where the 'national question' is finally addressed through the lens of a regional solution.

Why this approach?

■ The interlocking trap: One cannot comprehend the genocide in Gaza, the looming shadow of full-scale war in Iran or the systemic repression of the Iranian, Arab, Turkish, Kurdish and Assyrian peoples without analysing the overarching regional repressive security architectures. We reject the 'silenced' view of liberation; Palestinian freedom is inseparable from the struggle against the reactionary regimes in the entire region surrounding it.

■ Socialist federation: Following the intellectual lead of our predecessors, we advocate a regional socialist federation. This is not a utopian dream, but a material necessity - the only viable alternative to the perpetual cycle of ethnic cleansing, settler-colonialism and religious sectarianism.

■ Breaking the silos: While most outlets focus narrowly on the 'Israel-Palestine conflict' or the 'Iran crisis', Nur connects the dots. We demonstrate how strikes in Tehran, protests in Beirut and resistance in Gaza are all part of the same pulse of

We need organised mass parties of the working class all over the world to get rid of these bastards.

**Jim Nelson**  
email

## Iran solidarity

Grassroots Left vehemently condemns the unprovoked imperialist attack on Iran, coordinated jointly by the US and Israel - and in the middle of negotiations with the Iranian regime. In a direct hit on a school, dozens of children have been killed. Hundreds, if not thousands, more innocent people will be killed.

The US and Britain are backing Israel's genocide in Gaza to the hilt. They have no standing to claim that they are supporting democracy in Iran or anywhere else in the Middle East. Trump claims he wants 'regime change'. But the liberation of Iran from the reactionary regime of the Islamic Republic is the task of the Iranian people and the Iranian working class. Our solidarity is with them.

Every bomb, every aggression and every economic sanction directed by US imperialism against Iran is a blow against the Iranian people, not the regime. That regime draws succour from all attempts at foreign imperialist interference, posing as representatives of the unity of the nation.

The British and American butchers of Baghdad, those enablers of Israel, must get out of the Middle East. Grassroots Left calls on Your Party and the whole British labour and trade union movement to oppose this new imperialist adventure: to oppose Starmer's intention to increase military spending by billions and to demand that Britain gets out of Nato now.

Sign up to show your support here: [grassrootsleft.org](http://grassrootsleft.org).

**Grassroots Left**  
email

## Still possible

The triumphant declarations of supporters of The Many would have people believing that they have some sort of majority support among the members of Your Party. The actual first-preference votes, however, indicate that The Many do not have that much support.

For the regional central

regional transformation.

We will feature rigorous analysis, long-form articles and dialogue:

■ Moshé Machover: Bringing decades of analysis on the class nature of the Israeli state, comrade Machover will expand on his seminal thesis that the Zionist project is a unique form of settler-colonialism that cannot be resolved through 'two-state' diplomacy. He argues instead for a revolutionary integration of the region, where the overthrow of Zionist structures is linked to the socialist transformation of the entire Arab east.

■ Yassamine Mather: She will focus on the Iranian working class as a pivot for regional anti-imperialism and a bulwark against both domestic autocracy and western intervention.

We are seeking support to build a platform that refuses to simply report on the 'Middle East' as a series of disparate catastrophes. Instead, Nur aims to help cultivate a regional left - one capable of thinking, organising and dreaming beyond the maps drawn by colonial powers ●

executive committee votes (that is, not the public office votes) candidates aligned with The Many won only 38.4% of the vote - not that much more than the 30.2% of the Grassroots Left-aligned candidates (this is considering Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi, Elizabeth Bailey and Niall Christie as *de facto* GL, and considering Jim Monaghan and Sam Gorst as *de facto* TM).

31.2% of voters cast their first-preference ballot for a candidate not aligned with Grassroots Left or The Many, yet these voters don't have any representation on the CEC. Those of us who are part of the Grassroots Left must convince our voters to stay as members of Your Party - we can campaign for democratisation of the voting system, which granted The Many 65% of the CEC with only 38% of first-preference votes. That gives the 992 voters of the North East region the same representation as the 4,574 voters from London and twice the representation of the 1,463 voters from Wales.

We can bring the unaligned voters to our side when we campaign for democracy. The majority that voted against the views of Corbyn at conference still exists, even if it didn't vote entirely for the Grassroots Left slate. I'm not saying this process won't be difficult - it is going to require a lot of campaigning and convincing people. However, it is possible - much more possible than people seem to think.

**Dovah**  
Oxfordshire

## YP nats

Republican Your Party welcomes the election of Niall Christie to represent YP Scotland on the CEC. We congratulate Niall on winning his majority and commend all who voted for him.

RYP endorsed both him and Rob Rooney (South West) as CEC candidates. We did so on clear political criteria, not met by any other candidates. We endorsed Rob Rooney after he was expelled. He was already on the ballot paper, having secured more than 75 endorsements. His expulsion was a violation of democracy. We did not and do not accept it is legitimate.

While The Many won a majority with 14 seats and Grassroots Left (GL) has seven, three independents - Niall Christie, Sam Gorst and Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi - won the remaining seats. We will seek discussions with Niall and the other CEC independents about how we can cooperate.

RYP has argued that Your Party has no future without a programme and unless it breaks from the ideology and programme of social monarchism and unionism. We stood on the following platform:

- For a democratic secular republic.
- For an end of the union.
- For an English parliament.
- For autonomous YP parties in England, Scotland and Wales.
- Support for dual membership.

RYP opposed The Many and the Grassroots Left platforms. Both reflect programmes that fail to respond to the 'crisis of democracy' facing the people of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

In the first round of the election campaign YP members (Chris Williamson, Dave Nellist and April Ashley, etc) were barred from standing. In the second round, Rob Rooney (South West), having secured more than the necessary 75

endorsements, was expelled. We opposed and condemned all these exclusions.

Chris Williamson stood on the Republic YP platform. He is a dual member of YP. There was no legitimate democratic reason to remove his rights as a member to stand for office. This was a direct attack on the RYP campaign.

RYP wrote to Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana in defence of these members unjustly barred or expelled. We received no response to our Open Letter. Given the threat posed to members' democratic rights, we launched a petition calling on the two leaders to respond to our letter and take appropriate action.

The non-response to our open letter and the boycott of our petition by TM and GL and their supporters implies political arrogance, and looks like a failure of leadership. It also looks like a continuation of sectarian and opportunist politics, which is the very thing we need to expunge if we are to build a credible alternative to the Labour Party and Reform UK. It appears that TM and GL are opposed to the programme of RYP (as is their right). But they are conducting their opposition not by open debate, but by bureaucratic action and the well-known 'tactic' of refusing to recognise that RYP exists.

The main responsibility for the action against RYP rests with Jeremy Corbyn and his organisers. However, the action of GL is more disappointing, because they have presented themselves as defenders of members' rights. They simply sat on the fence and turned a blind eye to our open letter and petition.

Our grievances against the former YP provisional joint leadership and their actions against Republic YP remain unresolved. We do not accept the CEC elections have been free and fair. Nevertheless, we accept the view of a majority of members that the newly elected TM-GL leadership

should be given the opportunity to lead. However, we must be ready for a continuation of the same modus operandi.

We will continue to highlight the absence of programme and oppose the TM-GL leadership on the grounds that social monarchism and unionism provided no democratic future for the people of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We will challenge the apparent sectarianism and opportunism of TM-GL as inimical to the interests of the working class.

**Republic YP**  
email

### All petty?

So Hannah Spencer is now the newly-elected Green MP for Gorton and Denton constituency. She faced a dirty and negative campaign from New Labour. The Greens were accused of wanting to turn people's daughters into legal prostitutes, and wanting to give schoolkids heroin and crack cocaine. But it didn't work.

All over the constituency posters heralded "Hannah, the plumber". The campaign reminds me of those of Militant Labour candidates Dave Nellist, Terry Fields and Pat Wall, who became Labour MPs in the 1987 general election. The only difference between Hannah and Militant Labour candidates is that the latter campaigned on the slogan, "For a worker's MP on a worker's wage".

The Green Party campaign compared Hannah in her plumber's van to Reform's Matt Goodwin in his expensive sports car. At Hannah's college bench, students put up a sign saying, "Ministry of Plumbing and Plastering - Hannah Spencer MP".

The sad fact is that the *Weekly Worker* called for a vote for New Labour's middle class candidate on the basis that Marxists cannot support a Green working class candidate because, in the words of Jack Conrad, the Greens are

a petty bourgeois party. Yet Jack conveniently forgets that all parties are petty bourgeois, including the Bolshevik Party, the Labour Party, and sects such as SPEW, the SWP and the RCP.

It is clear that, if Andy Burnham had been New Labour's candidate, it would have won. The victory of 'Hannah, the plumber' has hastened the day that Sir Keir Starmer will be replaced. Yet New Labour, just like the Democrats in the USA, has no policies. All Starmer can say is that Hannah and the Greens are leftwing extremists.

Now that Morgan McSweeney has departed as Sir Keir Starmer's closest advisor, perhaps New Labour can stop trying to out-Reform Reform, and move to the left by introducing wealth taxes on the rich and super-rich. As Hannah Spencer said in her victory speech, "Working class people are being bled dry by the billionaires".

McSweeney, just like his mentor, Peter Mandelson, thinks that New Labour voters have nowhere else to go. But the Gorton and Denton by-election showed that New Labour voters will turn to the Greens as a means of fighting the hate and division policies of Reform UK.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

### Navigation

In the CPGB *Draft programme*, great emphasis is placed on learning Marx and even taking time off to do it.

Leftwing papers (mostly) are meant to give a Marxist interpretation of current events, often with the odd quote or two from Marx or Lenin, but it never goes beyond that. The smatterings of Marxist sayings on the left isn't good enough if it wants to build a generation of Marxist revolutionaries dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism. One side of a page in the *Weekly Worker* should be dedicated to providing the education that's needed. After all, there is enough material to choose from. There shouldn't be a conflict with weekly news, as theory puts in proportion the capitalist world and sums up events from a Marxist point of view.

From my own experience of reading Marx, like most theories it's like navigating in the dark corridor, bumping into the odd cobweb or two until a lightbulb effect begins, where you start putting two and two together and start getting it - even though you may not articulate it in a letter in a paper.

I think this is a missed opportunity for a paper like the *Weekly Worker*, which is miles ahead of other leftwing papers like *Socialist Worker* and *The Socialist*, which are dull and patronise readers as obedient dolts!

**Frank Kavanagh**  
email

### Icemen cometh

Yes, ICE in the US is appalling and we need to keep it out of Britain, Robert Jenrick notwithstanding. As a dual national, I find it difficult to even think about travelling, even though I have two perfectly valid passports. But the EU seems to be trying to go one better - aided and abetted by Germany.

Anyone who follows the Electric Intifada will have read about/seen the interview with Huseyin Dogru, which fills in the details. Dogru is a German

journalist, who was born and lived all his life in Germany. At one time he had Turkish citizenship too, but now only German. He writes about Gaza, but does not follow the 'official' line of the EU or Germany. What chutzpah!

The ministry of foreign affairs in Germany doesn't like what he writes and has made that clear by sanctioning him. As the minister said, "Those who abuse [freedom of opinion and the press] must be aware that this entails costs and what they can expect as a consequence." Mark those words: "abuse freedom of opinion and the press"!

This sanctioning is a little different from arresting people who carry signs. Ali Abunimah, the co-founder and host of Electric Intifada, interviewed Dogru on February 19 to gather the details (all my quotes are from the Electric Intifada under the heading, 'Rights and accountability').

Because of the sanctions, Dogru has no access to his own money - his bank will not allow it. Abunimah offered to send Dogru groceries and pay for them himself, but Dogru is not allowed to accept any financial or material support, notwithstanding that he already had a child and now a newly born set of twins. He is officially allowed \$600 a month from his own account, but his bank refuses to allow him even this. The EU directive calls for up to five years in prison for anyone who violates the sanctions, including Dogru.

Dogru is not allowed to leave the country either. He can't pay his rent, his lawyers or accept any food, water or medicine from third parties. Technically, as Abunimah makes clear, this includes his wife. The sanctions now also apply to his family - his children, including the newly born twins. Up until recently, his wife was allowed to accept food, money, etc, but Germany chomped down on that.

(Others who have been sanctioned in this way cannot go back to their homes because the sanctions do not allow them to fly over EU territory to get to, say, Switzerland.)

These sanctions were adopted by all EU foreign ministers - without allowing any way for those sanctioned to defend themselves - and are binding on all EU states. What are these sanctions supposed to do? Brussels says that they are "not punitive [sic] and instead seek to bring about a change in the policy of those targeted, with a view to promoting the objectives of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy".

In other words, sanctions for publishing opinions not in line with Brussels' policies is now a punishment for non-illegal behaviour - and the writers need to change their opinions sharpish or shut up altogether.

Dogru is the first person in the EU to be sanctioned for covering Germany's role in the genocide in Gaza (others have been sanctioned for "pro-Russian" statements). However, he is also being sanctioned on the grounds that he is not really German, but actually a Turkish citizen and therefore not covered by EU legal rights.

In other words, his German citizenship is being denied because of his ethnicity. Now where have we seen this before? In the last century maybe? In Germany? The message being sent to people in Germany (and the EU?) whose ancestors come from other countries is certainly clear. But then in Britain we know the outcome of these kind of laws - I remember a young woman named Shamima Begum, still imprisoned in a camp in Syria.

Dogru is, of course, challenging this in the high courts. But this could take years, and what is he and his family to do in the meantime? However, he is determined, because, as he says, once they "set a precedent, they will come after all non-pro-Palestinian voices as well".

How about this? "First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out, because I was not communist... then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist... then they came for me. And there was no-one left to speak for me..."

**Gaby Rubin**  
London

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday March 8 5pm

### The US-Israeli war on Iran: political report from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

Use this link to register:  
[communistparty.co.uk/ocf](http://communistparty.co.uk/ocf)

Organised by CPGB: [communistparty.co.uk](http://communistparty.co.uk) and  
Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk)  
For further information, email Stan Keable at  
[Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk)

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: [youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](https://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)

## Fighting fund

# Target so close

Another excellent bit of last-minute help came our way at the end of February, with a tremendous £460 donated in the last couple of days. Many thanks to the comrades who responded to my request last week to play their part as soon as they read that appeal.

The most generous was comrade JC with his excellent £100, while comrades RL (£60), AG and BK (£50 each), OG (£30), JT (£25), JM (£15) and MD (£10) also delivered the goods via bank transfer. On top of that comrades JB and DB (£50), ESJ (£15) and AC (£5) donated via PayPal. Well done, everyone, for taking us so close to our £2,750 monthly target - we were just £70 short!

But now let's see if we can not only make up for that shortage, but go shooting past that target this month - there are, after all, an extra three days in March! So I'm confident we can do it - especially because, after the first four days, as I write, we've already received £563.

Thanks very much, comrades AC (£100), EW (£55), LC (£50), BO (£35), MM (£31), ST and CG (£30 each), MS, BH and RG (£25), DL, AB and MT (£20), CP (£16), AN (£15), RM (£13), RP (£12), MM (£11), JD and DIK (£10) and AR (£5). All of those comrades contributed via bank transfer or standing order, while JN chipped in with a fiver via PayPal.

So please do your bit for the *Weekly Worker*. Make a transfer, donate via PayPal or send us a cheque. You can even hand a few quid to one of our comrades, if you happen to know one! Whatever way you do it, be assured that we rely on our readers and supporters to get us over the line! ●

**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](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate)

## IRAN

The full, uncut version of this article is available at  
[www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1575/defeat-us-israeli-aggression/](http://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1575/defeat-us-israeli-aggression/)

# Defeat US-Israeli aggression

Numerous bogus excuses have been concocted for an extraordinarily dangerous war. We reject them all. This is a nakedly imperialist war by America designed to weaken China and ensure the regional hegemony of Zionist Israel. **Yassamine Mather** calls for revolutionary defencism

There has been much speculation in the US about the abrupt turn from jaw, jaw to war, war.

In many respects, the precise trigger matters less than calling it what it is: an act of imperialist aggression. Since the launch of 'Operation Epic Fury' on February 28, the Trump administration's 'justifications' have shifted repeatedly. While the core themes - the nuclear programme, regime change and alleged threats to the US - have remained, the specific 'reason of the day' has varied. Everything depends on the audience and the speaker.

In his February 24 State of the Union address, Donald Trump claimed that Iran was rebuilding its nuclear programme. That after the June 2025 'Operation Midnight Hammer' strikes. He also accused Iran of developing ballistic missiles capable of threatening Europe and US Middle Eastern bases. However, this was not presented as a matter of urgency. There were talks in Geneva where the US government sought a deal curbing Iran's nuclear and missile programmes and an end to its backing for regional 'proxies' such as Hezbollah.

There were reports that the Geneva talks between the US and Iran were making "significant progress". Oman's foreign minister, Badr Albusaidi, who acted as the chief mediator, told the media that negotiations would resume in Vienna to discuss the finer details of a possible agreement.

## Regime change

Now Trump promises regime change ... but what exactly that means and how it is to be brought about remains vague, and, as is often the case with Trump, never consistent.

■ February 13: Trump publicly declared that regime change would be "the best thing that could happen".

■ February 28 (launch day of the air strikes): in a Truth Social post, he went further, urging Iranians to "take back your country", signalling US support for an internal uprising against the government.

■ March 1-2: The messaging pivoted toward a so-called 'Venezuela model', implying that the aim was not to remake Iranian society, but to remove the senior leadership - a shift that followed reports of the death of supreme leader Ali Khamenei during the initial phase of the war.

■ March 3: References to Iranians 'taking back' their country had largely disappeared from official statements, with attention returning to technical military objectives.

As the war expanded, US officials introduced a 'ticking clock' narrative: senior officials claimed that intelligence indicated Iran was preparing imminent missile strikes against US bases and those of its allies, presenting this as a justification for preemptive action. This followed questions from members of Congress, the Canadian premier and several European governments about the immediacy of the threat - noting that Iran's intercontinental missile capability was reportedly years away. Administration spokespersons subsequently reframed the argument, shifting the emphasis from preventing an imminent strike to averting a future nuclear war.

A newer justification, articulated by secretary of state Marco Rubio, suggested that the US acted because Washington believed Israel was already preparing its own strike on Iran and that, if Israel acted alone, Tehran would retaliate against US forces.



Israel got what it wanted

Therefore, by joining the initial assault, the US claimed it was preempting Iranian retaliation by weakening Tehran's capacity to respond. An explanation that is as baseless as it is labyrinthine.

On February 27, and again on March 3, Trump cited the repression of Iranian protesters and an exaggerated death toll as a moral rationale for war, framing the conflict as part of a broader 'liberation' effort. The problem with this constant dishonesty is that no-one with any intelligence can take such claims seriously.

This is a war of aggression and should be condemned, regardless of the brutal and repressive character of the Islamic Republic. Contrary to the simplistic comments made by sections of the Iranian left, this is not merely a war between two reactionary states, Iran and Israel (the latter backed by the US). One of the many factions of the Worker-communist Party of Iran (Hekmatist) is even echoing Trump's claim that Iran was not serious about negotiations, and that this is why the war began!

In Iran, the initial attack happened on Saturday morning, the first day of the week. People were going to work and school. Soon after the first bombs and missiles struck, I received a photo of schoolchildren taking refuge in a shelter. But many were still in the streets. This was partly because everyone assumed an initial attack would happen overnight. So they were surprised. I spoke to relatives on the phone saying they had to rush and pick up their children from school. On that same day, reports came in of at least 148 children having been killed in Minab, in the south of the country. By Tuesday we had at least 1,000 civilian deaths. Clearly, when the US and Israel say they have targeted specific sites and institutions such as the Revolutionary Guards, that their weapons have pin-point accuracy, this is a comforting lie. It is impossible to separate 'legitimate' state targets from the surrounding civilian population. Already some residential parts of Tehran are beginning to look like parts of Gaza.

## Khamenei killed

Killing Ali Khamenei was not as complicated an operation as some western media outlets have claimed. The BBC reports that Mossad used clever tactics, such as tracking his movements by hacking into Tehran's CCTV system. Nonsense. In reality, he refused to go into hiding or even move from his home after the 12-day war in June 2025. Contrary to CIA and MI6 propaganda, he was not hiding in a bunker. In fact, there is a video of him explaining the logic of staying put: "I am 86 years old, I'm crippled" (he had a paralysed arm). "I am not healthy, I am going to die. I am not going to hide - they can come and kill me." Of course, given what we saw on March 1 in Iran and across the global south - millions on the streets of Iranian cities,

hundreds of thousands in Yemen, Pakistan and Sri Lanka - there was a certain level of 'calculated martyrdom' in this decision.

As much as I abhor the politics of Khamenei, we should not treat the assassination of heads of state or leaders of organisations - simply because the US or Israel do not approve of them - as lightly as some have done. We need to condemn such acts without hesitation. In some ways, we have become immunised to these killings. So far, we have seen Israel assassinate a string of Hezbollah and Hamas leaders; Trump assassinate the IRCG's general Qasem Soleimani; and now, between them, they have assassinated the supreme leader himself.

What is different is that, for the first time, a *head of state* has been assassinated. Some of this is a direct consequence of the global tolerance of the genocide in Gaza, which we now take for granted. A most horrific mass murder has occurred in front of cameras for the last two and a quarter years, and the world has not only tolerated it, but western governments have provided diplomatic cover and arms for the genocidal state. We cannot carry on as we were, because we live in a new era. We live in a situation where the world has changed, where it is no longer surprising that a head of state of a country Trump does not like is killed - along with members of his family - while the world looks on.

Have you seen any pictures of protests against the war in Iran in the mass media? No. What they have chosen to show are a few honking cars, on Saturday night, filled with flag-waving royalists celebrating the war and the death of Khamenei. With the exception of a short video on Sky and another on ABC, there seems to be a deliberate decision by major media outlets to turn a blind eye to the massive protests in Tehran, Shiraz, Isfahan and elsewhere. True, this has fooled some. In *Socialist Worker*, Hossein and Amir, Iranian exiles, write that the "attacks empower the monarchists", the supporters of Reza Pahlavi, son of the former shah (March 4 2026).

But the fact of the matter is that huge numbers took to the streets. Far from echoing Trump's call for regime change, they called for revenge, shouting "Death to America!" and "Death to Israel!" They are angry, because their homes, schools and hospitals are being destroyed. With his death, Khamenei has managed something he could not achieve during his life: uniting the Iranian people against the US and Israel.

For those of us who are in opposition to the Iranian government and to US aggression, all of this creates an even more difficult situation. On one hand, I appreciate that people have come out - a real slap in the face for imperialist aggression. But, on the other hand, all of this might *consolidate* Iran's Islamic Republic.

## Strategic options

Israel's objective appears to be the weakening, if not the destruction, of Iran as a functioning state. Several Israeli ministers have made statements that strongly suggest this, and US officials who have met with Israeli leaders often emerge with that impression. There has also been a broader argument - advanced by figures such as Alain Badiou in recent years - that the US strategy in the Middle East has been to produce weakened or failed states. Iraq can be described in that way, while

Libya is widely seen in similar terms. There is arguably an element of this logic in Trump's policy, and it cannot be dismissed outright.

At the same time, this is not the only scenario being pursued. My understanding is that a number of tech billionaires close to Trump - including some of Iranian origin - have argued that there is significant financial potential in reaching an accommodation with Tehran. From this perspective, a negotiated deal could represent a political victory for Washington, particularly if it ended or at least curtailed the sale of discounted Iranian oil to China. Such an outcome would be a real blow to China and its global ambitions. If an agreement could be reached with the interim leadership - whether the current three-member council or some other body - it would be presented as a personal triumph for Donald Trump, who clearly has an eye on November's mid-term elections. The GOP's majority is seriously at risk.

## Balance of forces

There is also the possibility that, if the Islamic Republic cannot be decisively defeated militarily, Washington may hope to undermine its social and political base. I remain sceptical of this scenario. Some commentators - including less serious voices in Persian-language media - have speculated about potential street fighting between supporters of the former shah and pro-regime forces. This seems highly unlikely. The balance of forces remains overwhelmingly in favour of the current state structure - especially following the Israeli-US assault. Monarchist supporters are unlikely to even show themselves on the streets for now. Of course, if dramatic and unforeseen developments were to occur - for example, if multiple senior figures were eliminated - the situation could change. But, at present, there is little evidence that the US administration, unlike Netanyahu, places any real trust in Reza Pahlavi. There are strong doubts about him having any sort of mass base inside Iran and he is widely thought to be somewhat stupid. Certainly he has proved utterly incapable of uniting the disparate elements of the exiled Iranian opposition.

However, as everyone knows, wars are unpredictable. While Trump initially seemed satisfied with forcing a "change in behaviour", his rhetoric has hardened, not least following Iran's drone strikes on the US embassy in Riyadh and facilities in Kuwait. Only a few days ago he bluntly stated it might now be "too late to talk". But with the mercurial Trump, war, war, could easily give way again to jaw, jaw ... with who and on the basis of what conditions is another matter.

There is, purportedly, considerable friction within Trump's own team. Secretary of war, Pete Hegseth, has argued that the current conflict is "not a democracy-building exercise", while vice-president JD Vance continues to warn against "endless wars" that alienate Trump's Maga base. Furthermore, domestic polling shows only one in four Americans supports the current strikes.

Military leaders in Tehran are undoubtedly closely monitoring these differences. If Trump concludes that the political cost is too high - whether due to rising US casualties or pressure from Arab allies - he may opt for a 'quick yield' exit that leaves the Iranian regime effectively intact - an

outcome Netanyahu would likely view as a failure. And, remember, he too faces crucial elections on October 27. If things go well in Iran, expect an early, snap, election which could easily strengthen his hand.

## Demands

Irrespective of the military outcome, we must go beyond shouting 'Stop the war!' What can we do, though? We should stand squarely with revolutionary defeatism: we want to see the defeat of the US, Israel and their allies, including the UK (which has reluctantly supported US-Israeli aggression because Iran has had the temerity to strike back). So we must call for solidarity with the people of Iran, while also opposing our own imperialists. That means demonstrations, widening the boycott campaign to docks and airports, selecting anti-war candidates in Your Party, etc.

Inside Iran, however, we must advocate revolutionary defencism. We must be aware that it is not easy. A few days ago, I was optimistic about promoting revolutionary-defencist slogans. However, having seen the large protests in support of the regime, I realise how difficult things are going to be for comrades.

Nonetheless, they will come forward with demands that rally people in districts and towns against the way the regime is conducting war.

Everyone in Iran tells me there are no adequate air-raid shelters - we must demand them. Open basements, underground car parks and the metro system.

We should call for universal rationing, instead of the selective subsidies the Islamic Republic grants to its chosen friends and allies. People are already going hungry. There should be fair shares for all.

The fortunes of the corrupt oligarchs should be immediately confiscated. Privatised industries put under state control so that the country can be organised to resist and survive. We must emphasise that the defeat of imperialism can only be achieved by fighting for extreme democracy. No to the rule of theocrats, generals, monarchists and capitalists.

We demand the freeing of political prisoners currently held in Iranian prisons who want to resist the Israelis and the Americans. We must call for an armed popular militia.

There must be freedom of speech and the unrestricted right to demonstrate, assemble and organise.

We have to keep demanding the separation of state and religion. Sunnis, Zoroastrians, Jews, Baha'is and Christians should have equal rights. People should be free to believe or not to believe. There must be no discrimination. Religion should be a private matter. Iran must become a secular republic.

We should demand the continued unity of Iran but also the right of the Kurdish, Azeri and Balochi nations to self-determination. Unity must be voluntary. That is the best way to thwart US and Israeli plans to use the legitimate grievances of national minorities to fragment and wreck the country.

We oppose the theocracy and any return of the monarchy. We call for a provisional revolutionary government that organises free and fair elections to a constituent assembly.

Such demands can gain mass traction, as the war goes from days to weeks ●

## BY-ELECTION

# Labour on the ropes

After the Green victory in Gorton and Denton, things look grim for Sir Keir Starmer's Labour government. But class strategy needs to be central, writes Paul Demarty

In the end, it was not even close. What was predicted by opinion pollsters to be a tight three-horse race in the Manchester's Gorton and Denton constituency ended in a thumping victory for Hannah Spencer of the Green Party, with 40% of the vote.

That left a distant second-place finish for Matthew Goodwin of Reform, on 28%, while Labour's Angeliki Stogia - a local councillor and former lobbyist - wheezed into third, on 25%. Neither the Tories nor Liberal Democrats came anywhere near retaining their deposits. More humiliation for Kemi Badenoch, then; but the real humiliation is for Labour and its embattled leader, Sir Kier Starmer.

As has been widely noted, this is the worst possible result. Ideally, of course, Stogia would have won; a by-election victory at this time, with scandal after scandal assailing the government, would have been quite the tonic. Failing that, a Reform victory with a split Labour/Green vote would have at least backed up the strategy, such as it is, that Starmer adopted from his now-departed henchman, Morgan McSweeney, to turn politics into a straight choice between Starmer and Nigel Farage ('Vote Green, get Reform').

Spencer's convincing win makes all that look a little silly. There was perhaps never a danger of Goodwin sneaking in, given the nature of the seat; and in any case, as it turns out, the Greens were in the better position. The dynamics of by-elections in general - an opportunity for voters to punish unpopular governments without serious consequence - should perhaps have encouraged some caution. It turns out the Greens can win; they can turn out canvassers by the dozen (soon they may even have more members than Labour); and, even allowing for the special circumstances of by-elections, they are presumably now a threat to Labour in its remaining urban strongholds like Manchester and London.

### Disaster labour

This is a disaster for Sir Keir, and unfortunately for him, a disaster largely of his own making. He made McSweeney into his Svengali, committing him to entirely cynical and negative campaigning, when it comes to shoring up his left flank. He hired Peter Mandelson as US ambassador. He prevented Manchester mayor Andy Burnham, who would have had a much better chance of winning than the anonymous Stogia, from standing, in order to head off a likely leadership challenge.

It is unsurprising, then, that his response has been simply to robotically repeat all the lines of attack that have been so badly shaken by this result: what else could he say without self-incrimination? He reminds us, alas, of Saddam Hussein's information minister, insisting on state television that the American invaders were being repelled, even as Abrams tanks rolled by in the background. Absent a miracle in May's elections, he surely cannot last much longer in No10.

Turning to Reform for a moment, this was not in fact a bad result for it - not that you would know it from the appalling grace shown by Goodwin after his defeat. Reform completely devoured the Tory vote, as noted, further burnishing its own credentials



A two-horse race to beat Reform

as the 'real' party of opposition. It gained, in fact, significantly more votes than Reform and the Tories got together in 2024, on a very similar turnout, suggesting that it did, indeed, manage to grub a fair few votes from Labour. This was not a target seat for Reform: its substantial Muslim population is something of an obstacle, especially if your candidate is a smug, racist charisma-vacuum, whose principal occupation these days is bloviating on GB News.

Yet to listen to Goodwin, you would think Reform had been robbed. "I don't think the progressives beat us," he huffed on Friday morning. "I think the progressives were told how to vote and I think what you saw was a coalition of Islamists and woke progressives that came together to dominate the constituency." This amounted to a new "dangerous sectarianism" in British politics. This line was repeated, bizarrely, by the Tories and even Labour before long.

The evidence for this seems basically to be that the Greens printed a leaflet in Urdu denouncing the slaughter in Gaza - for shame! - and a few unconfirmed reports of "family voting" (basically the *paterfamilias* ensuring that the wife and kids vote 'correctly'), hotly denied by the local polling station staff. For all we know, there was some of the latter. It has long been a perfectly routine piece of political chicanery in large cities with significant migrant populations in all countries that have such cities and also hold elections, and would be quite familiar to Boss Tweed of Tammany Hall. As for the Urdu leaflet, this amounts to a complaint that the Greens ... campaigned for votes.

If it were just Goodwin, it would not be terrifically interesting: basically an instance of a racist complaining that the electorate includes the people he spends his whole life decrying as a dangerous alien element. The adoption of this attack by Labour and the Tories suggests that this will become another mechanism to delegitimise opposition

to the Gaza genocide (and the fresh horrors unfolding in Iran) and keep any disloyalty to Washington, real or perceived, firmly off the electoral menu when the general election rolls around. One to watch.

### Class first

The Green victory, in the context of its left shift under new leader Zack Polanski, will be widely welcomed on the wider left. The Socialist Workers Party called for a Green vote, as in the end did both Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana of Your Party. Many other organisations could be named. But it is not altogether surprising. Given the botched launch of YP, it is the Greens who have been most successful in hoovering up the scattered remnants of Corbynism.

Our organisation did not call for a Green vote - in fact, we called for a Labour vote. Had there been a plausible leftwing candidate, then we would probably have supported them, but there was not (Hugo Wils, of the eccentric left-Zionist Communist League, came last). This comes down in the end to the centrality of class for the communist project - and, while we doubt we could have swayed many votes one way or the other in Gorton and Denton, the class question makes the spate of socialist enthusiasm for the Greens deeply problematic.

The Greens are a petty-bourgeois party. By this we do not mean, in 'prolier than thou' fashion, that it is dominated by 'studenty types' (who isn't these days?), but that it is literally a vehicle for small business owners. Where it has gained power municipally, it has governed perfectly in accordance with this background, in the interests of sections of the local petty proprietors. Indeed, despite widely being described as 'working class', presumably on the basis that she does manual labour and speaks with a northern accent, Spencer is petty-bourgeois - a self-employed tradeswoman with a not-too-shabby

property portfolio on the side. We look forward to her filling out the MPs' register of interests.

The leftism of Polanski is widely, and adequately, described as "eco-populist". It would be no surprise to find him pitching it under the name 'eco-socialism', and it would not be totally unfair for him to do so - many strange things have gone under that name over the years. 'Populism' is better, however, because its basic actors are the elite and the 'people' - what the Occupy populist movement used to call 'the 99%'. That is precisely a class amalgam, which does not distinguish between the class components of the plebs - principally proletariat and the middle classes (including the petty bourgeoisie).

It is perfectly standard Marxism, back to the days of the Second International and beyond, for the proletariat to fight for leadership over the intermediate strata. The shape of such leadership is roughly that we ought to convince these layers that working class rule will be better for them than rule by the big capitalists and landlords, that they will enjoy fuller democracy and a better standard of life, and will not need to fear the wolf at the door. It may further involve strategically justifiable political concessions to the middle classes.

What it cannot do is side with the middle classes where their interests collide with those of the proletariat. It is not in the interests of the petty bourgeoisie, for example, for there to be strict limits to the working day and a high wage-floor. They will have to foot the bill, in the case of their own employees. Nor is it necessarily in the interests of the petty bourgeoisie to socialise the commanding heights of the economy: nationalisation of the banking system will make credit more easily available, sure, but it puts a hard ceiling on success. The American-style story of a company starting in the founder's garage and growing into a world-bestriving conglomerate is decisively closed off.

When leftwingers tail the likes of Polanski, they make the mistake of forgetting the basics of their own socialist programme. The case of a sentimental pacifist like Corbyn is perhaps different (indeed, given the projects they actually pursue, it is not clear that disunity between the Greens and the right wing of Your Party is at all principled ...), but for the SWP - always ready to sing you a song of workers' self-activity and 'socialism from below' - it is a matter of incoherence.

### Hard choices

What justifies it explicitly for the SWP, and implicitly for many other organisations, is that the Green Party is where the action is. Newly radicalised layers flock to it; they are inspired and raring to go. They want peace; they want to fight racism; they want a less exploitative and ecologically ruinous economy, and indeed many will quite happily consider themselves socialists on that account. They are our kind of people - at least by instinct.

And, truly, they are! Yet if they are to stay involved in radical politics, they will face political choices; and those will by definition close off certain avenues. For a Marxist, the 'small is beautiful' comfort zone of Greenism is essentially a utopia. Climate change itself poses problems of global economic coordination. It is not impossible for some kind of principled socialist organisation to emerge in some way from the Green Party (the *Communist manifesto* itself was adopted by an organisation that began as a Christian-utopian outfit, after all), but for it to do so will entail splits - and splits along class lines.

Simply following them now because they are popular militates in the opposite direction. One does not want to be disruptive to such a dynamic movement. But the point of Marxist politics is to take a longer view - a strategic perspective that will outlast multiple political cycles, and give us the strength of mind to (for example) pursue a political line to the point of forcing splits, in the interests of firmer and more effective unity in the long run.

The lack of a long view plagues far-left opinion on the Labour Party. It was a truism, in the Tony Blair years and after, that the party had lost any remaining working class character, and should be shunned entirely, in favour of initiatives outside it. With Corbyn's leadership, that perspective was violently reversed (although the likes of the SWP still kept their people out). Now, with Starmer in charge, we are back to Blair mode. All the way along, Labour has retained the affiliation of the trade unions, and, of course, its name - as Mike Macnair has put it, the shadow of the idea of a workers' party. We need to approach it strategically, not purely on the basis of vibes.

Labour will probably recover somewhat before the next general election. The threat of Reform, or 'Reformified' Toryism, will weigh more heavily under those circumstances. Further fragmentation of vote shares will make things deeply unpredictable under our electoral system. The same fundamental obstacles to independent working class politics will remain ●

## OUR HISTORY

# German takes on the general strike

Marking the centenary of the 1926 General Strike, Jack Conrad looks at how Belgium's 1893 suffrage strike and Russia's 1905 revolution impacted on German social democracy. By 1914 plans were well afoot

Belgium's successful 1893 suffrage general strike taught and inspired the Second (Socialist) International. As might be expected, that included its biggest and most influential affiliate, the Social Democratic Party in Germany.<sup>1</sup> The prevailing orthodoxy had, till then, been to dismiss the idea of a, certainly *the*, general strike as an irresponsible diversion, a primitive throwback. Belgium changed things.

Russia's 1905 revolution, though it ended in defeat, also taught and inspired.<sup>2</sup> "There are," as Gregory Zinoviev said, "defeats which are more valuable than any victory."<sup>3</sup> Beginning with a humble petition to the tsar, it reached its high point with the Moscow uprising: soviets, general strike, armed insurrection and innovative barricade tactics were combined together.<sup>4</sup>

This in no way refuted Marx and Engels. On the contrary it bore out their method and showed that the anarchist strategy of overthrowing the bourgeoisie with one big general strike was a non-starter. The land of Mikhail Bakunin's birth provided an unsurpassed example of *how* to make a revolution. Yet no thanks to the marginalised anarchists. It was the Marxists, crucially the Bolshevik wing of the RSDLP, who led and gave the general strikes, mass demonstrations and urban uprisings their revolutionary programme.

Marxism by definition learns from life. It organises, generalises and gives conscious expression to the struggles and creative developments brought about by the masses themselves. Unlike anarchists and reformists, Marxists have no ready-made formulas, nor a list of forbidden methods of struggle. In principle we positively recognise *all* tactical forms.

Not only did the anarchists play no significant role whatsoever in 1905, but the idea of a general strike as a panacea was explicitly rejected. Having discovered the general strike as a *tactic* "essential under *certain* conditions", its limitations were also discovered. The spontaneous general strike sounded the approach of revolution. However, even if led by the party, it could not take things to the finish. To do that an armed uprising was necessary. That is why Lenin argued, in the course of 1905, that as an "independent and predominant form of struggle" the general strike was "out of date".<sup>5</sup> The combination of general strike with insurrection was needed. That was the main lesson Lenin tried to drive home, when it came to the temporary reunification of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in 1906. In the "tactical platform for the unity congress" the Bolsheviks wanted this agreed:

With further growth of the movement, the peaceful general strike proved inadequate, while partial recourse to it failed its aim and disorganised the forces of the proletariat... In the present stage of the movement, the general *political* strike must be regarded not so much as an independent means of struggle as an auxiliary means in relation to insurrection; that therefore the timing of such a strike, and the choice of its place and of the industries it is to involve, should preferably depend upon the time and circumstances of the main form of struggle: namely, the armed uprising.<sup>6</sup>

Needless to say, most Mensheviks were not prepared to accept any such thing. For Georgi Plekhanov, the key



Rosa Luxemburg: prison mugshot taken in 1906

lesson of the Moscow uprising was that "they should not have taken up arms".<sup>7</sup> A view doubtless common on the right wing in the German SDP. Reichstag deputies who had grown complacent in that self-important little world; trade union officials who saw the class struggle limited to negotiating over wages and conditions; party functionaries who feared a revival of the anti-socialist laws - could only but look at Russia's general strikes, street barricades and guerrilla fighters with consternation.

## Leftist wing

Not so the SDP's, leftist, semi-syndicalist wing, and its leading figures, such as Alexander Parvus, Paul Lensch, Heinrich Cunow, Karl Liebknecht and, of course, Rosa Luxemburg. With her relationship with Karl Kautsky - and the SDP's orthodox Marxist centre - already considerably strained, Luxemburg launched a polemical broadside against the party leadership over Russia's 1905 revolution and the significance of its general strikes.

She did this most famously in her *The mass strike, the political party and the trade unions*, a pamphlet written in 1906 following her release from a Warsaw prison (Kingdom Poland was part of the tsarist empire). Usually simply known as *The mass strike*, its conclusions, as might be expected, were substantially different from Lenin's. She had, after all, been a fierce critic of the Bolsheviks since 1903. Luxemburg condemned Lenin for "ultra-centralism" and his supposed attempt at transposing "Blanquism" onto the mass socialist movement in Russia.<sup>8</sup>

A bit rich, given how she willingly tolerated, enabled, the genuine "ultra-centralism" of Leo Jogiches in the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL).<sup>9</sup> His own comrades described how Jogiches ran the party with an iron hand: he "imposed the greatest discipline on himself" and "compelled his fellow comrades to do likewise".<sup>10</sup> A dictatorial approach Jogiches took with him into the formation of the Communist Party of Germany in 1918-19.

Either way, whereas Lenin stressed the limits of the general strike, the necessity of a mass party and detailed

preparations for an armed uprising, she positively celebrated spontaneity. Her take on 1905 was therefore much closer to Leon Trotsky's (heavily influenced by Parvus). It should be added that Kautsky soon became something of an "honorary Bolshevik". Lenin and other Bolsheviks, including a young Stalin, wrote enthusiastically about his 1906 article, 'The driving forces of the Russian Revolution', where he expressed his agreement with their strategic conception of a worker-peasant alliance and organised distrust of the liberals.<sup>11</sup>

Luxemburg wanted to inspire German workers with the stunning vistas offered by the general strike, compared with what she viewed as the dull and limited routine in Germany. A routine of standing in elections and patiently building the party which resulted in a million members and the state within a state that the Bolsheviks, and many others besides, so admired. Of course, objective circumstances were radically different. Between 1905 and 1907 Russia experienced a tremendous revolutionary upsurge, but Germany only the slow decay of social peace.

However, though originally a critic of Bolshevism, Luxemburg and her organisation, of which she was 'the brains', the SDKPiL, came to reconsider the Bolsheviks, not least in light of 1905 and the Moscow uprising. The SDKPiL tended to side with the Bolsheviks against the Mensheviks during the 1906 Stockholm (Unity) Congress: this is when the SDKPiL formally joined the RSDLP as an autonomous national section. The SDKPiL drew even closer to the Bolsheviks at the 1907 London congress: it supported the Bolsheviks on all major strategic questions.

## One-sided

Luxemburg tended to produce one-sided theorisation. Thus on the national question she came out in opposition to self-determination as a matter of principle because of her correct view that the workers of Russia and her native Poland had no interest in fighting for separation (Poland was at the time divided three ways - by Germany, Austria and Russia). With Jogiches and Luxemburg taking the lead, the SDKPiL maintained a thoroughly sectarian attitude

towards the Polish Socialist Party-Left. That despite the fact that this not inconsiderable 1906 split from Józef Piłsudski's PSP had come round to virtually indistinguishable conclusions: demanding national independence should be rejected as a petty bourgeois diversion in favour of cooperation with the workers' movement in Russia.

The failure, the refusal, to seriously pursue unity with the PSP-Left allowed Piłsudski and his national socialism to remain the dominant force within the Polish working class (Piłsudski and the PSP providing the unacknowledged template for today's Scottish Socialist Party, Solidarity, Radical Independence Campaign, Commonweal, Your Party Scotland, etc). The SDKPiL and PSP-Left only merged in 1918 to form the Communist Workers Party of Poland.

In the same way, having adopted Germany and the German workers' movement, Luxemburg hardened her theoretical overreliance on spontaneity. Her belief that "the directing organs of the socialist party ... play a conservative role" and that revolution is primarily "a spontaneous act", theorised against Lenin in 1904, was confirmed by personal experience of what she saw as the timidity of the SDP.<sup>12</sup>

Luxemburg was sure that the party would act as a barrier to revolution. So, instead of fighting through the party, crucially by organising factionally, she banked on the broad mass of the working class propelling the party into decisive action. Hence spontaneity. Freed from the "barbed wire" of party control, the general strike rouses, unleashes, new, hitherto unorganised, layers who flood into the party and thereby transform the party.<sup>13</sup>

Though many aspects of her account of 1905 are unsatisfactory, she recognised that the class struggle, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. She did not suffer from that dire pessimism of the intellect nor the paralysing construction that workers are forever doomed to trench-like warfare.

There were those on the SDP right who accused her of wanting to foist the general strike on Germany through winning a 51% congress resolution. Countering them, Luxemburg argued: "It is just as impossible to 'propagate'

the mass strike as an abstract means of struggle as it is to propagate the 'revolution'."<sup>14</sup> Resolutions at party congresses do not bring about a general strike. No party, no matter how strong, no matter how high the esteem of its leaders, can call a general strike without regard to the concrete historical situation.

Well, of course, the call can be made without regard to the concrete historical situation. Beginning this series of articles, we have already cited the antics of Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party and Tony Cliff's Socialist Workers Party.<sup>15</sup> Quintessential confessional sects both. However, a *real* party, yes, by dint of a congress resolution, can actually stage a *symbolic general strike* on an agreed date, such as March 8 and May 1 (respectively International Working Women's Day and International Workers' Day). Such actions can, as year follows year, demonstrate the unity and growing power of the working class globally. We have also touched upon the 1893 suffrage general strike called by the Belgium Workers Party ... which did, of course, take full account of the concrete historical situation.

Obviously, though, what Luxemburg had in mind was the *revolutionary general strike*. She was convinced that Germany was heading towards a final crisis. Likewise global capitalism. With that in mind, there was nothing artificial about the workers' movement in Germany learning from Russia 1905. The general strike was not, to state the obvious, a specific product of Russia 1905. However, for Luxemburg the general strike was no mere tactic to be included in a Swiss army knife medley: street demonstrations, standing in elections, publishing a newspaper and making agitational speeches in parliament. No, it was central to her strategy of overthrow (*Niederwerfungsstrategie*). Even if it begins by fusing various economic strikes together, her general strike drives onwards, through the elemental pulse of mass self-activity, to political demands and from there to a direct challenge for state power.

The SDP's trade union officials had their own particular fears and were quick to voice them. After decades of slow and painstaking work building the unions into strong

organisations, they did not want to risk disaster through importing Russia's general strikes. The Reich state was just itching to clamp down. So they pleaded. According to Luxemburg, these guardians of the trade unions treated them not as weapons, but "like rare porcelain".<sup>16</sup>

The general strike, she argued, is not a crafty device that can speed up the process of objective development. History cannot be cheated. The general strike can only be understood from the point of view of what is historically inevitable. General strikes result from social crises which, by definition, have deep, objective, causes.

Trade union officialdom had another excuse. The unions were too weak! Luxemburg had no difficulty in disposing of that particular argument either. General strikes do not come onto the agenda when trade union membership reaches x, y or z level. The class struggle cannot be conducted by "counting heads". Furthermore, taking the example of Russia, it was clear that out of the "fire and the glow" of the general strike there had emerged "like Venus from the foam, fresh, young, powerful, buoyant trade unions". Before the revolution, unions hardly existed in Russia.<sup>17</sup> In the course of it, because of it, one industry after another spawned them, till they too counted members in the hundreds of thousands. What had taken decades in Germany, had, in Russia, been done in months. Luxemburg was sure that the revolutionary general strike in Germany would see the unions grow enormously in numbers and authority.

Luxemburg derided those who insisted for their own reasons in presenting her ideas as if they were dealing with an anarchist. The general strike should not be seen as "one act, one isolated action" which overthrows the bourgeoisie.<sup>18</sup> Rather - as an elemental movement made up of millions of people now being economic, now being political - the general strike represents the culmination of a whole period of the class struggle. Drawing together all strands of the class struggle, the general strike "is inseparable from the revolution".<sup>19</sup>

## Turning Belgium

The SDP's Jena congress in 1905 actually adopted a resolution, moved by August Bebel, agreeing to the general strike. The aim was to emulate the Belgium Workers Party and 1893. Not a revolutionary but a suffrage general strike. The objective being to force an extension of the franchise in Prussia (the pre-eminent and by far the largest political unit in the German empire). Its 'three-class' system favoured Junkers and big capitalists and ensured that their interests easily dominated Prussia's indirectly elected Abgeordnetenhaus (lower house). The Herrenhaus (the upper house) was largely appointed by the kaiser.

In the same year, however, the Cologne trade union congress scandalously ruled out any discussion of the question. To do otherwise would be "playing with fire". The biggest trade unions were, needless to say, closely aligned to the SDP and a secret deal was hatched not to implement the resolution.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, at the SDP's Mannheim 1906 congress, trade union leaders backtracked somewhat. It was agreed that the SDP would coordinate all actions (including strikes) of equal interest to the party and the unions.

The general suffrage strike was taken up by Luxemburg in 1910 - resulting in a big falling out with Kautsky. He refused to publish her article on the subject in *Die Neue Zeit*. Why? Essentially because Luxemburg wanted a revolutionary version of the Belgium suffrage general strike (there had been further such actions in 1902 and 1913). She argued that Belgian leaders such as Émile Vandervelde had intentionally restricted the strike

to prevent it from turning into a movement that would "strike terror into the hearts of the bourgeoisie". Hence the BWP had "deflated the latent political power of the general strike into thin air" by treating it as a one-off, legalistic action.<sup>21</sup>

Kautsky was quite prepared to criticise the conservatism of the right. Even threaten coalitionists with expulsion. But he also feared a split. Publishing Luxemburg would have triggered outrage on the right ... and therefore his conciliationism. But events were moving, albeit not at the flood.

The new Prussian minister president and German chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, had proposed "half-hearted and limited reforms", which the SDP had rejected. This failed reform attempt created a situation where Luxemburg and other SDP leftists began organising bigger and bigger street demonstrations. They rallied not only SDP members, but left-liberal, middle-class protesters too.

After a months-long campaign, some 200,000 demonstrated for democratic reform in Prussia on April 10 1910. Mass demonstrations on this scale were a new feature of political life in Germany. However, whereas Luxemburg and other SDP leftists wanted to springboard into launching a revolutionary general strike, the majority of party leaders were convinced that this was premature ... and therefore dangerous.

Kautsky's case against both the SDP's impatient left and its conservative right can be found in his 'Between Baden and Luxemburg'.<sup>22</sup> According to Kautsky, objective circumstances demanded a continuation of his "strategy of attrition" ... for the moment. Only a revolutionary situation would demand Luxemburg's "strategy of overthrow". Moreover - and this is important - Kautsky believed that the SDP needed a majority in parliament as a mandate to shift from a "strategy of attrition" to a "strategy of overthrow".

Incidentally, there can be little doubt that Lenin "stood closer to Kautsky than to Rosa Luxemburg".<sup>23</sup> He approvingly cites him to the effect that the moment for a "strategy of overthrow" had not yet arrived at "this moment" ... but it was "unavoidable and imminent". That said, Lenin celebrated the unity between Kautsky and Luxemburg at the SDP's September 18-24 1910 Magdeburg congress. It voted for the first part of Luxemburg's motion on the general strike which recognised its applicability when it came to electoral reform in Prussia ... but she withdrew the second half which dealt with the general strike as a strategy in order to "make for peace between her and Kautsky".<sup>24</sup>

## Leaps and bounds

Since 1890 SDP membership had grown in leaps and bounds: it reached a million shortly before the outbreak of World War I. With the 1912 elections, its Reichstag fraction increased from 43 to 110 deputies - making it the largest parliamentary party. Political power appeared inevitable, if the SDP acted with caution. The reasoning being that capitalism not only produces its own grave-digger in ever greater numbers, but mounting internal contradictions above in the ruling apparatus. That did not imply passivity for what Kautsky happily described as a "revolutionary party", but not a revolution-making party.<sup>25</sup> A critical element of his strategy, outlined in his *Road to power* (1909), being the transformation of the standing army into a popular militia. In short, an expected, or actual, popular majority would be defended by the armed people. Nonetheless, achieving universal suffrage was considered central.

While the falling out between

Kautsky and Luxemburg over the revolutionary general strike is often seen by historians as having led to a permanent split, Dieter Buse amply demonstrates that this is false. Leave aside the September 1910 rapprochement, by 1913 all party factions, impatient left, orthodox centre and conservative right, were working together and remarkably well at that.<sup>26</sup>

Over the course of three years a number of factors had changed. Firstly, though the 1912 Reichstag elections resulted in the SDP becoming the biggest parliamentary party, initial hopes of gaining sweeping reforms, including in Prussia, had been disappointed. Secondly, the attempt to promote parliamentary cooperation between the SDP and the liberals, promoted by the likes of Philipp Scheidemann and Friedrich Ebert, floundered. Thirdly, the Junker-big capitalist elite developed a "fortress Prussia" approach to defend the kaiser state.

As a result, by mid-1914, even "avowed mass strike sceptics" - among them, and most importantly, the trade union leader, Carl Legien - acknowledged that the government's commitment to the status quo had become "so uncompromising and aggressive that a potentially violent confrontation of the labour movement and the Prussian and German authorities was becoming increasingly likely".<sup>27</sup>

"Fortress Prussia" created considerable areas of "overlap" between the SDP's main factional blocs. Hence, the SDP, almost as a whole, came round to the idea of a Belgian-style suffrage general strike - something which should, as we have argued, blow apart the bog-standard academic and leftist narrative of a reformist, non-revolutionary SDP, mired in bureaucratic inertia.<sup>28</sup> Much to my surprise, and I am sure that of most readers, even Eduard Bernstein - the 'father of revisionism' - was up for the fight in 1914. Of course, when it comes to tactics, timing is everything. What might have been inappropriate adventurism in 1910 could well become appropriate in 1914.

## Coup from above

Documents unearthed by Guettel show that on June 23 1914, just five days before the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Prussia's interior minister, Friedrich Wilhelm von Loebell, was venting his worries, "not about a looming world war, but about the possibility of a general strike". Loebell sent an urgent note to the president of the Prussian police, demanding "a report on all proposed, planned or potentially necessary police and economic measures in case of a mass strike in your district". Meanwhile, at the Reich level, chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg planned to initiate criminal proceedings against SDP leaders. There were also genuine fears in the SDP that this would go hand-in-hand with an army-Junker 'coup from above' (*Staatsstreich*).

So objective circumstances were heading towards a stark choice: revolution or counterrevolution. What the outcome would have been is, however, hard to call. The SDP had no fighting formations and nor were there signs of splits in the state machine. Of course, a suffrage general strike could have created schisms. Even mutinies and changing sides. After all, young SDP members, trade unionists and voters made up a good portion of the army's rank-and-file conscripts.

Karl Liebknecht had written his *Militarism and anti-militarism* book (1907), in which he exposed the ill-treatment of soldiers and how the army was used as a strike breaker. He advocated "a citizen's army in place of the standing army" - and got an 18-month sentence for treason.<sup>29</sup>

But, as far as I know, however, no organised SDP work was being conducted in army barracks.

Despite that, Guettel argues that radical constitutional change was achievable (but by no means guaranteed). This is not to say, he argues, that a suffrage general strike would "definitely have occurred, had war not broken out". Yet even in 1913 both SDP tops and rank-and-file members were actively engaged in exploring the possibility. In April 1913, Scheidemann, an SDP conservative, initiated contacts with the Belgium Workers Party to learn from its experience. By June 1913, the police's surveillance report on Scheidemann's activities noted that "the mood in comrades' circles is beginning to become 'Belgian'".

Traditionally, scholars have stressed the unwillingness of the labour unions to follow the SDP down the path toward a suffrage general strike. True, Carl Legien opposed the strike - he clearly feared a coup from above. Yet he found himself in a tiny minority. Most union officials were strongly Belgian ... that was certainly the case with SDP leaders and Reichstag deputies.

In the autumn of 1913, during the SDP's Jena congress, the party's executive committee proclaimed either "democratic suffrage or mass strike". The new chair, Friedrich Ebert, confirmed the line: "either we will have free elections in Prussia or we will have the mass strike" (stormy applause). Later, during a meeting of the party's general strike committee, in January 1914, the leftwing SDP Reichstag representative, Adolf Hoffmann - a future Communist Party member - echoed Ebert: "the fight against Prussia's three-tier franchise is a battle of utmost revolutionary importance ... I completely concur with Bernstein, who has argued that surrendering in this all-important fight would be a betrayal of the cause of the proletariat (applause) ... Of course, rash actions and everything that can lead to them have to be avoided."

That the leftwinger Hoffmann could both refer positively to Bernstein "while simultaneously arguing for a cautious approach" as to how such a strike should be organised, is not without interest. The party's debates about how to plan a future suffrage general strike therefore reveals considerable agreement, but also the need for "a process of slow, careful and deliberate preparation". And concrete preparations soon began: special branch meetings, a membership levy for strike funds and concerted press agitation.

Why things petered out owed nothing to internal SDP divisions. Rather the explanation lies squarely with growing international tensions. The Archduke was assassinated on June 28 1914. The SDP organised numerous anti-war demonstrations till the August 4 collapse. By a fateful 96:14 vote the Reichstag fraction agreed to the *Burgfrieden* (fortress truce) proposed by Kaiser Wilhelm II. Abiding to party discipline, the entire fraction proceeded to vote for war credits.

On December 2 Karl Liebknecht was the first to rebel. He denounced the "imperialist war" as an attempt to "disrupt and split the growing movement of the working class" for the benefit of "capitalists and financiers".<sup>30</sup> The Reichstag president refused to allow him to read his statement, nor would a single German paper agree to print it.

The first victim of war is the truth ●

## Notes

1. See J Conrad 'Classical Marxism and general strikes' *Weekly Worker* January 29 2026 ([www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1570/classical-marxism-and-general-strikes](http://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1570/classical-marxism-and-general-strikes)).
2. Marx and Engels were surely right when, back in 1882, they suggested that Russia had become the world's revolutionary centre:

"Today ... Russia forms the vanguard of revolutionary action in Europe" ("Preface to the Russian 1882 edition" *Manifesto of the Communist Party: CW* Vol 24, London 1989, p426). The December 1905 uprising was therefore not simply a local event. It was a precursor of what was to come in other countries.

3. G Zinoviev *History of the Bolshevik Party* London 1973, p127.

4. See J Conrad 'General strikes and insurrection' *Weekly Worker* February 5 2026 ([www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1571](http://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1571)).

5. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 10, Moscow 1977, pp152-53.

6. *Ibid*, pp174-75.

7. *Ibid*, pp174-75.

8. R Luxemburg 'Organizational questions of the Russian Social Democracy': [www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1904/questions-rsd/ch01.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1904/questions-rsd/ch01.htm). It was eagerly published by the Menshevik, new *Iskra*.

9. See M Macnair 'Her life and her legacy' *Weekly Worker* August 16 2012 ([www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/927/her-life-and-her-legacy](http://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/927/her-life-and-her-legacy)).

10. P Frölich *Rosa Luxemburg: her life and work* New York NY, 1972, p13.

11. "[A]fter the 1905 revolution Kautsky acquired a deserved reputation as an honorary Bolshevik. Particularly in his seminal 1906 article, 'Driving forces and prospects of the Russian Revolution', Kautsky endorsed the basic Bolshevik strategy of alliance with the peasants and distrust of the liberals" (LT Lih 'Lenin, Kautsky and the "new era of revolutions"' *Weekly Worker* December 22 2011: [www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/895/lenin-kautsky-and-the-new-era-of-revolutions](http://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/895/lenin-kautsky-and-the-new-era-of-revolutions)). Incidentally, Kautsky's article, as well as commentaries by Trotsky and Lenin, can be found in the Richard B Day and Daniel Gaido collection, *Witnesses to permanent revolution* (Leiden 2009).

12. [www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1904/questions-rsd/ch01.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1904/questions-rsd/ch01.htm).

13. *Ibid*.

14. R Luxemburg *The mass strike* London nd, p17.

15. J Conrad 'Approaches to the general strike' *Weekly Worker* January 22 2026 ([www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1569/approaches-to-the-general-strike](http://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1569/approaches-to-the-general-strike)).

16. R Luxemburg *The mass strike* London nd, p35.

17. The only independent - ie, non-police - trade union before 1905 was that of the printers, which was established in 1903. The 1905-07 period of revolution produced a huge number of small unions. Of the 600 or so, only 22 had memberships over 2,000. It was the factory commissions, however, which began to "take charge of all matters affecting the internal life of the factory, drawing up collective wage agreements and overseeing the hiring and firing of workers" (SA Smith *Red Petrograd* Cambridge 1983, pp57-58). The 1917 revolutions produced even more rapid growth. By October 1917 there were some two million trade union members, with Petrograd having "one of the highest levels of unionisation in the world" (*Ibid* p109). Incidentally at that point in time all major trade unions except the railworkers, postal and telegraph and printers had been won to Bolshevik leadership.

18. R Luxemburg *The mass strike* London nd, p44.

19. *Ibid* p47.

20. In February 1906 the SDP's central committee secretly agreed with the trade union leaders not to implement the Jena resolution. Despite that, in the following years the Second International, in which the German party played a leading role, passed a number of resolutions which threatened the use of any means - and everyone knew that also included a general strike - in the event of an inter-imperialist war (see J Riddle *Lenin's struggle for a revolutionary International* New York NY 1984, pp23, 25, 33-37).

21. [rosalux-geneva.org/de/rosa-luxemburg-and-the-political-mass-strike](http://rosalux-geneva.org/de/rosa-luxemburg-and-the-political-mass-strike).

22. [www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/kautsky/1910/xx/luxemburg.htm](http://www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/kautsky/1910/xx/luxemburg.htm) (1910).

23. [www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1932/06/luxemburg.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1932/06/luxemburg.htm).

24. See VI Lenin 'Two worlds' *CW* Vol 16, Moscow 1977, pp305-13. There is also his October 7 1910 letter to Julian Marchlewski in *CW* Vol 34, Moscow 1977, pp424-29.

25. [www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1909/power/ch05.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1909/power/ch05.htm).

26. DK Buse 'Party leadership and mechanisms of unity: the crisis of German Social Democracy reconsidered, 1910-1914' *The Journal of Modern History* Vol 62, No3, September 1990, pp477-502.

27. J-W Guettel 'Reform, revolution and the "Original catastrophe": political change in Prussia and Germany on the eve of the First World War' *Journal of Modern History* June 2019, pp311-40. All quotes unless otherwise stated come from this very useful article.

28. See CE Schorske *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917: the development of the great schism* Cambridge Mass 1955; JP Nettl *Rosa Luxemburg* Vols 1 and 2, Oxford 1966; D McLellen *Marxism after Marx: an introduction* London 1979.

29. K Liebknecht *Militarism and anti-militarism* Cambridge 1973, p130.

30. [www.marxists.org/archive/liebknecht-k/works/1916/future-belongs-people/ch06.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/liebknecht-k/works/1916/future-belongs-people/ch06.htm).

**DRUGS**

# Sinking into the gutter

Labour ran a low-life campaign against the Greens in Gorton and Denton, saying that under them playgrounds would be 'turned into crack dens'. Eddie Ford takes a rather more principled position

Of course, the usual suspects lined up to launch mad attacks on the Green Party during the Gorton and Denton by-election.

The *Daily Star* got excited about "the Greens' bonkers plan for Britain" with "free porn, high street brothels and drugs legal!"<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the *Daily Mail* had an 'exclusive' on how "loony Greens call for free-for-all on prostitution and porn": they back "legalising prostitution and freeing up access to sexually explicit pornography"<sup>2</sup>. The *Mail* article talked about the "outcry" over the Greens wanting to "legalise all drugs - including crack cocaine, heroin and date-rape chemical GHB"<sup>3</sup>. Not wanting to miss out on the fun, *The Sun* talked about the "leafy lunacy" of the Greens wish to "legalise heroin" and "letting in all illegal migrants", while the paper's Julia Hartley-Brewer warned its readers that the Green leader's "communism-on-ketamine policies" would destroy the UK.<sup>4</sup>

But, if anything, a desperate Labour Party and Sir Keir Starmer sunk lowest into the gutter, as they began to realise that defeat stared them in the face. According to Sarah Jones, the policing minister - which seems like the only correct job for her - the Green's plans to liberalise the drug laws would "unleash a drugs epidemic" that would see "our parks and playgrounds turned into crack dens", with "lives shattered, anti-social behaviour through the roof, and public drug use running rife"<sup>5</sup>. Quite obscenely, having no problem with inverting reality, she boasted about how the fact that drug seizures had reached a "record high" under Labour represented a "common sense" approach to keeping communities safe and drugs off the streets - never mind the social devastation caused by a punitive, 'law and order' approach. As for the increasingly beleaguered Starmer, he denounced the supposedly "disgusting" Green plan to make it lawful to provide his 17-and-a-half-year-old son with heroin and crack cocaine, and at PMQs - no doubt thinking he was being clever - he accused the Green Party of being "high on drugs, soft on Putin". He was referring obviously to Zack Polanski's view that you cannot reform Nato "from within" and should instead be "reviewing" US bases on UK soil as part of a "genuine" strategic defence review, and "a different approach to defence". Even though Sir Keir's strategy of highlighting the dangers posed by "the extremes" of politics proved disastrous in Gorton and Denton, he said he would continue unchanged - fighting "the extreme of the left in the Green Party".

## Venomous

Interestingly, it has since been revealed that the deputy leader, Lucy Powell - the only member of the NEC to vote in favour of Andy Burnham standing in that constituency - expressed doubts about the venomous attacks on the Greens, as you could not succeed by trying to "out-Reform" Nigel Farage's party. Other senior Labour members declared that the party's campaign was misjudged and too negative: one MP was quoted as saying that she could not "understand the choice to attack the Greens on their drug policies with sensationalism and misinformation" - it "did the party no favours whatsoever", with Labour crashing down to third place behind Reform as well as the successful Greens.

In reality, whatever the lies and



Since the beginning of human history

slander of Labour and the rightwing press, our readers will not be surprised to learn that the Greens were not militantly demanding the legalisation of all drugs - which is the long-stated position of the CPGB. Heather Spencer, the winning candidate in Gorton and Denton, said in an interview with the BBC that "decriminalising is a conversation that we need to have" - which hardly sounds like someone from Keir Starmer's "extreme" of politics. In its 2024 election manifesto, the party proposed setting up a "regulated market" for drugs "that stops criminal supply and profiteering, and that reduces harm, including by preventing children accessing drugs" - also calling for a national commission into "an evidence-based approach to reform of the UK's counterproductive drug laws"<sup>6</sup>.

## Spring conference

Zack Polanski, who says he has never taken drugs or drunk alcohol, personally wants to legalise all drugs, but party members will vote on whether to adopt the policy at their online spring conference (March 28-29). He argues, not unreasonably, that for the Labour government to be "playing political games with people's lives is totally unacceptable" and that we are "seeing people who aren't taking issues seriously" and "aren't doing the things that need to be done to protect people". Instead, he wants a "public health approach" to "make sure that children absolutely can't go anywhere near drugs", because at the moment they "can often get drugs if they want"<sup>7</sup>.

He states "very clearly" that he wants to "regulate and control drugs" - something favoured by "public health professionals". For example, he cites alcohol - "we regulate it because we know it's dangerous if anyone can get it, any time, and so it should be the same with drugs" - which is not the same as saying it "should be fully accessible to everyone".

Actually, for communists this is the wrong formulation. We do not want to stop alcohol or drugs that are currently illegal - say, cannabis or cocaine - from being "fully accessible" as such. Instead, we want an *informed choice* based on the best science available, and effective *quality control*, so people know exactly what they are taking. In that way we would be able to regulate

ourselves as individuals and minimise any potential harm.

But Polanski recognises that the 'war on drugs' is unwinnable, which in a rational debate would "not be a contentious thing to say". He further makes the simple point that "all around the world, when people have tried to have the same policy ... with drugs, it hasn't worked, and it's not worked in this country". The Green leader gives the example of Portugal, which in July 2001 decriminalised the personal possession and use of all drugs. This measure reduced drug deaths, HIV transmissions and - in the words of Polanski - "what's often labelled as anti-social behaviour", rather than "allowing drugs to be in the hands of drug gangs or to be on the black market or in the streets"<sup>8</sup>.

It almost goes without saying, at least pre-spring conference, that the current official Green position is not for the legalisation of all drugs - though for communists the legalisation of cocaine and heroin would be a perfectly logical policy decision, given Polanski's general concerns. We are told that the focus "needs to be shifted from suppressing these substances" to instead "tackling the social and public health issues which lead people to use drugs" - not viewing drug abuse as a "criminal justice issue"<sup>9</sup>.

## Cowardly

For all the Greens' shortcomings, their drug policy is far bolder than what is offered by Your Party. To be more exact, YP has not offered anything so far. Presumably it is keeping silent, as it does not want to offend anyone or appear too radical or 'extremist'.

Jeremy Corbyn has previously said that "criminalising people for possession of small amounts of cannabis is not a particularly good idea". He thinks that medical use of cannabis oil is "good", as it is "clearly beneficial to people" and therefore "should be decriminalised and made readily available as quickly as possible"<sup>10</sup>. Actually, you can get cannabis on the NHS (though not directly) ... and civilization has not collapsed. Apart from that, Corbyn appears to be incredibly conservative on this issue, never calling for across-the-board decriminalisation of cannabis, let alone the legalisation of all recreational drugs. Forget it!

As for Zarah Sultana, her record

is only slightly better. As a Labour MP and Socialist Campaign Group member, she signed an early day motion in parliament in May 2021 stating that the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 "is not fit for purpose", as it has failed to reduce drug consumption, and only increased harm and damaged public health.

The fact of the matter is that taking drugs is as old as human culture itself, going back hundreds of thousands of years. Human beings have drunk, sniffed, snorted, ingested and smoked - either for spiritual reasons or because they want a good party. But for the vast majority of human history we have known what we were consuming - it was a *communal* activity, not an individualistic or alienated one. The older generation would advise the younger about what to do and what not to do: evidence-based wisdom was passed down. But nowadays young people are often left to their own devices and that is an unhealthy situation - leaving some people vulnerable to criminal gangs.

We sometimes forget that at one time not so long ago your doctor could legally prescribe heroin (diamorphine), until regulations became more restrictive in the mid-1960s. Then there was the Misuse of Drugs Act that made it an illegal Class A drug, in the same year that Richard Nixon declared a war on drugs in the US.<sup>11</sup> Cannabis also was listed as a Class B drug, remaining that way except for 2004-09 - when it was classified as C (a lower punishment category) - before being moved back to B.

That is why in our *Draft programme*, under 'immediate aims', we say "end the war on drugs": "... recreational drugs should be legalised and quality standards assured" - people with a "dependency problem should be offered treatment, not given a criminal record" (3.17: 'Crime and prison').<sup>12</sup> Anti-drug legislation has done far more damage than the drugs themselves and banning them *magnifies* the problems rather than solving them. Many people use something, legal or illegal, to pick themselves up and help them get through the day - they should not be punished for that •

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## Notes

1. [dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/greens-bonkers-plan-britain-free-36793124](https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/greens-bonkers-plan-britain-free-36793124)
2. [dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15585569/Now-looney-Greens-call-free-prostitution-porn-election-nears.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15585569/Now-looney-Greens-call-free-prostitution-porn-election-nears.html)
3. [dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15579401/Green-Party-legalise-drugs-crack-cocaine-heroin-date-rape-chemical-GHB.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15579401/Green-Party-legalise-drugs-crack-cocaine-heroin-date-rape-chemical-GHB.html)
4. [thesun.co.uk/news/38353504/green-party-policies-legalise-heroin-migrants](https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/38353504/green-party-policies-legalise-heroin-migrants)
5. [telegraph.co.uk/politics/2026/02/21/playgrounds-become-crack-dens-under-greens-claim-labour](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2026/02/21/playgrounds-become-crack-dens-under-greens-claim-labour)
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7. [independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-green-party-drugs-alcohol-polanski-jones-b2924610.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-green-party-drugs-alcohol-polanski-jones-b2924610.html)
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9. [greenparty.ie/policies/drugs](https://www.greenparty.ie/policies/drugs)
10. [independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/jeremy-corbyn-cannabis-decriminalisation-ridge-sunday-labour-a8425326.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/jeremy-corbyn-cannabis-decriminalisation-ridge-sunday-labour-a8425326.html)
11. [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4647018.stm](https://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4647018.stm)
12. [communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme/3-immediate-demands](https://www.comunistparty.co.uk/draft-programme/3-immediate-demands)

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POLEMIC

# Not a serious response

Thoughtful, but sharp polemics are useful. Bashing jobs to score points, which ignore the actual arguments of the other side, are not. Vincent David of the Spartacist League dismisses Mike Macnair's polemic

I have titled this article 'Not a serious response', because that describes Mike Macnair's article, 'Beware of Sparts bearing gifts' (*Weekly Worker* February 26). Macnair avoids most of the issues in dispute, goes down long, historical rabbit holes on tertiary points and, once again, attributes to us several positions that have nothing to do with what the Spartacist League writes and does. *Alas*, let's unpack again.

Comrade Macnair believes we are shocked by the tone of his letter and how "sharp" it was. He proceeds to teach us at length about "civility" in the workers' movement, and explains that sharp polemics are necessary to clarify differences. This is quite bizarre. We are the Spartacist League, after all. Everyone on the far left knows that sharp polemics are our bread and butter - and we wholeheartedly agree that they are essential to clarify differences.

The problem with Macnair's original letter ('Spart Cannonism', February 12) is not its tone or supposed sharpness. It is that the letter had no bearing whatsoever on reality; no bearing on what the Spartacist League writes, and what it does. It was - excuse my sharpness - ignorant, which is why I called it a 'bashing exercise'. Thoughtful, but sharp polemics are useful for the workers' movement. Bashing jobs to score points, which ignore the actual arguments of the other side, are not.

## Blind optimists?

Unfortunately, Macnair's article is again made up of a lot of this. For example, almost the entire first half is a long polemic accusing us of being blind optimists. Why? Because I dared to say that the merger of the RCO with the Spartacist League of Australia was a "major win" for the communist movement, which it is! But, for Macnair, this is the latest iteration of a supposed 80-year history of mistaken optimism by the Trotskyist movement, going all the way back to James P Cannon's 1946 'Theses on the American Revolution' (a document which, by the way, James Robertson, our founder and supposed cult-leader who everyone always accuses of every crime, repeatedly criticised for ... its blind optimism).

With all due respect, the accusation that the Spartacists are blind optimists is laughable. If Macnair had bothered to seriously read our most important articles of the last period, he would have quickly seen that our world perspective is that we are at "the dawn of a reactionary period of capitalist offensive", with the workers' movement worldwide in a position of weakness (see 'The world at a turning point', *Spartacist* supplement, November 13 2025). Whether during the strike wave in 2023, the Palestine movement, the Gen Z 'revolutions', or the recent strikes in Italy and France, we have consistently attacked the blind optimism of the left, underlined the weakness and impotence of the strategy of the leaders, while fighting for a different course. In fact, one of the most common accusations levelled against us on the left is that we are 'pessimists'. Macnair would know this, if he had actually studied our positions, but he clearly has not.

Macnair's method is the following: he has forged his idea of the Trotskyist movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, rather than seriously dealing



Starbucks barista: petty bourgeois? You cannot be serious

with what the Spartacist League says or does today, in 2026, he simply picks sentences and goes on autopilot by forcing them into his decades-old 'boxes'.

Now, let us deal with the real issue of controversy: should small communist groups today, which are largely composed of petty-bourgeois elements, seek to consciously push some of their members to take jobs in the industrial proletariat? We think yes, while the CPGB raises a number of arguments against this.

Many of Macnair's arguments are based on his own experience from the 1970s, and that of the International Marxist Group's turn to industry. We dealt with this method in our previous letter: to argue that turning to industry was a failure for some does not mean that turning to industry is wrong *in general*. We have no intention of defending the IMG's course here, so let's not dwell on this.

Our central starting point for insisting on turning to industry is that the socialist movement today is totally divorced from the working class. Macnair responds by saying that this is "just not true", because "the major left groups have significant involvement in major trade unions". We can debate whether "totally" is appropriate or not, but if we look at the British far left today, it is *undeniable* that its composition is overwhelmingly made up of students, middle class elements and retirees. Go to any Your Party meeting and survey how many people are actual workers. Look at a group like the RCP: it is almost 100% made up of students. Some, like the SWP, and particularly the SP and the CPB, are more present in the trade unions. But this presence is most often found in the upper layers of the union bureaucracy, with their influence among rank-and-file workers being small or simply non-existent. Thus, even those groups with "significant involvement" in the trade unions are, in the main, divorced from the working class.

We are not saying that the socialist left has no workers. What we are saying is that, in the past decades, the far left has lost almost all its influence in the industrial working class and has grown mainly from campus recruitment. This is a problem, because, although work on campus has its importance, a revolutionary party made up in its

majority of petty-bourgeois elements will inevitably embrace the politics of the petty bourgeoisie.

Macnair counters that the far left "is marginal in the working class; because it is *generally* politically marginal". There is some truth in this. But this presents the problem purely in objective terms. It evades the issue that most left groups today have a *conscious* orientation towards the petty bourgeoisie. This is why we argue that, in current conditions, a *conscious* turn to the working class is needed.

## A worker?

To my statement that "it is much better for young revolutionaries to become plumbers, electricians, welders, nurses or even teachers" than to pursue academic or white-collar jobs, Macnair basically argues that those working class jobs do not really exist any more, and that almost everyone is a worker anyway. He writes: "The proletariat is, for Marx, the *social class which, lacking property, is forced to work for wages*."

This is a classic revision of Marxism, which dissolves the centrality of the *industrial proletariat* into a sea of wage-earners. According to this definition, there is no difference between a dockworker, an assembly operator at Land Rover, an Oxford University professor and a lawyer in the City of London. All earn a wage, right?

Wage-earners have existed since way before the birth of capitalism. Yet the possibility of socialist revolution appears only with the creation of the industrial working class, who not only have to sell their labour to survive, but who also work in *socialised production*: ie, industry. It is because the industrial proletariat is at the heart of capitalist production, which has become socialised on a large scale, that the industrial proletariat is a revolutionary class: that is, a class which carries within it a new, progressive mode of production - socialism. It is because the industrial proletariat is concentrated in key areas of the productive process that it is objectively pushed towards collective forms of struggle. When Marx and Engels talked about the proletariat in the *Communist manifesto*, they were not merely referring to people earning a wage. Those existed even in Roman

times. They were talking about the *modern industrial working class*.

So, no, not anyone who receives a wage is in the proletariat. Academics, lawyers, students, even employees in small shops (like the famous barista, who often comes up in discussions with RCOers) are not proletarians. These layers form various strata of the petty bourgeoisie. They have class interests which sometimes clash with those of the proletariat and thus tend to have a political consciousness at odds with it. They have few or no links with social production and little to no social power. Of course, the communist movement must seek to win those layers over and support their struggle, provided they align with the interests of the proletariat. But they are simply not part of the revolutionary class. This is not an insult: it is a social fact. As for nurses or teachers, while they are not formally industrial workers, they do occupy a central role in the economy, and they do form a critical mass, with potentially powerful trade unions.

Why does all of this matter? Macnair's conception dissolves the centrality of the industrial workers in the fight for socialism. If anyone is basically a worker - from Amazon drivers to PhD students - then there is no need for communists to focus on the industrial proletariat. In turn, it does not matter if communists are now near-irrelevant in the proletariat, because all wage-earners are workers anyway. Unfortunately, the conception Macnair expresses has become widespread within our movement, particularly with large-scale deindustrialisation. Yet the numerical weakening of the industrial working class does not change the fact that it is this class, and this class only - not the students, not the university teachers, not the baristas, but the industrial workers - which can bring about socialism, and, in turn, the liberation of all the oppressed.

So, yes, since the communist movement is the movement for the emancipation of the proletariat, young people who become communists should be encouraged to join its ranks - particularly if they are from petty-bourgeois backgrounds.

Macnair takes issue with my simple assertion that "every single communist party that went from a sect to a national force did so by organising workers and leading decisive sections of the proletariat in struggle." Macnair responds with this extraordinary statement: "No evidence is offered in support of this argument and it is very doubtful that any can be." This is astonishing, coming from someone we assume knows quite well the history of the workers' movement.

The SPD, so dear to the *Weekly Worker*, became influential by essentially building the German workers movement. Then, what made the KPD a mass force was not merely the product of the Halle Congress and the subsequent unity with the USPD left, but the fact that the KPD had won decisive influence among the Revolutionary Shop Stewards in the heat of the 1919-20 strike waves. The French Communist Party consolidated itself as a real force not merely with the Tours Congress, but by leading the CGT, which organised the most militant sectors of the French proletariat, notably in the metal and rail industries. The Bulgarian 'Narrow' CP became a force by focusing almost exclusively on the

industrial proletariat, and leading many strikes. The Italian CP was able to lead the resistance because it spent years building illegal cells in factories like Fiat, enabling it to lead the 1943 strikes. Even the small CPGB became a force in the 1920s because of its decisive influence within the shop stewards' network and among the miners. Macnair focuses on the formal foundations and congresses of those parties, at the expense of the decisive element which made them a real force: influence in the proletariat.

This is not at all to say that these parties had good politics. For example, the Italian CP would proceed to use its weight to betray a revolutionary situation. But every single one of these examples confirms my basic statement that these parties became a force not because they led vague 'political actions' or had mergers in congresses, but *because* they led workers in key industries. It is quite astonishing to have to actually provide proof for what should be an ABC of the communist movement's history.

## Red unions?

Classically, Macnair ends his article with an entirely false polemic, stating that the Spartacist League does not want to engage in "the real existent trade union movement" and that our conceptions are "closely analogous to the 'red trade unions' policy of the Comintern's 'Third Period'". This is a straight-up fabrication. Anyone who bothers to read a single one of our articles detailing our work in trade unions, whether in Britain, France, Germany or the US, would realise this.

Everywhere we work, we seek to gain influence among the existing structures of the unions. We always argue against splitting unions, and we also constantly denounce the left's attempts at bypassing the union bureaucracy rather than frontally confronting it. However, everywhere we work, we do put ourselves sharply in opposition to the programme and strategy of the union bureaucracy, which is probably what Macnair confuses with "red unionism". If one wants a broad overview of our conception, we recommend our article, 'For revolutionary work in the trade unions' (*Spartacist* No70, May 2025).

In conclusion, our insistence on turning towards the working class must be understood in today's context. Today, the small communist movement, at least in the west, is largely divorced from the working class and rooted among students and intellectuals. But, more broadly, even the once-large CPs and social democratic parties have lost much of their influence in the proletariat. In most of the west, the main political force among workers is often the insurgent right. In Britain, I would argue that Tommy Robinson or Nigel Farage have much more traction among industrial workers than any Labour politician or trade union leader. This is in large part because the left has become associated with liberal and middle class politics.

This is a major problem for our movement, but one that Macnair denies even exists. While sending young communists into industrial jobs alone will not solve it, it is at least a step forward, and a crucial one for building the communist movement of the future ●

**YOUR PARTY**

# Definitely His Party now

With Gorton and Denton, Jeremy Corbyn jumped on the Green bandwagon. Where he might simply want an election deal, many will go the whole hog and take out membership. **Carla Roberts** reports on a very expensive CEC election campaign and the suffocating control-freakery

Less than five hours after the result of the leadership elections in Your Party was announced at 11.30am on February 26, the Peace and Justice Party posted a picture of Jeremy Corbyn with his newly coined title, 'Elected parliamentary leader of Your Party!' A rather symbolic *faux pas* that shows exactly in which direction Your Party will travel now. Needless to say, the central executive committee (CEC) had not even set a date for its first meeting at that stage - let alone decided to, say, unilaterally change the party's constitution to establish such a position (or elect Corbyn to it, for that matter).

That gives us a good idea of what is meant by "getting the party back on track" - the main slogan of The Many, the HQ leadership faction's slate: it meant back into the hands of those who have mismanaged, manipulated, rigged, leaked and generally run roughshod over the members and branches. Not that the party was ever 'out of their hands'.

But there was certainly an increasingly vocal opposition that protested loudly against the undemocratic way in which the Corbyn clique micro-managed the whole run-up to the November launch conference, with impotent regional assemblies, in which members were not allowed to vote, let alone move any motions or amendments to the four pre-written conference documents. Then there was the stage-managed Liverpool conference, with sortitioned attendees rather than democratically elected and accountable delegates, the expulsion of members of groups like the SWP, online voting hours after the short 'debates', and the livestream cut, whenever somebody criticised the leadership.

## Proto branches

All the while, hundreds of proto-branches up and down the country were gagging to get going, only to be entirely ignored by HQ. How could there not have been a rebellion? Some 800,000 people begged Corbyn to launch a socialist party - he dithered, he delayed, he equivocated and what he finally launched is not exactly inspiring. Of course, people have felt let down. The Grassroots Left was formed in reaction to this misleadership, in an attempt to turn things around.

The Many tried to paint those speaking up as 'sectarian troublemakers' - and no doubt, this worked on the more passive YP members, especially as the bourgeois press had a jolly good time reporting about the alleged "factional infighting", symbolised neatly by "Zarah versus Jeremy".

But this story is very unlikely to have worked on those who are actually active in YP: those who hold the branches together, those organising YP stalls, those who have produced banners and leaflets, paid for out of their own pockets. There can be no doubt that most of those members will have gotten behind the Grassroots Left - which did very well in the initial stages of the election. The endorsement figures indicated a narrow win, with a slim majority of between one and four members on the CEC. Eleven thousand members had endorsed candidates - pretty much exactly



**His legacy won't amount to much**

the same number who had voted in the Christmas referendum. There can be no doubt that Corbyn's slate got spooked by these projections, which, we suspect, were confirmed by the first few thousands votes coming in. The Many could, of course, witness those first results coming in 'live', seeing as those running the slate also run HQ - and the election itself.

While the 'First year organisational strategy' agreed at launch conference promised that "the CEC election will be run by an independent and professional third party",<sup>2</sup> HQ simply changed its mind - "to save money", as they assured us in a throwaway sentence in an email a couple of months back. Well, not quite, as it turned out: they simply decided the money would be better spent *elsewhere*. We know they waited until the first eager supporters on both sides had voted. No point spending money on them. Around 10,000 or so members voted in the first week.

In week two Karie Murphy

really showed why Jeremy Corbyn trusts her so completely: She really is an excellent bureaucrat and manipulator. She arranged to send A5 postcards to every single YP member who had not voted within those first few days - ie, those not actively involved in the branches. Naturally, it had Jeremy Corbyn's face and name all over it. Handily, all candidates on Corbyn's slate were listed on the website with the phrase, "Endorsed by Jeremy Corbyn". No need to read statements to make up your mind, is there? This little exercise must have cost around £25,000.

## Phone banks

HQ also hired a professional marketing company to phone every member who had not yet voted. We have no way of knowing how many people were called, but we do know that a lot of people got phone calls from both YP and Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project. AI tells us that it would cost anywhere between £30,000 and £50,000 to employ a

company to call 50,000 members.

Add to that the number of PJP full-timers and Corbyn staffers working on the campaign, the cost for graphic design and other such campaign expenditure and this election could easily have cost HQ £100,000. It now makes a lot of sense that the election rules did not set an upper limit on expenditure per candidate - only that no individual was allowed to donate more than £1,000 in the election. An entirely pointless rule that benefits those who spent a lot of money, obviously. As an aside, for anybody who wondered why MP Ayoub Khan was disqualified - we hear he did not submit his candidate expenditure on time, even when HQ extended the deadline by two hours, just for him.

HQ will no doubt claim that all of this money was spent in 'the name of democracy', to increase members' engagement, etc. You would have to be extremely naive to believe that. Had The Many looked like a shoo-in for the CEC, HQ would undoubtedly not have spent

such an amount on increasing voter turnout.

Some online commentators have joked that perhaps Your Party will now be renamed 'His Party'. And this was all that Your Party was ever supposed to be - a "legacy project for Jeremy", as his wife, Laura Alvarez, has reportedly called it more than a few times.

Under Corbyn's leadership, we are likely to see the worst of the Labour Party, mixed with Podemos-style online voting and topped off with a sprinkle of Momentum circa 2021. Corbyn is and remains at best a left Labourite who still believes in the British road to socialism along the lines of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain. He has no interest in building a party that organises an active working class in vibrant branches and with a healthy culture of discussion and debate - that kind of party would hold its leader to account. And Corbyn certainly does not believe in the need to build a revolutionary party. He thinks that socialism can be introduced by a vote in parliament - and therefore you need another Labour-type party.

Seeing as The Many now controls the CEC and therefore will make damn sure that the next conference is just as much of a stitch-up as the previous one, we are now likely to see the consolidation of Your Party along the following lines:

- With a powerless and sidelined CEC similar to Labour's NEC, meeting occasionally, its main job will be to rubberstamp decisions made by the real leadership - the small group of officers, in cooperation with the party machine and the new general secretary - who might or might not be called Karie Murphy (she rather symbolically did attend the first meeting of the CEC, more below). This has already begun. Before the CEC even met, HQ put out a number of lame statements and petitions on the war in Iran, without even showing them to the new CEC.

- With Jeremy Corbyn crowned leader before long, be it as 'parliamentary leader' or whatever they can come up with. And then they will move to abolish 'collective leadership' altogether at the next conference, so that he can reside as undisputed king of YP until he drops.

- With policy-making outsourced to tame 'members' policy forums', which will be easily controlled and run by trusted bureaucrats. Tony Blair first came up with that idea to gut Labour conference - it is beyond shocking that Corbyn would want to copy this in YP. Instead of a group of bureaucrats huddling away somewhere to come up with YP policy, we believe that it should be the members in the branches who discuss policy and then present motions to a sovereign conference.

- With inactive, underfunded and gutted branches, which will not be set up for some time. We hear there are plans for yet more 'assemblies' to discuss how branches could be organised - mainly to stop lots of them from actually getting organised. At best we might see 'trusted' bureaucrats calling inaugural meetings here and there, which will have most matters and positions sown up pretty tightly - especially if we see CEC member

Hannah Hawkins' wish come true: during the elections she argued that those who kept the proto-branches alive should be barred from standing in local leadership elections.

■ With online voting, email referendums and conferences made up mainly of unaccountable participants chosen randomly by sortition, which will sideline the branches even more. Instead of 'empowering' members, this will atomise them even further - which is, of course, why Margaret Thatcher took away the power of workplace union branches to call a strike by a show of hands. Instead, she introduced the kind of Omov voting at home now championed by parties like Podemos, DiEm25 - and Your Party. They certainly achieve one thing: it makes it almost impossible to hold the leadership to account. Bureaucracies love online voting - socialists argue vehemently against it.

■ With an expansion of the witch-hunt against the left, with very few groups allowed on the 'white list' for dual membership. Perhaps the Green Party might be on it, perhaps Counterfire - their member Steph Driver certainly delivered an Oscar-worthy performance when she was wheeled out on February 26 as one of the five-strong Member Oversight Committee to announce that the CEC elections had been conducted in a "free and fair manner" and that "nobody has seen the results before today". We suspect this will be more of a simmering rather than a 'hot' witch-hunt - as long as you keep your head down and don't run for a position or such, members of the SWP, SPEW, CPGB, etc might be tolerated. Unless of course local witch-hunters report them to Your Party's compliance unit. We suspect there will be a very big compliance and disciplinary unit, having to deal with hundreds and hundreds of complaints. Never a sign of a healthy organisation.

■ Politically, Corbyn seems keen to position YP as an appendage to the Green Party - not that he appears to have spoken to Zack Polanski about it. It makes some sense, from Corbyn's perspective. For a start, there is not much between Corbyn and Polanski programmatically - if anything, the Greens seem currently to the left of YP. Neither of them believe that capitalism has to be overthrown or that, indeed, the working class has to be organised to fulfil this historic mission. Corbyn seems to imagine a slightly parasitic relationship, where he can feed off the Greens' massively bigger energy and membership figures (now well over 200,000). YP members could help out and tag along where the Greens are standing and maybe in some areas the Greens would, in return, 'allow' YP to stand.

## Red-green?

But this is, to put it mildly, a risky strategy for Corbyn. What exactly would be the point of Your Party as a separate entity, if there is no distinction politically or organisationally? Many of those 800,000 who begged Corbyn to launch a new socialist party never joined Your Party, but went straight to the Greens - and many are now leaving to join it, unsurprisingly. The Greens, according to a new poll, have just leapfrogged the Labour Party and the Tories (both at 16%) into second place, with 21% of the vote, after Reform's 23%. As an aside, we should take this poll<sup>1</sup> with more than a pinch of salt - not just because mid-term polls are skewed anyway and the 'first past the post' system would lead to an entirely different result in terms of the actual number of MPs. We should also

note that the poll was produced for *The Times* and its main purpose is probably to create a sense of slight panic - best we all get back behind the establishment parties ASAP.

And there is no denying that the Greens do not just *look* a lot more attractive than 'Yorp' (which does not even feature in the *Times* poll) - it is also a hell of a lot more democratic. Branches and members are - shock, horror - able to present motions to conference (not something you can currently do in YP). Should their spring conference adopt the motion committing the party to "anti-Zionism", this would make it even more attractive - to anybody but hardened socialists who know that the Greens are not the answer - ie, to those that Corbyn does not really want in his party.

He could end up with a mere shell of an organisation that does not do very much, apart from suppressing its members. Perhaps that would indeed suit him to a tee, but it would surely not be able to survive for very long. Far from getting Your Party 'back on track', Corbyn's victory is likely to finish off the organisation before long. We are suspecting that to anybody on the left with any ambition to become (or remain) a councillor or MP, for example, the Green Party is already looking very, very attractive.

As we have pointed out before, from our perspective the Green Party is not the answer - or even part of the answer. That does not mean it is unprincipled to ever call for a vote for it or, on occasion, work together on this or that campaign. But even if the Greens officially take on the moniker of 'eco-socialist', that does not qualitatively change things. As was pointed out in a certain little bestseller, called the *Communist manifesto*, there are all sorts of 'socialisms' - most of which are, in reality, dead ends, because they do not base themselves on the working class. The Green Party's programme is based politically on the petty bourgeoisie. Unlike the working class, which has 'nothing to lose but its chains', this class has quite a bit to lose from the end of capitalism - its shops, property portfolios, plumbing firms. It does not actually want to get rid of capitalism, but merely tweak it. Another dead end.

Many on the left will continue to argue that the main task for socialists today is to 'stop Reform' and that we need to support the Greens or build a red-green alliance to achieve that. Actually, the best way to stop Reform is to build a real political alternative - a socialist party worthy of the name.

It remains to be seen if Grassroots Left will be able to survive in such a 'hostile environment' and in what form. There is certainly a huge political space to the left of Your Party - but an increasingly small space within it.

Had Grassroots Left won a majority, the CEC would have become a truly collective leadership. As it is, the seven GL members on the CEC (nine if you count Naomi Wimborne Idrissi and Niall Christie - and you should) will be in a fight they have almost no chance of winning. The Corbyn clique will make sure that their own 14 supporters on the CEC vote as a block on most, if not all, things. (Louise Regan, activist in the National Union of Education, *might* on occasion vote with GL supporters, as might independent Sam Gorst.)

Some in GL suggest that we should now focus on carrying on building proto-branches regardless, in the hope of showing the CEC how vibrant they are, so that it *has* to acknowledge them, while also building a GL conference,

which should take steps to "build campaigns on the cost-of-living crisis", as former long-time Workers Power cadre Richard Brenner suggests. All very worthy - and very unlikely to succeed. This is, we fear, based more on wishful thinking than a hard look at reality.

Many socialists decided not to join Your Party, because of the lack of democracy and the total control exercised by the Corbyn clique. And many more have now left after the CEC elections - or are about to leave: some towards the shiny Greens, some into their local mini-parties and many will just leave, demoralised. This is a pity, but certainly understandable.

Some have accused us of demoralising members and "ruining things" by realistically assessing our current situation. We reject that. First of all, as those accusing us will be first to point out, the CPGB is hardly a mass organisation. We do not have that kind of power.

We also believe that being honest should be the key task for Marxists - "*aussprechen was ist*" (saying what is). We can understand why some prefer 'official optimism'. But it cannot get us very far: quite the opposite. It leads to even bigger demoralisation, when what you promised does not materialise.

Transparency and openness are now of the utmost importance - they really are the only real weapons the left in YP now has. GL members on the CEC have pledged to report openly and in detail about all meetings, so that at least the members and the wider working class can see what is happening - and which mistakes are being made.

Naturally, we have already seen attempts by the bureaucracy to label various things as 'confidential' in the run up to the first introductory CEC meeting on March 3. Socialists should simply ignore such demands - they are there to stop the bureaucrats from being held accountable.

## First CEC

We hear it was Jeremy Corbyn who chaired the first half of the meeting, after having been told by a very hands-on Karie Murphy how to use Zoom. Twenty minutes were spent on introductions and Corbyn giving a five-minute long pep-talk about "needing to deliver the change we need."

HQ had obviously decided beforehand to push through Jenn Forbes as permanent chair of the CEC. This was vehemently opposed by GL CEC members, most of whom had very unpleasant experiences with her - she was, for example, one of the chairs at the launch conference, telling people off like naughty children. GL members demanded, quite rightly, that the CEC should, at least, first agree on the remit of what powers such a chair would have.

Some had hoped that Louise Regan would be to the left of The Many - that has not yet transpired, we hear. In fact, we are told that she tried to push the meeting into electing Forbes as permanent chair, even *after* Corbyn had proposed that maybe electing an *interim* chair for now would be enough. As he was chairing, this is what the meeting eventually agreed to do.

Jenn Forbes, Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi and, somewhat strangely, Niall Christie, put themselves forward. Christie was not fully endorsed by the Grassroots Left, because it had foolishly agreed to stay out of Wales and Scotland - but he is a member of the Democratic Socialists of YP. The comrades should try to coordinate better in future. Not that it would have made a difference, on this occasion:

Forbes got 14 votes and Wimborne-Idrissi nine. Sam Gorst writes in his report that he was the only one voting for Niall Christie.

This vote was, incidentally, conducted via anonymous Zoom polling. Very bad, in our view - clearly, members should be able to find out who voted for what. Anonymous polls protect those who do not want members to know what they are doing.

And we hear that there is a plan for worse to come: that votes at future CEC meetings are to be conducted *after* the meeting - ie, exactly like at the launch conference. That would be an incredibly undemocratic way to go about things and any moves to implement this will be vehemently opposed by GL CEC members.

After the vote, Karie Murphy gave a very long and, by all accounts, very boring verbal report of the wonderful work of the interim leadership, which she called "the secretariat". It obviously did a brilliant job "implementing all conference decisions" and then an awful lot of other marvellous stuff. Most comrades we spoke to say they can hardly remember any of it, as it was full of HR-style waffle, which sounded like it had been compiled by ChatGPT. But if anybody was in any doubt about who has been running things, her report made it clear.

Next up was Angus Satow, YP's young and eager press officer, who gave a self-congratulatory report about the "many exciting" things YP had been up to - like the regional assemblies and the conference. Very exciting. He explained that he and others are employed on a "temporary basis as freelance contractors" and that he was leading YP communications, along with Alex Nunns and Artin Giles.

There was no time scheduled for questions or comments on the reports and Forbes went straight into rattling through all the things the first full meeting on Sunday March 8 (3-5pm) would be discussing - for example, the CEC standing orders, its code of conduct, the first policy commissions, local branches and the local elections (on the latter, it appears that the focus will be on "supporting independent campaigns" rather than standing YP candidates). GL comrades did their best to demand written reports, that the various documents will be shared well ahead of Sunday and that the meeting should be extended - clearly, there is no chance that this could all be properly discussed and agreed upon in two hours. Jenn Forbes, being almost as good a bureaucrat as Karie Murphy, was very keen to hear all suggestions - and then did absolutely nothing with them. A sign of things to come, we fear.

As communists, we will continue to engage with the thousands of socialists who remain YP members and we are urging our supporters and readers to stay and fight. We shall, of course, continue honest and detailed reporting ●

## Notes

1. x.com/InacioVieira/status/2027073155315999133.
2. docs.google.com/document/d/1WayA7hpdb1pA\_zsziCzE\_JPArPoc\_JF3MabxBALjjs/edit.
3. www.thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/green-party-polls-labour-yougov-record-low.

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# What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly worker

Biomechanics,  
psychology,  
computer-aided  
design and  
specialist nutrition

## When Saturday comes

As club owners have ceded control over the terms and conditions under which elite players sell their labour-power, they have tightened their grip over the labour process. Peter Kennedy discerns an ongoing class struggle

For many of us long in the tooth, elite football has become a hollowed-out spectacle in the tradition of Debord.<sup>1</sup> Viewed as the bastard offspring of hybridised global sports and entertainment industries,<sup>2</sup> elite football presents itself as more “soap opera” than ‘workers’ ballet’.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, this negative tag of ‘soap opera’ for the masses appears confirmed, whenever professional footballers are caught in the glare of media headlines for ‘having one too many’, staying out ‘partying’ before important games, gorging on fast food or being caught smoking during down time (most recently Scott McTominay, who was condemned for smoking during Napoli’s victory parade in 2025<sup>4</sup>). Yet, behind the hype and headlines - through the unique prism of the elite football industry - lies that very traditional struggle between capitalist and worker.

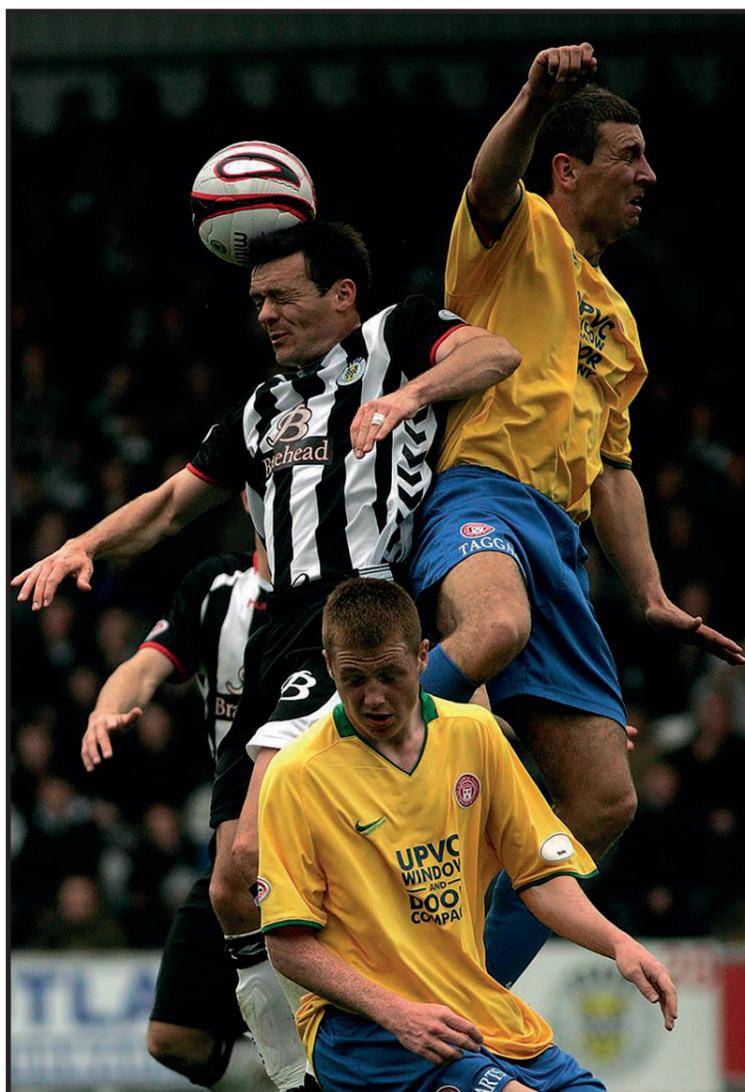
As we all know well, capitalists seek to control the terms and conditions in which workers sell their labour-power (market situation) and their labour process (work situation) to maximise their profit margins. Granted, the world of elite football is more ‘gilded cage’ than ‘factory barracks’, where elite footballers are concerned, while clubs are more likely to make a loss than profit.

Nevertheless, there is a class struggle ongoing, discernible to a Marxist lens. Although generating a sustainable profit is an issue, the English Premier League’s (EPL) system of fines and point deductions, and the threat thereof, on clubs to keep their books balanced does go some way to ensure elite football operates according to capitalist principles, to the extent that any gratuitous logic it may still adhere to on the playing field must submit to the logic of capital-labour relations. As I demonstrate below, club owners, having ceded control over the terms and conditions under which footballers sell their labour-power, have tightened their grip over the elite-footballer labour process.

### Controlling labour

For most of the 20th century, clubs had more control over players’ wages (whether direct or indirect wage caps), but ceded control over elite players’ work situation (training in the morning; off to the races and a couple of pints in the evening). However, in more recent decades this logic has been flipped on its head.

The commercialisation of the game from the beginning of the 1990s ceded contractual power to elite players. Today they exercise extensive control over the terms and conditions under which they sell their labour-power. Jet-propelled by player agents,



Producers of a mass consumption product: but proletarian?

they are able to secure lucrative transfer deals, media rights and vast salaries. Over the period 2015-24, the big five leagues in Europe (EPL, Bundesliga, La Liga, Serie A, Ligue 1) spent far more than they generated, with the Premier League accounting for roughly half the losses incurred in net transfers.<sup>5</sup> Every transfer presents a lucrative opportunity for players and their agents to lever yet more lucrative windfalls, wage cheques and media rights add-ons.

Elite football clubs in the EPL succumb, because they face a number of problems in curbing the market power of elite players. Firstly, any potential solution would have to be Europe-wide, because no single club would choose to place formal wage caps, if others did not follow suit. Secondly, highly paid footballers add to the glamour of soccer, placing them in the same bracket as globally recognised actors and performers in the entertainment and music industries, who are able to attract lucrative corporate and media sponsorship. Thirdly, fans place heavy demands on their club to cough up what is required

to ‘buy’ the best talent possible, to the point of mounting up debt and absorbing club profits. Having ceded control in the market place, clubs look to control their labour process.

### Extracting labour

Elite football clubs have been determined to extract as much labour as they can out of elite players, to the point of attempting to control their entire lifeworld. Sport science has been deployed to exact more control over the footballing labour process. Traditional methods have gone to the wall, replaced by state-of-the-art training regimes and matchday preparation.<sup>6</sup> The arrival of ‘big data’ and GPS technology have transformed club capability to quantify, measure and record every facet of individual and team, including movement in training and on matchday.

Clubs have at their fingertips information on ‘average number of sprints per team’, ‘recovery time between high-intensity sprints’, how many times a player touches the ball, what areas of the pitch players cover.<sup>7</sup> In-game intelligence data generate statistical models to pinpoint each individual player’s capacity

to keep the ball when under pressure, relative to their position in the team.<sup>8</sup>

They make systematic use of biomechanics, psychology, computer-aided design, specialist nutrition and sports physiology. In this respect the modern football club no longer lags behind other sports in applying the accumulated wealth of scientific knowledge toward achieving peak body performance: sport science - from big data, dietetics to vitamin D beds - has firmly embedded itself in the professional lives of elite footballers.

That is all the more necessary when elite footballers not only train more, but play more matches, as clubs sweat their asset in-season and pre-season by hawking squads around the globe to ‘build the brand’. The elective affinity between the latter year-on-year grind and the use of legal stimulants such as caffeine pills and snus pouches, along with ‘therapeutic use exemptions’, such as medication for treating asthma and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, is palpable.

Away from the grind and amidst the paradox of immense wealth and gated isolation, the elite footballer lifeworld is broken up by adherence to dietary regimes, digital tracking of biometrics and monitoring of a player’s social media output - their lives and bodies relentlessly monitored, utilising wearable sensors and AI-driven data analysis.<sup>9</sup> The aim is to ensure elite footballers are constantly under the gaze of a sport science-infused labour process committed to prune and nurture their bodies into finely tuned performers.

The Marxist term for the above is the formal and substantive subordination of labour by capital. And we know why clubs buy into this individually and collectively: it raises ‘player productivity’ (the performance principle), and raises the asset value of players, especially when they internalise the mantra of health, training and dietary discipline. We also have a good idea why players tend to ‘buy in’ to their formal and substantive subordination to their capitalist employers. Mainly because sport science techniques help increase player peak performance, lessen injuries and extend careers at the highest level, especially when they are expected to play more matches per season than ever before.<sup>10</sup> Even when intruding into player lifestyle, it may be more or less tolerated, more or less embraced by elite players due to the benefits sport science has for sustaining the saleability of their talents.

At the same time football players continue to resist their status as a commodity, in multiple

ways - from partial withdrawal of their labour, their effort and talent, to refusing dietary regimes and indulging in what would be defined as excessive lifestyles. So-called disciplinary breaches - from time-keeping, on-field aggression and weight gain to partying - reflect this resistance.

### Two-edged sword

In so far as elite clubs succeed in their quest to control their football labour process, and in so far as elite players succumb to their Faustian pact, then the modern elite player is more likely to be attracted to their latest team performance pie charts than their proverbial post-match pork pie and chips. But whether this will kill off the aesthetics of the ‘beautiful game’ is another matter.

Marx approached the formal and real subordination of labour by capital as one of struggle contestation, viewing science as a two-edged sword in that struggle. Science and technique “conditions the parameters of our lives at a given moment in time; it doesn’t determine our lot, control our fate”.<sup>11</sup> In which case, while sport science can subordinate, quantify and standardise the matchday experience, yet it can also underpin the more consistent execution of iconic football artistry, completed in the blink of an eye. No doubt the appliance of sport science holds the capacity to enhance elite skills and help to foreground the aesthetic, moral and ‘gratuitous logic’ of the game.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the overarching reality is that of the exploitative dynamic between the market and work situation elite footballers and club owners operate in. A contested terrain in which sport science facilitates player exploitation and aids the commodification of elite football as an abstract performance imperative. At present this reality suffocates much of what passes for ‘beauty’ in elite football ●

### Notes

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