

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

# weekly **worker**



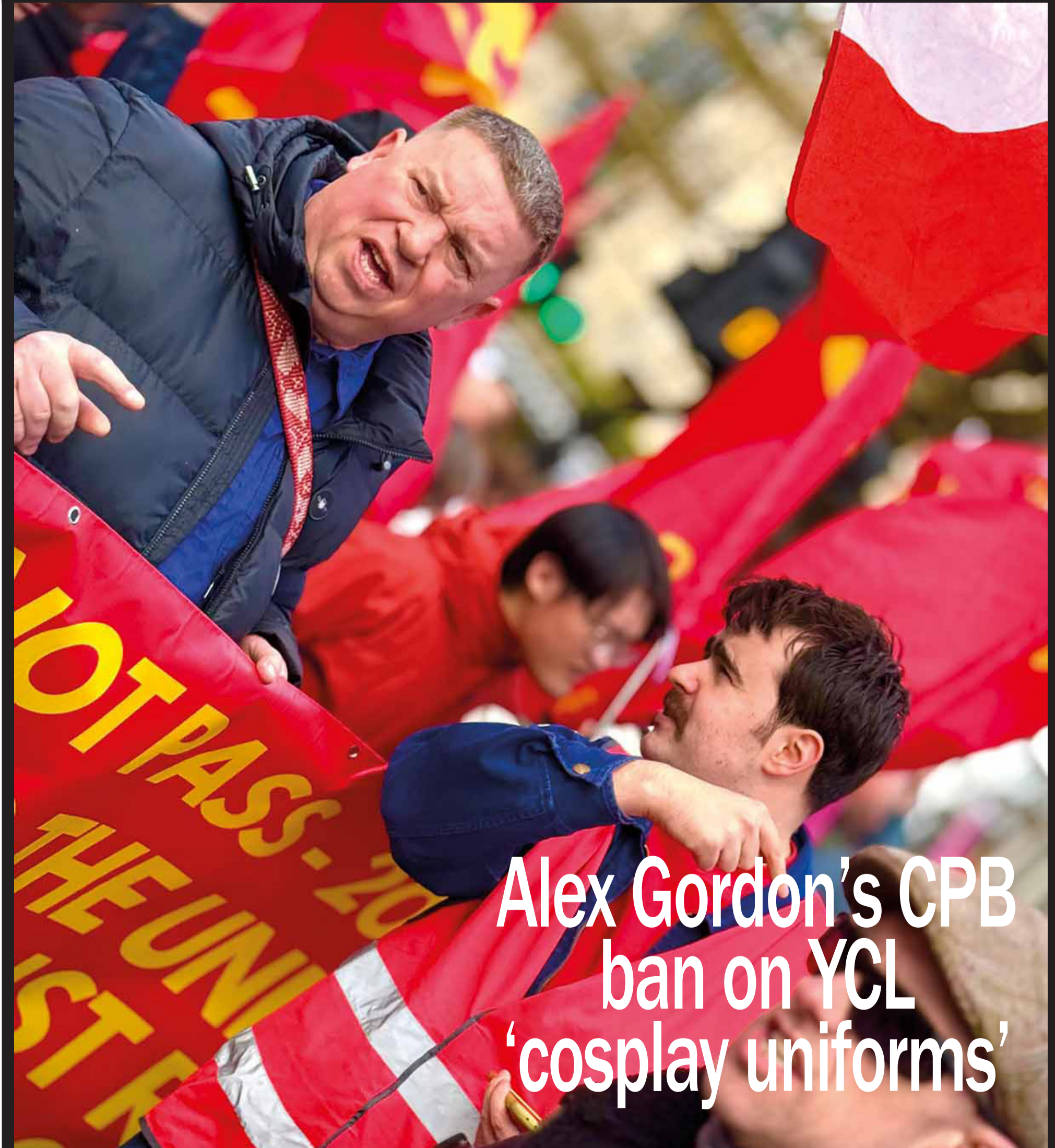
**Tony Greenstein's suspension from the Green Party exposes its current left posturing as a total sham**

- Letters and debate
- Sir Olly Robbins
- General Strike 1926
- Just so stories

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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**Alex Gordon's CPB  
ban on YCL  
'cosplay uniforms'**

## LETTERS



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

## Orgreave enquiry

The Orgreave enquiry is, for better or worse, going ahead. It's not what many of us in the National Union of Mineworkers thought it would be and its terms of reference are strictly limited.

We had thought it ought to extend back to Ridley and the plan to engage us, drawing up strategies and traps back then. We had thought it must include the pit closure programme and the anti-union knock-on. We had hoped it would show how unnecessary Margaret Thatcher's endeavour was in the first place, which always had at base deindustrialise-deproletarianise aims.

We thought the events of June 18 1984 - the Battle of Orgreave during the miners' Great Strike - had given the police licence to act with impunity, as proved by police riots in countless villages after and then at Hillsborough. We thought it would be judge-led, and would summon cabinet members, police inspectors, special branch members, cabinet papers, all documents from the period, etc. Instead it is chaired by Rev Pete Wilcox, who I'm sure is a decent chap, but hardly 'Judge Dread'.

None of us will be summoned, so, if you think you've something to tell them, you have to write it online. That's a wow for all the old lads in the bombed-out pit villages. Arthur wanted to act as a prosecutor, but that's not being allowed, and the NUM isn't even preparing a case, with our own witnesses, etc, and hasn't written to all our past members who are still with us. So expect little. But it's important that everyone registers to give evidence. Check online and submit your name, etc.

My own view on what happened at Orgreave and the flawed strategy which took us there can be found in my book, *Ghost dancers* - which is still available either on eBay, where second-hand copies are next to nowt, or else at a fiver plus post from me. We fought like lions that day, and succeeded in closing the plant, and that caused many knock-on effects - not least two national dock strikes, which took us to the cusp of victory. Nobody died, but it certainly wasn't for the cops' want of trying - they laid about us with murderous abandon with clubs and dogs.

David Douglass  
South Shields

## Double game

Lewis Nielsen, the Socialist Workers Party chief and 'anti-fascist officer' with Stand Up to Racism, who has a host of other SWP front group titles, is currently busily building for the next big event on the SWP calendar. That being the May 16 anti-fascist counterdemonstration, which will oppose Spanish resident and Irish passport holder Tommy 'Ten Names' Robinson's self-proclaimed 'British Patriotic Festival' in central London on that date.

Nielsen is using ever more bellicose language and invoking the slogan of 'No pasarán!' and allusions to Cable Street 1936 and Lewisham 1977 to show his militancy. This is jarring, as simultaneously he is promoting the Together Alliance, which is a liberal, tepid popular-front organisation, deliberately and purposefully shorn of any militancy. Indeed, its main slogans are variations of 'Love, peace and be nice to each other'!

So what is happening here? As usual the SWP is playing its double game, trying to appear militant by wearing

its SWP hat, while simultaneously appealing to liberals and the likes of Zack Polanski when sporting its popular-front hat. Of course, the SWP has done this before - most notoriously in the Respect coalition, when they argued for 'No immigration controls' in *Socialist Worker*, while supporting immigration controls when they were in alliance with a certain Mr George Galloway.

SUTR certainly (and presumably Nielsen himself) liaises with the Metropolitan Police heavily over their counterdemonstration, as that is a legal requirement, and will have liaison officers working with them on the day. I am sure it will come as a surprise to these officers that Lewisham 1977 is being invoked by SUTR in speeches promoting the day. The fact is that there will be almost certainly no breaking through police lines and physically confronting fascists on the day.

Cable Street and Lewisham occurred in very specific circumstances, when the left was able to unite with the local minorities, especially youth, who were under direct attack by the fascists. This clearly will not happen in the centre of London in 2026 and Nielsen knows this. I mean, what 'locals' is he intending to mobilise on the day in Westminster? Bemused Japanese and Korean tourists? The Metropolitan Police, of course, are well used to tightly policing events in that area and haven't really lost control of a demonstration in central London since the poll tax riots of 1990.

Of course, Nielsen wants to have his political cake and eat it. It will just lead to disappointments and yet more false dawns ... until the next SWP-sponsored demo is promoted.

Paul O'Keeffe  
email

## Brothel politics

I would like to comment on the article by Judy Cox in last week's *Socialist Worker* headlined 'Sex work - can it ever be liberating?' The subheading says: "Socialists support decriminalisation of sex work - and fight for a society where women aren't treated as objects and human relationships are free from the market."

I have a friend whose work name is Suzy, who has been escorting for nearly 20 years and has had no trouble with the laws surrounding sex work during that time. Most of her clients are married men in their 50s, whose wives are going through the menopause. Suzy also sees a lot of older men, the oldest being 84. She charges £160 for an hour and up to £800 for overnight - she sees one client a day for five or six days a week. Suzy has an accountant and pays tax like everyone else.

Sex work is just like being a car mechanic - some clients are better than others. Mechanics enjoy working on cars and look forward to meeting their clients - some even become friends. But I'm a bit sceptical about the call for the decriminalisation of sex work - it's a bit like calling for the decriminalisation of all drugs. Far better to call for the legalisation of sex work, just like Marxists call for the legalisation of all drugs.

The Office for National Statistics says that each year 65,000 rapes are reported to the police. This equates to 100 rapes each year per parliamentary constituency or two rapes a week per constituency. In my opinion brothels should be made legal, as in Australia for the last 40 years, and should be licensed by local authorities. In Australia only women can own and run brothels.

The number of rapes would decrease substantially, as sex workers in brothels would teach men how to

treat women, including the importance of women's sexual fulfilment. At the same time, men who visit sex workers in brothels would get used to using condoms to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

I disagree with *Socialist Worker*, when it implies that sex work will disappear under socialism. There will still be married men whose wives are going through the menopause. There will still be shy and disabled men. A large proportion of women will continue to only want sex as part of a long-term relationship. Another group of women don't want or like sex. This will continue under socialism. Escorts and brothels solve this problem.

At the same time, many men are frightened of women. This fear has been made worse by the Me Too movement, in which men are frightened of asking a woman out, as they may be accused of stalking or harassment. In our atomised society, dating has become incredibly difficult. The old ways of meeting a partner don't work any more. Online dating is a dead end, especially now that *Match* has changed its format to be like *Tinder*.

The article in *Socialist Worker* supports the call of the English Collective of Prostitutes for the decriminalisation of prostitution. The ECP should go one step further and call for its legalisation. It's time to legalise brothels.

John Smithee  
Cambridgeshire

## YP delusions

The central dynamic in the struggle for a mass party of the working class is between Labourism and republicanism. In the Your Party central executive committee elections this took the form of the opposition of The Many (TM) platform and Republic YP (RYP). TM won 14 seats, while RYP ended with only one of its supporters on the CEC. This is not a reason for despair, because it was a real step forward.

The CEC meeting - held on Sunday April 12 - is another turning point in the short history of Your Party. Before commenting on this meeting, we must turn the clock back to the period after the CEC election results and before that Sunday meeting.

RYP is a platform set up to campaign for a YP party programme as basically a struggle between Labourite and republican programmes. It was rumoured that there was a communist platform, but if so, it was a dog that didn't bark. We highlighted the fact that YP does not have an official programme. It is therefore a party in name only. We have only a *proto*-party with proto-branches, until the programme is agreed.

Many comrades don't care about a programme because they don't understand its centrality for any effective working class party. They want to stand in elections for minimum reforms and protest on the streets, which they could do equally well by standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. Your Party has to offer something different to all the previous left party failures.

We declared our intention to remain in YP until it adopts a (Labourite or republican) programme at the first conference able to decide this. This means RYP is on board for the next year or so, seeking to transform YP into a real party with an agreed programme. This gives us objective criteria to assess the leave/remain dilemma, so we are not blown off-course by the vagaries of inner-party conflict.

Because YP is still a pre-party, pre-programme formation, then dual membership makes complete sense. It is important to draw all working class

activists, in whatever organisation they have temporarily anchored themselves, into one political space, where we can openly discuss politics and act together to defend the working class. Once we have a programme, then we can decide what is the best organisational structure and whether dual membership should end. It is in this spirit of left unity that Republic YP has supporters who are also members of the Workers Party and the Socialist Party.

So it is interesting to look back on the CPGB's "Assessments and perspectives", which were "unanimously agreed at the March 22 AGM". These perspectives recognised the various failures and disappointments of YP. Yet they consider that "Your Party remains a site of struggle". Yes, a site of struggle between Labourism and republicanism. They add: "Despite that sorry record, Jeremy Corbyn's The Many faction and its plans for Your Party promise little more than a repeat of what is a hopelessly failed model." The "model" in question is the 'orange constitution' with a social monarchy and union.

However, clouding the issue between Labourism (TM) and republicanism (RYP) was Grassroots Left (GL), the largest opposition platform, which won seven CEC seats. GL was never a programmatic break with Labour, but rather the left wing of Corbynism. It was an electoral alliance, whose platform was mainly about the constitution of Your Party, with the fig leaf of abolishing the monarchy as if by magic.

As soon as the CEC elections were over, GL began to fall apart. The CPGB perspective explains that GL should not "be considered anything more than a temporary arrangement". It was a flag of convenience, occupying the centre ground between Labourism and republicanism - a sort of halfway house, where communist groups parked their cars before driving off again.

It wasn't a communist programme. It was a pact between Zarah Sultana, the Democratic Socialists of Your Party and a range of communist groups, such as the Socialist Workers Party, Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century, the CPGB, Counterfire, Socialist Alternative, etc. If it did not win the CEC elections, then disintegration was predictable. What else did it have to hold it together?

Grassroots Left was an unholy alliance between anti-monarchists and anti-republicans, whose purpose was to defeat Corbynism electorally rather than by ideology and programme. It was therefore a barrier to the kind of mass republican politics and programme the working class movement needs.

This is why Republic YP did not support it. It was a distraction from the fundamental question of programme - a deviation into the politics of economism and the worship of spontaneous 'action'. We will add GL to the list of what the CPGB

perspectives called "a hopelessly failed model".

With all this behind us, we await news from the CEC on the April 12 meeting. What is going to happen next and how will RYP respond to it? Watch this space.

Steve Freeman  
RYP

## Darker corners

There was a time when detective TV dramas relied on the 'whodunnit' premise - inviting audiences to play along, as suspects were examined and alibis unravelled. Then came *Columbo* - iconic trench coat and cigar in hand - revolutionising the whole structure. The brilliance of the 'howcatchem' was that the audience already knew the culprit from the outset. The intrigue lay not in discovering guilt, but in watching it slowly, inevitably, become undeniable. It was less about revelation and more about exposure - a drawn-out process of watching someone talk themselves into a corner they'd been standing in all along.

Which brings us, with only the slightest narrative leap, to Westminster. Because in much the same way, the idea that Keir Starmer could have 'mised' parliament over the appointment of Peter Mandelson feels like accusing *Columbo* of spoiling the ending. The facts weren't hidden in some complex mystery: they were sitting in plain view. It didn't require the 'grown-up in the room' - 'Mr Forensic' Starmer himself - to reveal the incriminating evidence. It was already in the public domain, the audience having casually absorbed it, while making tea. Mandelson's past, his controversies, and the reasons behind the failed vetting weren't secrets waiting to be uncovered: they were already part of the plot.

And to suggest MPs were somehow duped is to pretend they're just extras in the show rather than seasoned participants in a series of sleaze and sordid behaviour. It's less 'whodunnit' and more 'how do we all keep a straight face?' In that context, outrage feels performative - overacting if anything. After all, when the evidence is already laid out, the real question isn't who knew what: it's how anyone manages to feign ignorance convincingly enough to sustain the spectacle.

Buoyed by potentially disastrous local elections next month, the first political casualty of the latest deluge from the Epstein files may be someone unlikely to be actually named in them: Sir Keir Starmer. That hardly renders him innocent; appointing Peter Mandelson invites the sort of 'guilt by association' politics that TV thrives on. And, as *Columbo* (shuffling back into the room) might add, 'And one more thing': the files aren't going anywhere. They'll keep doing what the scruffy detective did best: casting a lingering, uncomfortable light on power's darker corners. The audience, one suspects, won't be shocked by what it sees.

Carl Collins  
email

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# Style is everything

The CPB's uniform ban, its craving for respectability, the purging of young rebels who object to its Zionism and its reactionary attacks on trans people - all are morbid symptoms of bureaucratic control-freakery. **Eddie Ford** tells the tale of two lives and two funerals

**Fo**unded in 1921, the Young Communist League has had two lives. The first was as the youth wing of the Communist Party of Great Britain - that until the Eurocommunist misleadership liquidated themselves in 1991 and established the ghostly and thankfully short-lived Democratic Left.

The YCL's last general secretary was Mark Ashton of 'Pride' fame. Other former general secretaries include William Rust, Ted Willis, John Gollan and Jimmy Reid. True, the YCL never had a mass membership, perhaps around five or six thousand at its height. But it did provide something approaching a political education, including through intense faction fights against the Eurocommunists from the late 1960s onwards.

Fergus Nicholson ran his own YCL faction during the 1970s. It had a national leadership with representatives from London, Scotland, the North East, East Anglia, Wales, East Midlands, Surrey, South East Midlands, etc. There were meetings each month at his 52 Tournay Road house. There was even an annual school in the Lake District.

We, too, had a YCL faction, with three members on its executive committee in the early 1980s. During the miners' Great Strike our faction published *East End Challenge* in the name of Hackney YCL. The 'official' YCL, meanwhile, published absolutely nothing during the entire 12 months of the strike. This was at its nadir under the 'leadership' of Doug Chalmers.

Death was not long in coming.

## Second life

The YCL's second life came with the rebellion of the *Morning Star's* colourless editor, Tony Chater, and the formation of the Communist Campaign Group and then the Communist Party of Britain. Having been 'reborn' under the uninspiring apparatchik, Kenny Coyle, the YCL had a desultory existence. That is, till the time of Johnny Hunter (2018-2023), when there was a sudden, and altogether strange, spurt in membership. Amongst a thin stratum of young people, Stalin had become chic: in part to identify with a historical figure loathed by mainstream liberalism, in part to provoke spluttering outrage amongst superannuated Trotskyists.

The YCL made quite a splash by marching in formation, faces covered in red bandanas, dressed in black and waving red flags. Adding to spectacle were the red flares and nostalgic r-r-revolutionary chants: 'Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, Stalin!' being a particular favourite.

CPB tops, not least former general secretary Robert Griffiths and resident Zionist Mary Davis, were left fuming. And inevitably there followed a bureaucratic dictat banning anything openly pro-Stalin, anything that might attract the unwanted attention of PC Plod. Secretly CPB leaders might have a soft spot for Uncle Joe, but don't go round in public shouting his goddamned name.

Today, the YCL barely exists - the last time there was a print publication of its journal, *Challenge*, was the "centenary edition" in August



Second life: street theatre

2021, and we hear that the YCL now has fewer than 75 members.<sup>1</sup> True, a lot of YCL members have been incorporated into the CPB's apparatus. Johnny Hunter, is, for example, assistant general secretary no less. CPB contingents on demonstration have become noticeably younger too.

Of course, there is now a new CPB general secretary, Alex Gordon. True he is an ex-RMT union president and also sits on Stop the War Coalition's steering committee, but he has no history, no background, no youthful schooling in the 'official communist' movement. All he knows is the Griffiths-era CPB.

Maybe that explains why our Alex is determined to carry on in the tradition of Robert Griffiths - who showed an extraordinary sensitivity to the dangers of PC Plod, maybe because he had to stand trial for terrorism back in 1983 (he was a member of the Welsh Socialist Republican Movement<sup>2</sup>). Either way, comrade Griffiths swiftly junked his revolutionary past and adopted the safety-first outlook of the staid bureaucratic place holder. This saw him write to Iain McNicol, Labour's witch-hunting general secretary, saying, 'Give me the names of CPB members who joined the Labour Party in order to support Jeremy Corbyn and I'll kick 'em out'. He also ordered CPBers not to join Your Party, supposedly because they would have to defend a political line - say on China, for example - that is not ours. Which is complete nonsense, of course. Could you really imagine YP imposing a strict political line, on China or anything else, on its membership?

Anyway, we learn that comrade Gordon has now banned YCL members from wearing what he calls "uniforms". There is a certain historical irony here, of course, because it was the British state that was persecuting CPGB members

for wearing "uniforms" after the introduction of the Public Order Act 1936 (contrary to some mythmakers, it was not just Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists that this legislation was aimed at).

So, in a letter on April 15 from Gordon to CPB members, there is a stern warning of a "concerted breach of democratic centralism" aimed at influencing YCL members "to adopt a so-called 'dress code' when attending public events and political demonstrations". He goes on to state that "various purported instructions" to YCL members "have been circulated without authority, agreement or prior knowledge" of the YCL general secretary, or the chair of the central committee - and furthermore that these "unauthorised 'instructions' to YCL members" are in "clear defiance of our party's policy against wearing uniforms when carrying out party activities".

He finishes by saying that all "attempts to subvert our party's policy prohibiting the wearing of uniforms or attempting to enforce the wearing of face coverings" on public demonstrations "must be treated as evidence of factional behaviour and dealt with accordingly".

This suffocating message is reinforced by the CPB *Party Line* bulletin, issued on the same day, which says it has been "alerted by complaints" from members of "a faction seeking to influence members" of the YCL to adopt a so-called 'dress code' when attending public events and political demonstrations. It states that those wearing a uniform or face covering "will not be welcome to join party blocs or activities" on May Day, as it "is the workers' day, not a day for paramilitary cosplay".

Cracking the whip, the bulletin darkly reminds us that this "factional attempt to mandate YCL members" to wear a black uniform 'dress code' and face covering (red snoods) "breaches an agreement" reached in 2023

between the CPB and YCL, and is a violation of various rules.

## Dramatic

But they are not actual uniforms, of course. When the CPGB ran the Workers' Theatre Movement in the 1920s-30s, for instance, the comrades dressed in red shirts and dungarees emblazoned with a hammer and sickle, as they wanted to present themselves in an eye-catching manner. In the same way that the Black Panthers dressed in black leather jackets and black berets - not because there was any particular instruction - but as a political statement.

In reality each political subculture will tend to adopt some sort of style. For instance, you could easily spot a member of the International Socialists in the late 1960s, because they tended to look a bit like the Black Panthers - it was cool. A lot of young men would also wear their hair long. A rebellion against the drab 1950s, and in reality the drab early 1960s.

There are, of course, other subcultures - eg mods and rockers: rockers rode powerful motorcycles, greased their hair and wore biker jackets; mods wore parkas and rode scooters. This was famously catalogued in the film *Quadrophenia*.

If you look at Karl Marx himself, he adopted the beard and long hair of his revolutionary generation (and kept it almost till the last days). Either way, there was a certain look. Young Bolsheviks also adopted a definite dress style during the civil war. Many wore black leather trenchcoats, or what the CPB would damningly call a 'uniform' - but in reality it expressed a particular, militarised, sort of politics.

The very idea of banning young comrades from displaying a certain fashion style shows, yet again, a morbid oversensitivity to any hint of factionalism and is, arguably, also part of a current left culture of boring conformity. In the name of keeping control, the CPB, under Robert

Griffiths and now Alex Gordon, has certainly killed off the second YCL, to all intents and purposes.

At its peak, the second YCL reported some 500 members (doubtless a much exaggerated figure). Now general secretary Georgina Andrews presides over a corpse.

## Red Britain

As a result of the crushingly bureaucratic culture imposed by the likes of Griffiths and Gordon, we recently saw a Red Wessex split - which you can read about on Lawrence Parker's blog, where he interviews a comrade from that group.<sup>3</sup> As the name suggests, Red Wessex covers the areas of Devon, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Avon and Somerset, in south-west England. There is also a linked group, Red Sussex, and some comrades in Manchester recently broke off from the national YCL - while there is a "developing situation" in Wales, where a lot have also seceded, and some comrades in Scotland appear to be ready for a split too.

The aim or intention seems to be the formation of a Red Britain network, which could be forthcoming fairly soon - there seems to be no ambition to create a party-type organisation at this stage. Of course, the CPB tops immediately moved against it with a *Party Line* bulletin on February 13, which deemed that membership of and/or support for Red Wessex or any of the groups associated with it "constitutes factional behaviour in breach of democratic centralism and incompatible with membership of the Communist Party". As is often the case with these sorts of anti-democratic measures, they have provided unintended publicity, as this was the first time that many CPB members had even heard of Red Wessex - which issued a militant statement on Instagram.<sup>4</sup>

The comrades seem to be rebelling around worthwhile issues, even though most remain Stalinites of some description. For example, they took a good stand against the persecution of trans people, opposing the CPB's biological determinism and its 'three cheers' welcome to the court judgment against trans people.

YCL comrades have also rebelled, quite rightly, against the 'anti-Semitism awareness' training courses run by Mary Davis. Looking at her reading list, we are clearly dealing with a Zionist doling out Zionist propaganda.<sup>5</sup> The Israeli embassy would thoroughly approve. You can understand then why some YCL comrades are up in arms, because the CPB obviously has not got an anti-Semitism problem - just as the Labour left, or the left in general, hasn't. What the CPB has got is a Zionist problem●

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## Notes

1. challenge-magazine.org/magazine.
2. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh\_Socialist\_Republican\_Movement.
3. communistpartyofgreatbritainhistory.wordpress.com/2026/04/15/red-wessex-ycl-opposition-national-network.
4. instagram.com/p/DSXCkg7JMa.
5. See T Greenstein, 'Distracting from genocide' *Weekly Worker* May 2 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1489/distracting-from-genocide).

## LABOUR

# He didn't want to know

Claimed ignorance of Peter Mandelson's security rating tells us a great deal about the inner workings of the state. But, says **Paul Demarty**, we should be demanding full access. Publish everything and 'security' be damned

There was much amusement earlier this year when Peter Mandelson - still for now 'Baron Mandelson of Foy' - was photographed urinating in the street in Notting Hill.

He had been enjoying a no-doubt well-refreshed visit to the home of former Tory chancellor George Osborne, where the two presumably compared notes on turning this country into a barely habitable hellscape of vape stores and homeless encampments. The BBC reported last week that Kensington and Chelsea council intended to issue a £300 penalty notice to Mandelson, but were not entirely sure what address to send it to. In the end, the Royal Borough will get off lightly, whether or not they manage to collect the cash, for Mandelson seems far more intent on pissing on the career of the prime minister! And, while the rain in time washed his Notting Hill ejecta out to the Thames super-sewer, not even a monsoon could clean the stains off poor old Sir Keir Starmer.

A quick recap: with the UK faced with the need for a new US ambassador (with Donald Trump already in a bad mood, thanks to Labour apparatchiks' worthless assistance to the Kamala Harris campaign), one name rapidly floated to the top of the list - that of Mandy. He had a good relationship with the president; he had a good relationship with numerous other dictators and princelings for that matter, and therefore had a good line in grovelling sycophancy. He was well-connected in the business world, which counts for a lot in sucking up to Trump. He was *perfect*, albeit perhaps a little unreliable.

He was also, it is fair to say, pretty well plugged into Starmer's circle. Morgan McSweeney, Starmer's then chief of staff and Svengali, was a protege of Mandelson's. He was also close to the residual Blairites in the parliamentary party, of course, like Wes Streeting. It was a match made in heaven. He was duly appointed, without much controversy (or any more than could be expected, given Mandelson's scandal-prone political history).

Alas, Trump had brought one troublesome promise into the White House with him: to release the 'Epstein files', even if nobody could really work out what these files actually were. When he got cold feet, Democrats in Congress, along with a few true believers in the GOP, forced significant releases of Jeffrey Epstein-related documents held by the department of justice. These provided, firstly, evidence that Mandelson had offered support to Epstein after his conviction for solicitation in 2008, leading to his sacking as ambassador.

Then, in February, *prima facie* evidence emerged that, when he had been brought back into the cabinet by nemesis Gordon Brown, Mandelson had leaked private government documents to the sex-pest financier at the height of the 2008 crisis; and also that he may have received financial gifts. He was sacked and, soon after, arrested for questioning. No charges have yet been filed - and, of course, he denies everything.

All of this was very embarrassing for Starmer, who made various statements to the effect that he was *shocked* that Mandelson had lied about the extent of his Epstein ties. Various people were thrown under the bus, including McSweeney.

The latest scandal is that it turns out that Mandelson failed his security



Real threat comes from behind him

screening comprehensively. Yet he was still appointed. How can this have happened? Once again, Starmer is *shocked* - I'm sorry, "staggered", to use the exact word he has been repeating for days like a malfunctioning wind-up doll - to discover this. Why wasn't he told? He is quite insistent that he was, indeed, *not* told. Various leaks from the government have striven to buttress this account of events. The sacrificial victim this time is Olly Robbins, the permanent private secretary at the foreign office, who apparently disregarded the security concerns and approved the appointment.

## Spectacle

All of which set up a great spectacle for the Commons this week, where Starmer and Robbins alike got to push their respective versions of events. On April 20, Starmer more or less rehashed his previous talking points, and was curiously let off the hook by the opposition; Diane Abbott asked some pointed questions, and Zarah Sultana got herself suspended from the house for calling Starmer a barefaced liar to his face.

More interesting was Robbins, who was clearly marked at having been made the fall guy. His story was already a popular hypothesis, shared (for what it's worth) by ourselves: the government, clearly, wanted Mandelson for the job. They made that extremely clear to the civil servants concerned, and it was up to the civil servants to work through the procedures. The procedures allowed overruling the security check, and 'working towards the Führer', and they took the decision they believed would save them the most hassle. Robbins claimed that he had not seen the vetting report - only been briefed on it. Perhaps true, perhaps a deflection of his own.

If this *is* true, then Sultana was morally correct, but technically wrong. Business was conducted in a way that Starmer could not, literally, be caught in a lie; his moral compromises were conveniently outsourced. It is hard not to feel for Robbins, all told. When

the revived Epstein scandal took out Mandelson, the civil servants were left exposed; after all, this sort of informal, nudge-wink decision-making is designed to help shit roll downhill (or, perhaps, piss!). It is very common in the business world for just that reason.

So we do not take Starmer at his word here. Suppose, however, we did. It is not an uninteresting argument. The government leaks are quite insistent that all this security vetting is an internal prerogative of the civil service (indeed, even Robbins claims not to have seen this report). Various names have been floated as blockers of the essential information: Robbins, of course, but also Antonia Romeo and Catherine Little (cabinet secretary and cabinet office permanent secretary respectively), who knew about all this weeks ago.

They had been brought into action during the February crisis, after parliament demanded the release of all information related to Mandelson's appointment - except that prejudicial to 'national security'. Their delays, according to *The Guardian*, relate to this:

A government source insisted Little "did not sit on the information", but was involved in a complex process and was trying to establish the risks in sharing highly sensitive information, including with the prime minister. The source added that Little informed Romeo of her plan to establish those risks. Romeo, the government source said, was supportive of the plan. That process appears to have taken weeks, with as many as a dozen officials and lawyers aware of Mandelson's vetting failure. Starmer's statement would suggest he was not formally notified by any of them until a few days ago.<sup>1</sup>

Now, there are very good reasons for scepticism, when it comes to anonymous 'government sources', but, in line with our thought experiment, let us assume this is all true. The striking conclusion is that,

even with his job possibly on the line, even after parliament demands access to this information (the sensitive stuff, after all, was just supposed to go to the intelligence and security committee), apparently the prime minister has no right to know about any of it. Huh?

The drama of Starmer's troubles, and the salacious character of the Epstein scandal, draws the headlines. Yet between the discreet smoothing of Mandelson's appointment and this year's crisis management, a picture of something more fundamentally important emerges - the structure of the British state (indeed perhaps of bourgeois states in general), and the essential role played within it of controlling the flow of information. Parliament is supposed to be sovereign (or at least the king in parliament), yet it is frozen out apparently by the obscure machinations of the Sir Humphreys, and indeed the Dame Humphreys.

## Bureaucracy remains

Governments come and go; the permanent bureaucracy, including the civil service, but also the military and security state (also involved here), remains. It too has its governing ideology and perceived purpose, which changes - but more slowly, tectonically. It is this permanent layer that makes the state effective as a bulwark for capital against challengers.

It is, ironically, the right - the party of order - that has led the charge of late against this permanent caste of officials. In America, this was strikingly illustrated by Elon Musk's campaign of terror last year in the short-lived 'department of government efficiency'; public servants were a perceived risk to the plans of Musk and his ilk for openly corrupt raiding of taxpayers' money. Yet he was hardly first on the scene. Numerous figures on the American far right, such as Steve Bannon and Curtis Yarvin, have long demanded an all-out assault on the 'administrative state'. British rightists, notably former

Boris Johnson *consigliere* Dominic Cummings, have made much the same case on this side of the Atlantic.

## Democracy

These people have tended to frighten the left into defence, however qualified, of the public servants concerned. Yet it is worth thinking about why the rightwing attacks always seem to *fail*. Governments of the right, even more than governments of the capitalist 'left' ('neoliberalised' social democracy and so forth), require impunity to be effective. Impunity is assured, above all, by the united front of the state apparatus and its control of information like the failed security vetting of Mandelson.

For Marxists, the proper proximate aim is the politicisation of state business, its being put into question in the full glare of publicity: the exact opposite, in other words, of the mission of the civil service. We do not favour permanent bureaucracy, civil or military, but the supremacy of democratic bodies. A mature socialist society would not have a career civil service at all, but accountable officials, upon whose work the utmost transparency is imposed. Though today the 'revolving door' between government and private industry is a mechanism of legalised corruption, we should in fact aspire to ordinary people rotating in and out of direct economic activity and political-administrative roles - something only possible with the total subordination of the economic to the political. Every cook can govern - and should.

We are far from this, of course, but it does suggest that our immediate demands should not be over-focused on Starmer, as pathetic a figure as he is, but on how this sausage was made. Release this vetting report! To hell with 'national security' - *we* will be the judge of what is prejudicial to 'British interests', such as they are. Any such revelations will not be politically actionable for the left in the short term, of course (unless we count the Greens). But it will be educational.

The Epstein scandal has had a rather ambiguous effect on political consciousness, spreading all too widely a credulous conspiratorial mindset. It has, however, had the virtue of being deeply destabilising, and forcing into the open the sorts of squalid arrangements that are, in reality, all too characteristic of political power under capitalism. So far as we are able, we should exploit this opportunity.

Meanwhile, Starmer struggles for survival. His future may be safer than it appears: nobody is likely to move on him before the expected drubbing in the May elections, and even then, there is the tricky question of who to replace him with. The non-stop disasters of this parliament have soiled most of the likely candidates; Starmer succeeded in keeping Andy Burnham out of the Commons (probably at the cost of Labour failing to win Gorton and Denton). Perhaps May 7 will be such a nightmare that they will offload him anyway - time will tell.

To find a replacement without the stink of Mandelson on them, the PLP will have its work cut out ●

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## Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/politics/2026/apr/17/keir-starmer-kept-in-dark-peter-mandelson-vetting-two-top-civil-servants.

GREENS

# Not so bold politics

Tony Greenstein's suspension from the Green Party exposes its current left posturing as a total sham. It also shows that investing hopes in the Green Party is completely misplaced. The Green Party is petty-bourgeois through and through, says **Carla Roberts**

He might not have set out to expose the Greens, but Tony Greenstein's very short membership has certainly laid bare the rotten underbelly of Zack Polanski's shiny new Greens. Tony joined on March 1 2026, but, less than two weeks later, on March 13, a "request" was made by persons unknown in "the local party" to the "Green Party regional council" to suspend him, which the leadership council, meeting on April 15, duly supported.

The comrade has sent us the relevant documentation, though it does not come to very much. The "basis of the decision" runs to a full 11 words: "Documented history of anti-Semitism, including court decisions and recent terrorism charges."

He has been suspended under point 4.8 of the Greens' constitution, which states that the council has the "power to expel or suspend any person from membership and/or refuse membership to any person for a specified period if in its opinion it is in the party's interest to do so." A lovely catch-all phrase that does not even require those accused to do any 'harm' or suchlike.<sup>1</sup>

No evidence is featured in the pre-printed, three-page template document, although there is plenty of space allocated for appendixes, etc - but it is all empty. There is not even an attempt to do what the witch-hunters in the Labour Party used to do, such as taking quotes out of context, featuring screenshots from private conversations, 'liking' a Facebook post, etc.

And it would be quite hard to find evidence. Yes, there are "recent terrorism charges" against Greenstein. In December 2023, he was arrested for this single tweet: "I support the Palestinians, that is enough, and I support Hamas against the Israeli army."<sup>2</sup> As Hamas has been designated a terrorist organisation, he has been charged under the Terrorism Act 2000 and will stand trial on August 18 2026. Greenstein also received a nine-month suspended prison sentence in September 2023 for his involvement in a planned protest by Palestine Action against an Elbit Systems factory (which never took place). His terror charge is on the same kind of bogus level as the charges doled out against over 3,000 people for the crime of holding up signs declaring "I support Palestine Action". It is beyond laughable to use these types of political charges as an excuse for disciplinary action.

Greenstein is certainly known for his fruity language and often explosive conduct and has clashed with many organisations that he has been involved with over the decades. But he is a long-standing and well-educated anti-Zionist Jew (whose father was a rabbi), who has written plenty on the subject. We might criticise his book *Zionism during the holocaust* for the lack of editing, but one would be hard-pressed to find in it anything that could be construed as racist.

Of course, we disagree with his unwavering support for the so-called 'one-state solution', which, as Moshé Machover has explained, is no solution at all, because it boils down to denying the "very existence of a Hebrew nation - a settler nation formed by Zionist colonisation". Greenstein views them



Working together with who?

as a single monolithic bloc, in which no significant body can ever be won over to a progressive or socialist viewpoint - so the working class in the Hebrew nation is written off! As such, Tony can only tell them that, in his vision for the future for the region, the poles of oppression will simply be reversed: Israeli Jews will have no right of self-determination. This is clearly not a programme for socialism of any kind, although it is certainly a very widespread position. But he is no anti-Semite.

## Accountability

Contrary to the suspension letter, there are also no alleged "court decisions", which supposedly prove his "documented history of anti-Semitism". In fact, not even the Labour Party could manage to dig up anything along those lines - and they certainly tried. In the end, they expelled him for "harassment" and "abusive language" towards a number of pro-Zionist politicians.

As a rather troubling aside, the "Green Party Regional Council" that suspended Greenstein was *actually abolished* at the Greens' autumn conference in October 2025. It was replaced with the Green Party Council (GPC), which "has responsibilities over areas such as the culture and wellbeing of the party, its governance, party policy, our political direction, and political strategy". Rather than being made up of regionally elected members (as was the old regional council), the new body is supposed to be made up of "members [who] will be elected at the annual ballot from 2026".

These annual ballots take place during the two conferences the Greens hold every year. And, while there was such an annual ballot during the party's spring conference on March 18, this *did not* extend to electing the members of the council!<sup>3</sup> The list of 30 "council members" on the GP website was last updated on January 8 2025 and still features the regionally elected reps of the former regional council - and the 'leadership team' of Zack Polanski,

Mothin Ali and Rachel Millward.<sup>4</sup>

So who knows who actually sits on the body that suspended Greenstein or how they could be held accountable? We can see from the documentation sent to Greenstein that 12 people voted during the said meeting on April 15 - 11 voted in favour of Tony's suspension, with only one against. Was Polanski there? How did he vote? Shouldn't Green Party members know this kind of thing? Such a lack of transparency always favours the incumbent regime.

Tony's suspension letter states that he "may make representations (for example, if you believe this decision was made in error) or to offer any mitigations for the council's consideration", by 5pm on Wednesday May 13. But there is no evidence! How can Greenstein defend himself against 11 short words? He also does not know if there will be a hearing, where he could present his side of things, or if this suspension would then be followed by his expulsion. We very much suspect it will. His numerous requests for more information have remained unanswered. This is, rather incredibly, much worse than the sorry excuse for a disciplinary process we witnessed during the height of the witch-hunt in the Labour Party.

## Racism?

In his blog on the issue, comrade Greenstein says that "this whole process, known as a 'no fault suspension', proves that racism is alive and well in the Green Party".<sup>5</sup> Among his evidence is that the Greens "continue to allow Zionists to accuse Palestinian supporters of 'anti-Semitism' without fearing any comeback", that the Green Party "has never been involved in Palestine solidarity work" and "its policy on BDS has always been a dead letter", that "there have been numerous articles targeting mainly Muslim [Green] council candidates" and that "anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism is extremely high amongst Jewish Zionists, many of whom, like Sussex Friends of Israel, are in bed with

Tommy Robinson's racists".

Perhaps comrade Greenstein is stretching things here. Nonetheless, the Green Party is definitely soft on Zionism. Under Caroline Lucas it adopted the IHRA's so-called definition of anti-Semitism, presumably to show that it was a reliable potential junior partner in a capitalist government.

Of course, what we are seeing from the Green leadership is not another attempt to play the 'anti-Semitism' card, which worked so well to get rid of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader. Tony Greenstein is not Jeremy Corbyn. What the Greens want to avoid is themselves becoming the target of such a witch-hunt already being whipped up by the *Telegraph*. That is why Greenstein is being pushed out, not because of racism, but because he makes an easy target.

Comrade Greenstein is also a potential pain in the arse for the local Green council in Brighton and Hove - he clearly has no fear of speaking out and has, for example, quite rightly publicly lambasted the council for wasting over £50 million on i360 - a pointless elevated lift on the seafront.

The Greens might have over 220,000 members - but most of them are happy to remain entirely passive, with only 700 voting during the spring conference (although it took place on Zoom and was open to *all* members). Greenstein, however, is the kind of *active* member who rather inconveniently disturbs Zack Polanski's very delicate balancing act: the Green leader is posing left, all the while touting the idea of a European (capitalist) defence pact, as an 'alternative' to Nato. He is touring trade union conferences, while assuring medium and big business that he is no anti-capitalist of any sort - for example, with the amendment agreed at spring conference, which removed a previous commitment to nationalise "the five largest energy supply companies".<sup>6</sup> He is speaking out in solidarity with the Palestinians, while conniving with those in the Green Party apparatus who did everything in their power to stop conference from voting for the 'Zionism is racism' motion.<sup>7</sup>

Polanski himself missed his party's highest decision-making body, instead spending the whole day at the Together demonstration, ending with him raving on the stage in Trafalgar Square. He judged that viral dancing clips of him and Hannah Spencer would do a lot more for the Greens' electoral chances than an 'internal' discussion about Zionism. Polanski has certainly made no attempt to overturn the Greens' adoption of the IHRA misdefinition of anti-Semitism, which, of course, is not about anti-Semitism at all, but serves as a shield to stop *criticism of Israel*.

In other words, the arch-careerist, Polanski, is getting ready for government. Not only is he hoping for a Green takeover of a whole slew of councils after May 7: he is very much looking for the big time of national government, albeit as a junior coalition partner. Zack Polanski has talked of entering a coalition with Labour (as long as it is not led by Sir Keir - not because of his commitment to British imperialism, but in reality because, for the moment, he is unpopular in the polls).

The Greens are and remain a petty-bourgeois formation (ie, they fight to reform capitalism in the interest of the petty bourgeoisie). They might soon enough become a *thoroughly bourgeois* party, especially if they get called into a potential anti-Reform coalition after the next general election - not an impossible prospect.

## Corbyn lessons

While he has certainly learned lessons from the defeat of the Corbyn movement and is less of a pushover, when it comes to the smear campaign, Polanski certainly does not want 'trouble-makers' like Tony Greenstein in the party ruining his electoral chances. It is the kind of witch-hunt against the left that unfortunately Greenstein supported in Your Party before he jumped ship: "The history of the left is a history of failure. We have groups who have built that failure - I refer to the SWP. We can't have parties within parties, otherwise we'll have the old fractious debates."<sup>8</sup>

Indeed comrade Greenstein seems to have given up entirely on the working class:

In the current climate forming a revolutionary socialist party is impossible for the simple reason: that we are not in revolutionary or pre-revolutionary times. We will have to ally with forces to our right who agree on such minor things like the right to protest, freedom of speech and association, and opposition to the deployment of terrorism laws to outlaw protest groups like Palestine Action.<sup>9</sup>

He is being facetious, obviously, but there can be no denying that this is opportunism pure and simple. It explains why he had no qualms about joining an organisation, which, by his own admission, is "a petty-bourgeois party with no socialist politics. It does not even recognise the connection between capitalism and the destruction of the environment. That is why Green Parties in Germany and Ireland have moved to the right and far-right. The Green Party has nothing to say about who controls the levers of production in society. It is filled with people who want to green capitalism, not change it."

Of course, there is no revolutionary situation today. But one thing is guaranteed: if socialists today simply wait for this to arrive, while giving up on building the kind of political alternative we actually need and instead help to prop up organisations that have no interest in building socialism, we can be absolutely sure that we will never ever get there ●

## Notes

1. [greenparty.org.uk/app/uploads/2026/02/Constitution-after-Autumn-2025-v6.pdf](https://www.greenparty.org.uk/app/uploads/2026/02/Constitution-after-Autumn-2025-v6.pdf).
2. [www.brightonandhove.news.org/2023/12/21/anti-israel-campaigner-arrested-over-hamas-support-tweet](https://www.brightonandhove.news.org/2023/12/21/anti-israel-campaigner-arrested-over-hamas-support-tweet).
3. [greenparty.org.uk/members/internal-elections/2026-internal-elections](https://www.greenparty.org.uk/members/internal-elections/2026-internal-elections).
4. [greenparty.org.uk/about/people/green-party-council](https://www.greenparty.org.uk/about/people/green-party-council).
5. [avzvas.blogspot.com/2026/04/i-have-been-suspended-from-green-party.html](https://www.avzvas.blogspot.com/2026/04/i-have-been-suspended-from-green-party.html).
6. [www.thecanary.co.uk/news/2026/03/28/green-party-conference-votes](https://www.thecanary.co.uk/news/2026/03/28/green-party-conference-votes).
7. [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1579/getting-ready-to-govern](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1579/getting-ready-to-govern).
8. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqyYnKnCW8Q&t=3318s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqyYnKnCW8Q&t=3318s).
9. [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1551/letters](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1551/letters).

## OUR HISTORY

# The good, the bad and the party

Confusion reigned over what attitude to take, when it came to the ‘official’ lefts in the trade unions and the Labour Party. Factional rights could conceivably have helped bring about clarity. **Jack Conrad** marks the centenary of the 1926 General Strike

**S**erious revolutionaries can only but admire the CPGB of 1926. An admiration that can only but increase, when we compare the class-wide impact of this tiny party to the crass tailism, economism and popular frontism of today’s left (divided not merely into the apocryphal 57 varieties, but nowadays into 57<sup>2</sup> - what with the internet and all those bloggers of one).

Of course, we must never give up on our critical faculties. To actively question the past is the first condition for learning from the past ... without which future practice is as good as blind. And, as already touched upon in this series of articles, there were significant shortcomings in 1926.

Partially this was down to the CPGB being theoretically weak and lacking deep social roots - related phenomena which undoubtedly reflected objective conditions. Though the working class movement in Britain possessed a long and incredibly rich history, though it was in global terms enormous and highly organised to boot, its consciousness - that is, after the break-up of Chartism - was dominated first and foremost by trade unionism.

True, socialism revived in the 1880s and 90s, but principally via members of the free-thinking intelligentsia, who had been left disappointed by the failure of late Victorian Britain to deal with the ‘social problem’. Some - notably Henry Hyndman - adopted Marxism, but only to turn it into sectarian dogma. Others - ie, the Fabians - advocated technocratic or statist socialism. Their big idea was to educate elite society. Hence, in the cutting words of Theodore Rothstein, they represented “nobody but themselves”. Even when there was the substantial involvement of working class activists, as in the case of the Independent Labour Party, its ethical socialism remained largely “hanging in the air”. They exercised “no influence whatsoever upon the large masses of workers”.<sup>1</sup>

That seemed like it was going to change with the formation of the Labour Party in 1900. In fact, Labourism was organisationally an outgrowth of trade unionism and politically a direct continuation of Liberalism. A defining characteristic, widely explained by the fact that Britain, throughout the 19th century and well into the early 20th century, was the dominant global power and thereby had the means - eg, extracting imperial tribute and sponsoring migration to the ‘white colonies’ - needed to ameliorate class contradictions at home and thereby put off socialism.<sup>2</sup>

While the CPGB included many prominent leaders of mass strikes in its ranks, and while a good many CPGB members were elected as Labour councillors, even MPs, no-one can really claim that the party, as the party, exercised hegemonic class leadership. There was the potential to change that, perhaps through the National Minority Movement, nonetheless the CPGB never assumed mass form. Where in other European countries communist parties became mass it was, note, primarily through a process of splits and fusions in already existing mass parties. Eg, in France by winning the Socialist Party’s December 1920 Tours congress and in Germany by winning the Independent Social Democratic Party’s October 1920 Halle congress.<sup>3</sup>



Britain’s militant minority

But, of course, the CPGB did not only emerge from British, but global conditions - specifically, the impact of the October Revolution, as embodied in the Communist (Third) International. Here was the source of the CPGB’s greatest strength, but also its quick descent into the sectarianism of the so-called third period and then the popular-frontist opportunism of the so-called fourth period.

### Follow Moscow

Throughout its history, the CPGB leadership obediently, doggedly, did its best to follow the advice/instructions/cues that came from Moscow (well, till Czechoslovakia 1968). For sure, the CPGB had no record of independent strategic thinking. That, by the way, is not to suggest that CPGB historians, scientists and economists were worthless. No, many of them were good - some very good.<sup>4</sup>

Already, in the mid-1920s, the key comrade, when it came to picking up the advice/instructions/cues that came from Moscow, was Rajani Palme Dutt. Not for nothing has he been called the “shadowy pontiff” of the CPGB (between 1924 and 1936 he lived in Brussels, from where he also helped steer the Communist Party of India on behalf of Comintern).<sup>5</sup> Palme Dutt was not the CPGB’s public face - that was Albert Inkpin, Arthur MacManus and Harry Pollitt - but he was the brains. However, while his writings display considerable skill and often provide penetrating insights, their prime purpose was always to present Comintern’s line in the most convincing light.

Perhaps an exception here is Palme Dutt’s April 1926 defence of

Trotsky’s *Where is Britain going?* He eviscerated the “vague confusion and shoddy sentiment” of Trotsky’s numerous British critics.<sup>6</sup> But Trotsky now had numerous Soviet critics too.

Beginning in 1924, there was a concerted campaign against Trotsky and Trotskyism conducted in the pages of *Pravda* and *Izvestia*. Gregory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, Nicolai Bukharin, Joseph Stalin, Nadezhda Krupskaya and Alexei Rykov were determined to take down Trotsky’s arguments presented in *Lessons of October* - a highly jaundiced, polemical account of the October Revolution that still passes for authentic history amongst the more gullible sections of the left.<sup>7</sup> It was not just about putting the historical record straight. Lenin’s closest comrades seem to have genuinely feared that Trotsky might be tempted to carry out a coup in order to make himself the Soviet Union’s Bonaparte. In my opinion, not a likely scenario. Trotsky always denied the charge and surely the Red Army would have refused orders to overthrow the Communist Party regime.

That said, in April 1926 the United Opposition was formed around Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev. Maybe with Palme Dutt’s close connections with Moscow - not least those provided by his wife, Salme Pekkala-Dutt - he had prior knowledge of this Olympian realignment. Either way, by late 1927 any sympathy for that quarter had long since evaporated. Palme Dutt became a devoted, slavish follower of Joseph Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili. A position he loyally maintained throughout the rest of his

life (despite that, apparently, he never liked the popular fronts, not least the suspension of the anti-imperialist struggle in the colonies, though he mainly kept that very close to his chest).

### United fronts

Painfully small, the CPGB both sought to maintain revolutionary principles and gain a hearing from the left-moving masses - the latter to be achieved not only through *Workers’ Weekly*. There were united fronts with the Labour left too - the National Minority Movement in the trade unions and the National Leftwing Movement within the Labour Party. Both initiatives had considerable rank-and-file support in the form of affiliated trade union organisations and ward, constituency and district parties.

Needless to say, any principled united front goes hand-in-hand with an inbuilt tension. Communists need to maintain unity with Labour lefts and therefore their social base; they also need to build the revolutionary pole of attraction through criticising, exposing and eventually overcoming the reformist pole. A difficult, though not impossible, balancing act. Not surprisingly, the whole General Strike period abounds with tilting, adjustment and barely disguised wobbling over unity/criticism.

The contradiction between unity and criticism often saw *rightist* approaches. Over 1924-25 the CPGB seems to have cohered around a perspective of gradually and patiently moving the Labour Party and the TUC further and further to the left through a combination of winning the argument below and mobilising to elect and then

“educate and persuade” left leaders. Presumably this would culminate in a Labour-communist government - a workers’ government with communist participation - this being a step towards “a genuinely proletarian workers’ government, which, in its pure form, can be embodied only in the Communist Party”.<sup>8</sup>

In 1925 Palme Dutt seriously suggested that left trade union leaders “occupy at present the position, not only of leaders of the workers in the immediate crisis, but also of the spokesmen of the working class elements in the Labour Party - it might almost be said, an alternative political leadership”.<sup>9</sup> No mere objective assessment. This was positive spin promoting the ‘official lefts’. With some considerable wit and much biting irony, Trotsky tore to shreds such misguided assessments and Palme Dutt himself seems to have undergone a change of heart. Without crediting him, he took up Trotsky’s specific arguments on the left Labourites, albeit in a somewhat diluted form.

As an aside, failure to credit Trotsky was perhaps understandable, given the times. We should not make too much of it anyway. Palme Dutt did, as already noted, provide a trenchant defence of *Where is Britain going?* This while the campaign against Trotsky and Trotskyism raged. The CPGB’s 7th Congress of May 1925 had already passed a resolution that woodenly repeated the Soviet party’s now standard vilification of Trotskyism. JT Murphy supplied an introduction to the English edition of *The errors of Trotskyism*, written jointly by Nicolai Bukharin and Lev Kamenev.

### Inconsistencies

Anyway, back to the main thread. As I have argued, through its own logic a general strike poses the question of state power. That entirely orthodox line was presented by JT Murphy in September 1925:

Let us be clear what a general strike means. It can only mean the throwing down of the gauntlet to the capitalist state, and all the powers at its disposal. Either that challenge is only a gesture, in which case the capitalist class will not worry about it; or it must develop its challenge into an actual fight for power, in which case we land into civil war. Any leaders who talk about a general strike without facing this obvious fact are bluffing both themselves and the workers.<sup>10</sup>

Eight months later and only two days before the General Strike, the same comrade was perhaps joining those who were “bluffing both themselves and the workers”:

Those who are leading have no revolutionary perspectives before them. Any revolutionary implication they may perceive will send the majority of them hot on the track of a defeat. Those who do not look for a path along which to retreat are good trade union leaders who have sufficient character to stand firm on the demands of the miners, but they are totally incapable of moving forward to face all the implications of a united working class challenge to the state.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, a middle course between the Scylla of surrender and the Charybdis of revolutionary struggle was considered feasible. "Good trade union leaders" could defend the miners through a general strike, while not mounting a challenge to the existing constitutional order. This illusory industrial use of the general strike was explicitly defended in the CPGB executive committee's statement adopted after the failure of the General Strike at its extended meeting of May 29-31 1926.

Its agreed resolution urged workers not to accept the argument that the general strike must "end either in revolution or the complete defeat of the working class". To suggest otherwise was a "travesty of the facts". There can be a general strike that neither goes forward to revolution nor backwards to defeat. If led "with the necessary courage", there can be a general strike "for definite concessions".<sup>12</sup>

No-one should deny the utility of a one-day or limited general strike as a gesture of protest. Indefinite strike action by the class - an open-ended general strike - is another matter entirely. As we have seen, even the threat of one causes the middle classes to polarise. Some 100,000 mainly middle class volunteers joined OMS: eg, Graham Greene, Joyce Carey and Ian Fleming. Yet many others from the same class background sided with the miners: eg, Cecil Day Lewis, RH Tawney, WH Auden, Virginia and Leonard Woolf. Alongside this there were associated splits and divisions within the ruling establishment. Stanley Baldwin was prepared to negotiate a "total surrender" with the TUC. His chancellor of the exchequer, Winston Churchill, sought naked dictatorship and a fight to the finish: he thought "a little blood-letting" would be a good thing.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, David Lloyd George talked of compromise and a possible coalition with Ramsay MacDonald and the Labour Party.

Certainly, once a general strike begins, it releases latent energy and creativity below. With the declaration of a general strike, a fateful first step along the road to power has already been taken. However, to prosecute the strike and protect its unity necessitates drive, boundless confidence and ruthless determination.

It is not a question of the "complete defeat of the working class", but it has to be either the victory of the existing capitalist state or the victory of the working class. One or the other. Those who suggest otherwise are, yes, "bluffing both themselves and the workers". Does that mean 'complete victory' for the working class and the consolidation of a socialist state? Not necessarily. There can be a victory which opens up that road, crucially if the existing constitution is overthrown.

Baldwin was right, in a sense, then, when he said: "The General Strike is a challenge to parliament and is the road to anarchy and ruin".<sup>14</sup> He insisted on presenting the strike not as a routine labour dispute, but as a direct threat to the constitutional order.

Victory for the General Strike would certainly have shifted the balance of class forces. It is highly doubtful, though, that the TUC, or the councils of action, could have seized power. Certainly with the TUC the will was never there and the old order would not have simply vacated the field of struggle by conveniently collapsing. But a triumphant workers' movement would surely have demanded the resignation of the Tory government, whose "swollen majority" had come about through the forged 'Zinoviev letter' and a conspiracy hatched between MI5, MI6, Tory central office and Buckingham Palace.

Conceivably, Baldwin would have gone to the country asking, 'Who governs? The unions or the government?'<sup>15</sup> Probably, Labour would have become the biggest party

in the Commons. Perhaps MacDonald would have sought a coalition with Lloyd George's Liberals - that even if Labour had a majority in its own right. Under such circumstances the CPGB would have been well placed to press ahead with *agitational* demands for sacking capitalist ministers and, instead, presuming any sort of communist presence in parliament, the *united front demand* for the formation of a "genuine workers' government" with "communist participation".<sup>16</sup> A government committed to the overthrow of the existing constitution with measures such as the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords, the formation of a popular militia in place of the standing army, equal voting rights for both sexes, freedom for India, etc, etc. Yes, for Baldwin, that represented "anarchy and ruin" from the point of view of his class.

My purpose, though, is not to run an entire counterfactual history that ends in a socialist Britain. Fun, thought-provoking perhaps ... but better left to writers of fiction. Rather my purpose is simply to illustrate the vistas that would have opened up with the victory of the General Strike.

## Confusion

As stated above, the CPGB's evident confusion on the significance of the general strike stemmed from a right communist viewpoint, which assumed that the basic contradiction in the workers' movement revolved around an ill-defined left-right axis. A conceptual framework which downgrades, or entirely puts aside, the more profound contradiction between reform and revolution - a contradiction specifically manifested in the programmatic attitude taken towards the existing constitution and the state.

Following on from this error, in the attempt to promote "genuine leftwingers", there follows an entirely false estimation of the trade union bureaucracy. It, if it is under left leadership, comes to be seen as the pivotal revolutionary force. Thereby the CPGB began to strategically think in terms of winning trade union positions for 'official lefts' as the prime means for "completely" changing the "policy and leadership of the Labour Party", so that it becomes the decisive instrument of working class self-liberation.<sup>17</sup>

The danger here is obvious. It is quite conceivable to envisage the Labour Party becoming a united front of a special - ie, permanent - type. The decisive instrument of working class self-liberation is, though, always a Communist Party. The role of the CPGB is therefore not to act as a ginger group within existing structures. No, it must merge with the great mass of class-conscious workers and thereby become the working class organised into a party.

"Genuine leftwingers" - ie, leading left Labourites - gain their reputation by voicing the widespread dissatisfaction with the existing social order that always exists. They do so, however, within definite limits. True, in 1926 there was the language of the coming Socialist Commonwealth and wanting to be seen defending the beleaguered Soviet Union. However, the 'official' Labour left was tied body and soul to the 'official' Labour right and thereby, in the last analysis, to the British state. Theirs, after all, is a British national socialism, to be achieved through the existing constitution.

Not being subject to instant recall, not operating under strict discipline, not being accountable to a revolutionary party, the further their political careers progress upwards, the more 'official' lefts are sociologically and psychologically removed from the rank and file, and the more open they are to flattery, bribery and identification with the pro-imperialist

'official' right, and eventually incorporation into the gilded circles of the bourgeois establishment.

The right-communist error, that the CPGB could "educate and persuade" Labourites to pursue a general strike through to a successful conclusion, was hotly disputed within the party. Hence the inconsistency, swings and fudging in the party's pronouncements. Sometimes dire warnings were issued about the left Labourites. At other times the CPGB was either arguing that "good" lefts could be won over, or even that the bureaucracy as a whole should not be challenged, because force of circumstance - ie, spontaneity - would see the TUC successfully lead the working class to victory, almost despite the trade union bureaucracy's compromising record, instincts and social location as intermediaries between labour and capital.

For example, in October 1924, in the immediate afterglow of the formation of the NMM, JR Campbell was writing:

It would be a suicidal policy for the CP and the Minority Movement to place too much [sic] reliance on the official left wing. It is the duty of the party and the Minority Movement to criticise its weakness and relentlessly endeavour to change the muddled and incompetent leftwing viewpoint of the more progressive leaders into a real revolutionary viewpoint.<sup>18</sup>

Almost exactly a year later JT Murphy had taken this wishful-thinking policy of *converting existing* leaders to the point where "We should ... recognise the general council as the general staff of the unions directing the unions in the struggle".<sup>19</sup>

Such ideological hermaphroditism led the CPGB to claim that the miners could be defended "only" by a general strike that would lead to civil war and at the same time that wages and hours could be preserved by "concessions" won by "good" left leaders who could get the general council to "stand firm".

True, at the 8th Congress over October 16-17 1926 there was in effect a disowning of this, what had been a right-communist reliance on trade union officialdom. It was agreed that the "principal lesson" of the General Strike was the need to convince the working class:

That the only way to complete victory is the destruction of the capitalist state and its replacement by a workers' state based on the mass organisations of the workers. The necessities of this developing struggle will compel the working class under the leadership of the Communist Party to struggle for the elimination of the present trade union bureaucracy, and the revolutionising of the trade union and labour movement in outlook, policy and structure. Without the defeat of the labour bureaucracy, more and more revealing itself as the agent of capitalism within the labour movement, the successful struggle of the workers is impossible.<sup>20</sup>

Notwithstanding this partial recantation, it is more than a pity that the congenital venality of the trade union bureaucracy, including its left, was not fully appreciated and therefore not consistently explained to the militant minority before the General Strike began.<sup>21</sup> If it was, the CPGB would have been well positioned to help transform the moderate majority into a militant majority.

Surely one of the handicaps that prevented the CPGB simultaneously educating itself, and therefore the militant minority, was the absence of factional rights. The CPGB as a

whole relied on the correctness of the executive committee in King Street and in turn King Street relied on the correctness of Comintern and its dominant and most authoritative national section HQed in the Kremlin. Even while Lenin lived, this carried its problems.

Factions were banned in the Russian Communist Party as an *emergency* measure in 1921. However, almost instantly this essentially *military* measure became enshrined as Comintern doctrine. Democratic centralism was drifting inexorably towards bureaucratic centralism.

Unity around Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov and Stalin was one thing: on a scale of 1-10, we might give it an 8. Pluses for the CPGB far outweighed minuses. With the triumvirate of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin, that was perhaps down to 6. Unity around Stalin and Bukharin might score 4, not least because of the 'socialism in one country' doctrine. By the time we reach Stalin's monarchy and the 'theory of social fascism', we start to get into negative numbers - more so with the popular fronts. For those committed to 'Moscow knows best' there was no escape route (we shall discuss the Soviets and the General Strike in a following article).

Anyway, had the CPGB permitted factions in 1925, the confusions, inconsistencies, vacillations and criticisms could have been clarified, hardened - ie, taken on organisational form - which in principle must be allowed to reach down to districts and branches and involve the open publication and subsequent elaboration of differences. There had to be more than executive committee manoeuvrings and coded language in the party press.

Doubtless the establishment of rival factions would have been condemned as diversionary by conservative elements. Eg, the party should not engage in unnecessary discussion before a pending social explosion. However, as well as bringing the outside possibility of a split, a *measure of last resort*, factions educate and, with a healthy internal regime, create the conditions for a higher, stronger unity. *Workers' Weekly* versus *Sunday Worker* could give birth to the *Workers' Daily*. A hard faction committed to a united front with left Labourites but which places its main emphasis on implacable criticism of their might have begun as a minority on the CPGB's leadership. It would, though, be well placed to become the majority.

So from the militant minority in the party ... and from here transforming the militant minority in the working class into the militant majority.

## Bolshevik faction

It is worth adding a coda. The Bolsheviks were divided after the February Revolution. Nothing like to the degree seen in the ranks of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, true. Differences within the Bolsheviks were more those of shade. Nonetheless, at the March 28-April 3 1917 conference, Bolshevik delegates unashamedly referred to themselves as a faction ... there was even debate about reuniting with the Mensheviks (well, the Menshevik Internationalists). Internal differences were also referred to as factional; eg, 'Choose your *factional* speakers'.<sup>22</sup>

The main bone of contention was the 'Attitude towards the provisional government' - there was a very small defencist faction that wanted to offer it critical support. Having been decisively outvoted, it split away.

However, the majority remained divided, though it amounted to nuance. Eg, as a tactic, Kamenev advocated offering the provisional government *critical* support: publish

the tsarist secret treaties, end the war with a democratic peace and distribute land to the peasantry. The provisional government would, of course, do no such thing. That allowed the conditional offer of support to be a *principled* calculation designed to hang. Kamenev was supported by his fellow *Pravda* editor, Stalin. The idea being to expose not only the bourgeois provisional government as pro-imperialist, but also the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary majority in the soviets who wanted a strategic agreement between the popular classes and bourgeois society. Such an approach, argued Kamenev, would allow the Bolsheviks to win a soviet majority and ready the country at large for the soviets taking power through Bolshevik leadership.

Lenin, of course, insisted on offering the provisional government no support whatsoever. He famously criticised Kamenev in the 'April theses'. Nor would he countenance any idea of reunification with the Mensheviks. However, the differences between Lenin and Kamenev were quickly sorted out and they both united in successfully overcoming the leftist impatience of the Petrograd committee under the leadership of Alexander Shlyapnikov. His faction wanted the Bolsheviks to immediately call for an armed uprising - that without winning a majority in the soviets or allowing the backward countryside to sufficiently catch up with the advanced towns politically.

My point here is to show that the Bolsheviks were far from weakened by factionalism. Admittedly, backward factions are hardly good news in and of themselves. But better they operate openly, not in secret, not as a sullen mood - that way, differences can be properly argued out and, hopefully, positively resolved.

That would surely have been the case with the CPGB of the 1920s ●

## Notes

1. T Rothstein *From Chartism and Labourism: historical sketches of the British working class* London 1929, p280.
2. Lenin's *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism* (1916) being the most famous and influential study.
3. For a colourful and informative account see B Lewis and LT Lih *Zinoviev and Martov: head to head in Halle* London 2011.
4. Eg, Christopher Hill, Rodney Hilton, John Saville, Eric Hobsbawm, JBS Haldane, JD Bernal, Maurice Dobb.
5. See J Callaghan *Rajani Palme Dutt: a study in British Stalinism* London 1993.
6. R Chappell and A Clinton (eds) *Leon Trotsky: collected writings and speeches on Britain* Vol 2, London 1974, p280. Palme Dutt's April 1926 *Labour Monthly* article, "Trotsky and his English critics", is included in the appendixes.
7. See DC Comey (ed) *Trotsky's challenge: the 'literary discussion' of 1924 and the fight for the Bolshevik Revolution* Chicago IL 2017.
8. J Riddell (ed) *Towards the united front: proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922* Chicago IL, 2012, p1161.
9. RPD 'Notes of the month' *Labour Monthly* October 1925.
10. *Communist Review* September 1925.
11. *Workers' Weekly* May 1 1926.
12. *Workers' Weekly* June 4 1926.
13. *New Statesman* May 22 1926.
14. *The British Gazette* May 6 1926.
15. Tory prime minister, Edward Heath, did exactly that in February 1974 ... and lost.
16. J Riddell (ed) *Towards the united front: proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922* Chicago IL, 2012, p1161.
17. 'CPGB 8th Congress: reports, theses and resolutions' quoted in J Klugmann *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* Vol 2, London 1969, p228.
18. *Communist Review* October 1924.
19. *Workers' Weekly* October 16 1925.
20. 'CPGB 8th Congress: reports, theses and resolutions' quoted in J Klugmann *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* Vol 2, London 1969, pp223-24.
21. "Partial" because at the very same 8th Congress of the CPGB the call for "More power to the general council" was still made, along with the perspective of putting "pressure on officials" (quoted in J Klugmann *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* Vol 2, London 1969, pp225, 227).
22. Trotsky includes the minutes of the Bolshevik's March 28-April 3 1917 conference in his book, *The Stalin school of falsification* London 1974, pp181-237. See www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/ssf/sf14.htm.

## POLEMIC

# Sloganeering on autopilot

Marxism demands concrete analysis: it embraces complexity, it rejects trite formulations. With that in mind, Carl Collins takes issue with those who use the slogan, 'No war but the class war', to negate political struggle

Amid the proliferation of global conflicts, the CPGB's weekly Online Communist Forum reports have, unsurprisingly, generated wide-ranging discussion on war, from military strategy to broader geopolitical dynamics. The CPGB, its OCF and the *Weekly Worker* are almost unique among leftwing organisations in welcoming and actively encouraging such debate.

One regular OCF participant, comrade Ant, a classic 'left' communist, consistently, almost obsessively, advances the slogan, 'No war but the class war' (from here on referred to as NWBCW), irrespective of the context. Whether the subject under discussion is tactical, strategic or theoretical, this slogan is automatically applied, as if it answers all questions.

The slogan obviously contains a certain truth. After all, as it says in the *Manifesto*, "the history of all hitherto society is the history of class struggles". But what such leftists mean by NWBCW is that workers should support no class struggle apart from their own *narrowly defined* class struggle. Clearly then, NWBCW is a variety, or form, of economism.

Allies, strategic or tactical, doing deals, weighing options, taking advantage of contradictions between other classes, including between states, developing the working class, so that it has its own highly sophisticated hegemonic political outlook, including its own foreign policy - that is what is being rejected.

Nothing could be further from Marx and Engels. Resisting a murderous foreign invader alongside members of other classes was considered not merely legitimate, but often heroic. Eg. they supported the 1848-49 Hungarian national movement against the Russian army sent to crush it. At workers' meetings they would propose toasts to its leader, Lajos Kossuth.

Both Marx and Engels actively participated in the struggle to unify Germany through an armed democratic revolution. That with the strong expectation that revolutionary war against Russian absolutism would follow. They supported Italian unification (the *Risorgimento*) too.

Their comrades in America helped get Abraham Lincoln elected in 1860 and Red '48ers fought in the American civil war with a fearsome bravery. Their close friend and comrade, Joseph Weydemeyer, became a lieutenant colonel. Under their leadership the First International urged Lincoln to abolish slavery and thereby boost black recruitment to Union ranks and open up a second front *within* the Confederacy itself. They heaped fulsome praise upon cotton workers in Britain for siding with the north against the south, though it cost them dear in the purse.

## Marx and Engels

What always decided matters for Marx and Engels was furthering the strategic interests of the working class - or, more accurately, the strategic interests of the *global* working class. With exactly that in mind they singled out particular struggles for national liberation - Poland springs to mind, so does Ireland.

The writings of Marx and Engels on Ireland are unequivocal. They came to the view that British working class emancipation was impossible without the liberation of Ireland from British rule. In a letter to Engels in 1869, Marx argued that the English



James Connolly: 1916

proletariat would never achieve revolutionary consciousness so long as it benefited, however indirectly, from the subjugation of Ireland.<sup>1</sup> National oppression, in this sense, was not an incidental issue, but a central pillar of imperialist domination. They did not treat the struggle for Irish independence with aloof dismissal, invoking the slogan, NWBCW. Rather than regarding it as a diversion from the class struggle, they understood it as a necessary *component* of it.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Ireland in 1916. There are, of course, justifiable reasons for saying that the Easter Rising - April 24 was the 110th anniversary - had no fully rounded socialist programme. Many of its leaders came from the romantic sections of the intelligentsia, embodied most clearly in Patrick Pearse and the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Their vision of Irish independence was steeped in cultural nationalism, red martyrdom and, in many respects, a backward-looking idealisation of Gaelic and Catholic society. Pearse, in particular, framed the rising in quasi-religious terms, glorifying blood sacrifice as a means of national regeneration.<sup>2</sup>

From a Marxist standpoint, these elements were deeply flawed. The IRB was a secretive, conspiratorial organisation with little connection to the organised working class. Its strategy relied on insurrectionary action, carried out by a relatively small group, rather than mass mobilisation. Moreover, its social programme was vague at best. Independence, in their conception, did not necessarily imply a transformation of class relations. An Ireland freed from British rule, but still dominated by native capitalists and landlords, would offer little to the working class.

Indeed, there was always the danger that a purely bourgeois nationalist movement would reproduce the very structures of exploitation it claimed to oppose. It is true that Marx himself warned of this possibility in relation to other national struggles.<sup>3</sup> Independence, while necessary, was not sufficient. Whilst conceding that, in the absence of a clear class perspective, such movements may simply replace one ruling class with another, it must nevertheless be

emphasised that this is not equivalent to dismissing them outright on the grounds that they do not conform to a 'pure' conception of class war.

Unlike Pearse, James Connolly and the Irish Citizen Army stood apart. In bringing a form of Marxist analysis to the rising, he refused to separate the national question from the class question and did not stand back from the movement. Yes, the struggle for Irish independence was inseparable from the struggle for socialism. As he famously declared, "The cause of labour is the cause of Ireland, and the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour."<sup>4</sup> He did not, however, dogmatically forgo the opportunity to advance his position, but instead demonstrated a strategic orientation that the rigid NWBCW slogan precludes.

Connolly understood that national liberation without social revolution would be incomplete and unstable. At the same time, he rejected the notion that the working class could ignore the national struggle. British imperialism was not an abstract force: it was a concrete system of domination that shaped the conditions of Irish workers' lives. To fight for socialism in Ireland required confronting imperialism directly *in the concrete terms in which it presented itself*.

In the lead-up to the rising, James Connolly grew increasingly impatient with the hesitations of the broader nationalist movement, fearing the opportunity for insurrection might pass and even contemplating an independent uprising by the ICA. He understood that waiting for an abstractly 'pure' class conflict was no option: to have adopted NWBCW would have meant immediate defeat without advancing the working class in the slightest. Instead, he demonstrated a necessary strategic flexibility, acting in accordance with both his revolutionary commitment and the concrete historical moment. The balance of forces did not permit a purely proletarian uprising, as the Irish working class, though militant, was insufficiently organised or numerous to seize power alone. Under such conditions, a united front against imperialism represented a rational, if fraught, strategy.

Connolly's participation in the rising was therefore a calculated risk.

He sought to push the movement in a more radical direction, to inject it with a socialist content that might otherwise be absent. His often paraphrased remarks about preferring to hoist over Dublin 'the red flag rather than the flag of the Irish bourgeoisie' captures this tension.<sup>5</sup> He recognised that the national struggle could be coopted by bourgeois forces, but he also saw the possibility of transforming it.

In practice, the rising itself bore the marks of these contradictions. The Proclamation of the Irish Republic contained elements that reflected Connolly's influence, including references to equal rights and opportunities for all citizens. However, it stopped short of articulating a socialist perspective. The leadership structure, dominated by the IRB, limited the extent to which the uprising could become a vehicle for proletarian revolution. The slogan, NWBCW, would have completely precluded it. It could be argued, therefore, that NWBCW is *less* progressive than even the quasi-religious programme of the IRB.

Figures involved in the rising, such as Liam Mellows - initially rooted in a more traditional republican framework - began to properly understand Connolly's position in the period following the rising, moving toward a clearer appreciation of the inseparability of national liberation and class struggle before being unforgivably killed by Michael Collins' pro-treaty forces.<sup>6</sup>

## Connolly's heritage

More recently, a similar trajectory could be seen in Seamus Costello's political thinking. Until he was killed in a factional dispute, Costello moved more fully towards Connolly's Marxist position. As Nora Connolly observed, "Of all the politicians and public men with whom I have come in contact, and who called themselves followers of Connolly, he alone really understood what my father meant by the freedom of Ireland."<sup>7</sup>

Both Mellows and Costello point toward the potential for figures in the Irish revolutionary tradition who, had history taken a different course, might have followed Connolly's teachings to their conclusion, expanding the war of national independence into a war for socialism and, in doing so, and with stronger organisational structures among workers and peasants, might have altered the outcome, potentially winning over the European proletariat to a broader revolutionary struggle.

Militarily, there are coherent arguments that the rising was doomed from the outset. The forces involved were too small, coordination was poor and the anticipated nationwide mobilisation failed to materialise. It is argued that the decision to seize and hold fixed positions in Dublin, rather than adopt more flexible guerrilla tactics, left the rebels vulnerable to superior British firepower. One does not need a military mind to recognise that, from a purely strategic standpoint, there were serious errors.

Yet to judge the rising solely on its immediate military outcome is to miss its broader significance. The execution of its leaders, including Connolly, transformed public opinion and reignited the struggle for independence. In this sense, the rising acted as a catalyst, reshaping the political landscape in Ireland.

Incapable of changing the past, for Marxists the key question is not whether the Easter Rising succeeded or failed in narrow terms, but what

lessons it offers for revolutionary strategy. One such lesson is the importance of maintaining an independent class perspective within broader movements, without the complete isolation of the NWBCW philosophy. Connolly's insistence on linking national and social liberation remains a vital contribution. He did not dissolve the working class into the nation, nor did he abstractly counterpose class struggle to national struggle. Instead, he sought to unite them in a single revolutionary project.

The NWBCW slogan fails as a guide to Marxist practice and theory in equal measure. It ignores the ways in which class struggle is mediated through other forms of conflict, including national oppression and uprisings such as those in Ireland. It reduces a complex, historically specific analysis to a simplistic formula. It takes no account not only of the balance of forces within the capitalist system, but the balance of forces within the capitalist and imperialist entities themselves. This is a grave miscalculation. We need to know and understand our enemies and be open to all and every form of struggle against that reality.

Marx and Engels did not reject national struggles for that very reason. They evaluated them in relation to their impact on the broader dynamics of class struggle. Where such struggles weakened reactionary forces and opened space for proletarian organisation, they offered critical support. Ireland, under British imperial domination, was a paradigmatic case.

The Easter Rising, despite its contradictions, fits within this framework. It was a blow against one of the most powerful imperial states of the time. It disrupted the existing order and created new possibilities for political development. That it was led in part by petty-bourgeois nationalists does not negate its significance, nor does it justify abstention by socialists.

Connolly's role demonstrates what a Marxist approach to such a situation looks like in practice. He engaged with the national movement critically, seeking to advance the interests of the working class within it. He neither capitulated to bourgeois nationalism nor retreated into sectarian isolation. His vision of an Ireland where political independence would be inseparable from social emancipation remains a powerful counterpoint to both narrow nationalism and abstract class reductionism.

In the final analysis, the NWBCW slogan is not fit for any serious Marxist. It obscures more than it reveals, replacing concrete analysis with empty rhetoric. The history of Marxism, from Marx and Engels to Connolly, points instead toward a more nuanced understanding - one that recognises the interplay between national and class struggles, and the necessity of engaging with both in a dialectical manner ●

## Notes

1. K. Marx and F. Engels *CW* Vol 43: Letters 1868-70.
2. See SW Gilley *Pearse's sacrifice: Christ and Cuchulainn crucified and risen in the Easter Rising* Cambridge 1916.
3. See, for example, K. Marx, 'The Polish question' *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (1848-49), in *CW* Vol 8.
4. J. Connolly, 'Labour in Irish history' *The collected works of James Connolly* Vol 1, Dublin 1987.
5. C. Desmond Greaves *The life and times of James Connolly* London 1961.
6. C. Townshend *The republic: the fight for Irish independence* London 2013.
7. N. Connolly O'Brien *James Connolly: portrait of a rebel father* Dublin 1975.

## ECONOMICS

# Third period inflation

Donald Trump's tariff tantrums have driven prices up. So too has the war with Iran. The turn by central banks to a psychological theory of 'consumer expectations' will do nothing to solve the problem, says **Michael Roberts**

**T**he era of disinflation is over. By 'disinflation' I mean a rise in overall prices of goods and services, but at a slowing rate. 'Deflation' means an actual fall in prices, but that has not been the case for many decades - not really since the end of money as a physical commodity: namely gold and the arrival of what are called *fiat* currencies (ie, money as coined, printed or digitally created by national states to replace gold). Only on rare occasions have states so restricted the supply of fiat money that it has caused deflation and that really only happened when there was already a slump in capitalist production.

For the last 70 years or more, governments have controlled the issuance of currency and so the direct relationship between production of value in an economy and its representation by the supply and turnover of money has become separated. Inflation of prices has become the norm, but the pace of that inflation is now the issue.

In our (forthcoming) paper on inflation, Guglielmo Carchedi and I will identify two separate periods of US price inflation in the post-1945 period to now. The first was from 1948-81 and the second from 1981-2019. In the first period, the *rate* of inflation rose, constituting an inflationary period. In the second period, the *rate* of inflation fell, constituting a disinflationary period. Between 1948 and 1981, the average annual rate of inflation was 4.3%; from 1981 to 2019 it slowed to 3.0%.

If we look at the annual average rate by decade, we can see the change even more clearly. From the 1980s onwards, the US (and other major economies) entered a period of progressive disinflation, culminating in the 'long depression' of the 2010s - a decade with an average rate of just 1.8% (and a rise of just 0.1% in 2015). But now in the 2020s, starting with the post-Covid pandemic inflationary spike in 2022, the major economies appear to have entered a new period of inflation: ie, a rising rate of price change.

I have previously argued, contrary to the mainstream theories, that inflation is driven by supply, not demand.<sup>1</sup> What determines the rate of inflation in a modern capitalist economy with fiat currencies is the rate of growth in the production of value, relative to the rate of growth in the supply of money. The latter excludes the supply of money that is hoarded in banks or used for speculation in financial assets ('fictitious capital', to use Marx's term). The supply of money rose sharply in the 2010s, as central banks tried to keep interest rates low and provide liquidity for the financial sector after the global financial crash. This monetary injection was called 'quantitative easing'. Mainstream monetarist theory argued that this would lead to a big rise in inflation, but no such thing happened - on the contrary, price inflation slowed almost to zero, because a large portion of central bank monetary injection never left the banking system.

As unemployment fell to lows not seen since the 1960s, Keynesian monetary theory also argued that high government spending (large budget deficits) and 'tight' labour markets would create 'demand-led' inflation. However, the empirical evidence for this theory - the famous Phillips



**Will god save the economy? Trump praying with faith leaders**

curve that supposedly revealed the inverse trade-off between falling unemployment and rising inflation rates - was missing.<sup>2</sup> The Phillips curve was flat. Low unemployment did not lead to high inflation. That is because the differential between the rate of growth in money supply created by the banking system and the growth in value production had narrowed.

The post-Covid inflation spike was clearly supply-driven, as the closing down of production and trade that produced the pandemic slump of 2020 was accompanied by a lingering breakdown of global supply chains and the squeezing up of prices in energy and key commodities by multi-national companies. A new Federal Reserve paper confirms that "underlying inflation dynamics have shifted since Covid".<sup>3</sup> The share of the consumption basket experiencing inflation above three percent remains well above the 2014-19 average in the major economies - more than doubling in the euro area and the UK. The Fed still wants to blame this on "excessive wage increases", but this is not born out by the evidence. Real hourly earnings roughly doubled between 1940 and 1970, but have barely risen since 1980.

### Slumpflation

Central banks have been at sixes and sevens in trying to control inflation. In the 2010s, they lowered interest rates to zero and raised money supply to new heights, but inflation slowed. Then in the post-pandemic period they hiked interest rates and introduced 'quantitative tightening' of the money supply. But that failed to stop inflation heading above 10% a year - a rate not seen since the supply-driven oil crisis of the 1970s.

The story then was that 1970s US inflation subsided because the US Federal Reserve under Paul Volcker hiked its policy interest rate to an unprecedented high. The reality was that inflation only dropped because the US economy went into a major slump in 1980-82 that decimated its manufacturing industry. The Fed's high interest policy just added to that investment and production collapse. Stagflation turned into 'slumpflation'. Indeed, the annual inflation rate stayed above the average of the 1960s until at least the 1990s.

Now with the Iran conflict and the reduction in oil and other commodity exports, inflation is back on the agenda, although global supply chain pressure was building even before the Iran conflict. Supply disruptions in metals, grains, and livestock markets can generate macroeconomic effects comparable to oil shocks.<sup>4</sup> When adverse supply disturbances hit these non-oil commodities, inflation rises persistently, while industrial production falls, closely resembling the stagflationary dynamics typically associated with oil price spikes.

The signs of a return to inflation are already there in the rise in rates so far in 2026. The latest March CPI data for the US show that another inflation spike is underway. Consumer price inflation rose to 3.3% in March - a near 1% leap from February. And there will be a further rise ahead towards 4% or more this year, as the lasting impact of the energy and trade blockage feeds through.

Trump's tariff tantrums are only adding to the inflationary pressure. Based on 2025-26 data, the US Federal Reserve reckons that tariffs have resulted in a "near-complete pass-through to consumer prices, contributing roughly 0.8 percentage points to core PCE inflation and explaining the excess inflation in core goods".<sup>5</sup> Goods inflation was +0.84% - a huge month-over-month increase (10.6% annualized) and the largest since January 2022. And the euro area is experiencing a similar spike.

Again, the major central banks are in confusion. Federal Reserve policymakers sparred during the central bank's March meeting over how to respond if the Iran war triggers a prolonged period of high energy prices. Minutes of the March meeting showed "most" members of the Federal Open Market Committee fretted that a lengthy war could warrant cutting rates to support the jobs market, while "many" suggested it might require raising them to counter higher prices.

Before the war, the ECB had been expected to keep rates steady in 2026. However, the war-driven surge in energy prices revived inflation concerns. ECB governing council member Olaf Szejnert warned that sustained energy disruptions could still feed into broader price pressures.

"Persistently high oil prices will ultimately feed through to the prices of other products, and thus also to wage formation, which could amplify inflationary effects," he said. "In that case, the ECB will naturally intervene to keep inflation around 2% in the medium term."

Divisions within the Bank of England have emerged. Andrew Bailey, the bank's governor, indicated that he expects depressed UK demand and labour markets to make "second-round" effects from surging energy and food prices less dangerous than in 2021-22, reducing the risk of another wage-price spiral. But other Monetary Policy Committee members, including chief economist Huw Pill and deputy governor Clare Lombardelli, sounded less sanguine.

This confusion could be resolved if central banks recognised that monetary policy has little influence over price inflation, which depends first and foremost on the pace of value creation. If economies' output slows and the monetary authorities react by increasing money supply and lower the 'price' of money (interest rates), then inflation will accelerate. If money supply growth stays close to value growth, inflation subsides.

### Expectations

Having seen monetarism and Keynesian monetary policies fail, central banks' economists have diverted to a psychological theory of inflation: namely that inflation rises because consumers expect it and act accordingly by buying more to beat price rises. But, as Federal Reserve economist Jeremy Rudd concluded in 2021,

Economists and economic policymakers believe that households' and firms' expectations of future inflation are a key determinant of actual inflation. A review of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature suggests that this belief rests on extremely shaky foundations, and a case can be made that adhering to it uncritically could easily lead to serious policy errors.<sup>6</sup>

But central banks are not going to admit this, because it would remove

their perceived role in the macro-management of the capitalist economy and reduce it to just acting as a 'lender of last resort' for the banking system.

In its latest *World Economic Outlook*, the International Monetary Fund reckons that economic growth will not slow much if the Iran conflict is short-lived.<sup>7</sup> But it sees global inflation rising significantly. Moreover, this time the 'supply shock' will not be easy to contain: "... the 2022 surge reflected an unusually steep aggregate supply curve, with strong demand running into supply bottlenecks, allowing central banks to achieve disinflation with limited output losses. Evidence now suggests a return to a flatter supply curve, making disinflation more costly." Nevertheless, the IMF advocates that central banks must be prepared to hike interest rates, because "if medium- or long-term inflation expectations drift up, as prices and wages pick up, restoring price stability must take precedence over near-term growth, with a swift tightening".

The Iran war and the ensuing oil and commodity price rises are clearly a supply-side problem. Falling supply will raise prices, but it will also lower growth, as it will cut into the wages and savings of households and raise costs for companies. High energy prices are a regressive tax, falling heavily on middle- and lower-income consumers. Weaker non-energy consumption and rising costs beget pressure on corporate margins, which in turn beget lay-offs, and the job market cracks. US fourth-quarter real GDP growth was just 0.5% (quarter-over-quarter annualised) and the consumer sentiment index has just hit an all-time low.

The major economies are not in 'slumpflation' yet. In the US, corporate profit margins remain at record highs. And corporate earnings for the first quarter of 2026 are expected to be very strong. Trump's planned fiscal handouts to US companies are substantial, with tax incentives for businesses investing in machinery and factory equipment. And a weaker dollar in the latter half of 2025 will help boost dollar earnings from foreign investment revenues.

But the bulk of these earnings gains are concentrated in the US silicon valley tech giants. The rest of the corporate sector is struggling. Profits for the whole of the non-financial corporate sector fell in 2025.

Meanwhile, the impact of the Middle East conflict on profits has yet to be fully felt ●

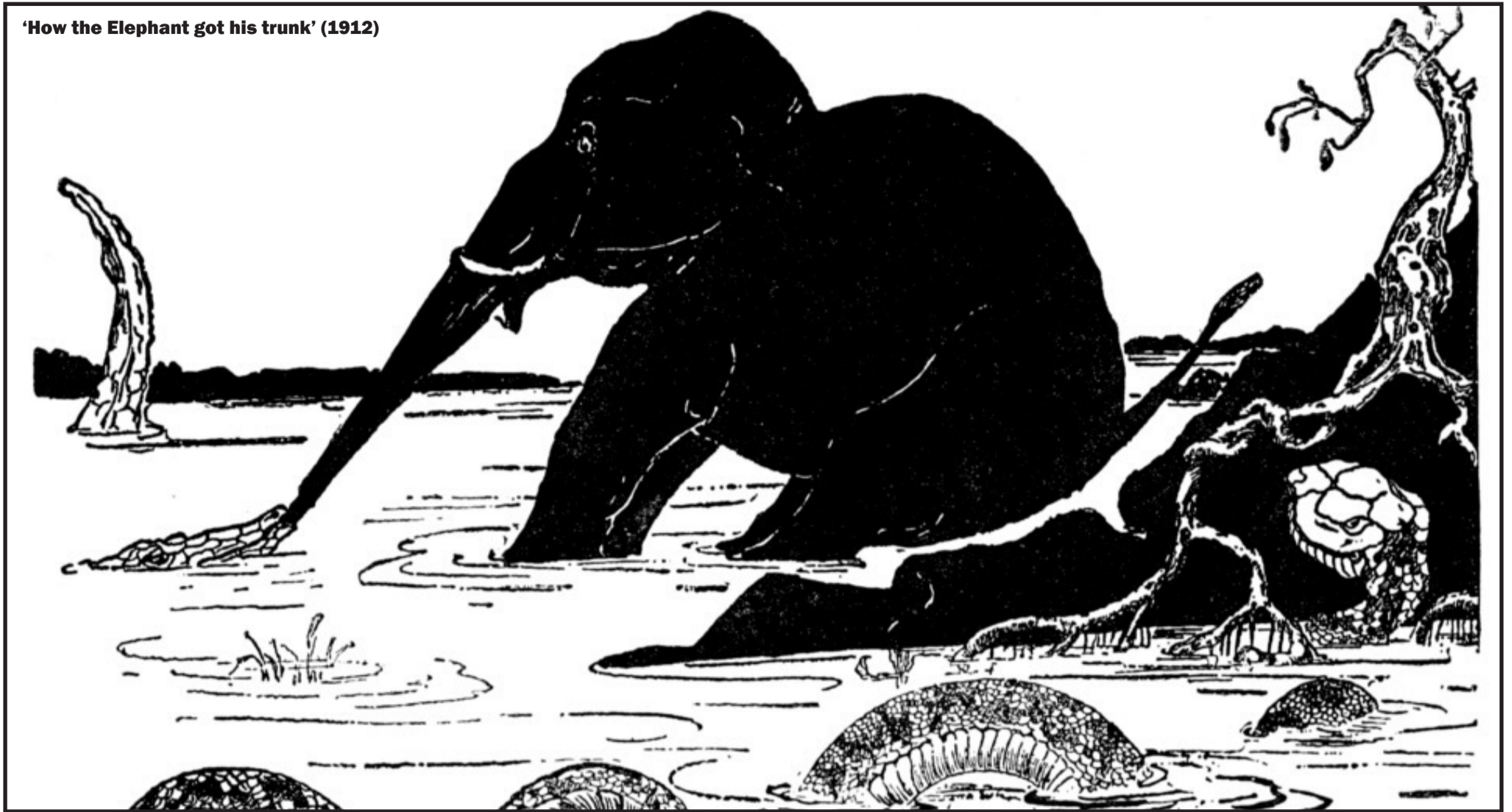
**Michael Roberts blogs at**  
[thenextrecession.wordpress.com](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com)

### Notes

1. See, for example, [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/04/27/inflation-causes-and-solutions](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/04/27/inflation-causes-and-solutions).
2. See [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2022/11/20/the-wage-price-spiral-refuted](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2022/11/20/the-wage-price-spiral-refuted).
3. [www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/is-the-inflation-process-in-advanced-economies-different-after-the-pandemic-20260330.html](https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/is-the-inflation-process-in-advanced-economies-different-after-the-pandemic-20260330.html).
4. [cepr.org/voxeu/columns/beyond-oil-macroeconomic-impact-commodity-supply-disturbances](https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/beyond-oil-macroeconomic-impact-commodity-supply-disturbances).
5. [www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/the-slow-climb-how-tariffs-gradually-raised-retail-prices-in-2025-20260305.html](https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/the-slow-climb-how-tariffs-gradually-raised-retail-prices-in-2025-20260305.html).
6. [www.federalreserve.gov/econres/feds/why-do-we-think-that-inflation-expectations-matter-for-inflation-and-should-we.htm](https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/feds/why-do-we-think-that-inflation-expectations-matter-for-inflation-and-should-we.htm).
7. [www.imf.org/en/blogs/articles/2026/04/14/war-in-the-middle-east-challenges-global-financial-stability](https://www.imf.org/en/blogs/articles/2026/04/14/war-in-the-middle-east-challenges-global-financial-stability).

## LEFT

'How the Elephant got his trunk' (1912)



# Just so stories

Members of the ISA in the US say they have been expelled for wanting to defend Iran and urging no support for Democrats. Here the comrades outline their political approach. The similarity with the Spartacists is striking, but, significantly, it goes completely unmentioned

**We** are a group of recently expelled members from the International Socialist Alternative. We are united by the conviction that liberal misleadership is holding back the power of our class, and that Marxists have to fight this misleadership, not accommodate it. In August 2025, we formed a faction in the ISA to argue for three programmatic points:

1. No support to any parties of imperialism, including (especially) reformist and opposition misleaders within those parties. When politicians like Zohran Mamdani run for office as Democrats, they are making a political choice to work within the limits of a party that breaks strikes, sends police to attack anti-ICE protestors, and provided the 2000-pound bombs that Israel used for the Gaza genocide. If Mamdani fought for the working class, he would have to break with the Democratic Party leadership; instead he has supported New York governor Kathy Hochul - even as she sent police to protect scabs during the recent nurses strike. Similarly, if New York had elected a mayor that was truly fighting for socialism, wealthy residents would have reacted with horror and fled the city; instead they rushed to purchase new properties on the city's booming luxury housing market.

Although the independent working class electoral campaigns that exist in the US today - such as Kshama Sawant and Ed Hershey's campaigns for Congress - are small and far from perfect, Marxists need to support these efforts on a united front basis as an intermediate step toward a workers' party. To the extent that advanced sections of the working class actually do support Democratic politicians with an 'independent' veneer, we propose a

'conditional support' tactic, in which we make endorsement contingent on a genuine break with the Democratic Party.

2. No support for pro-imperialist trade union leaders. Instead, fight for a counterposed revolutionary programme for the immediate struggles of the working class. To make progress toward any of our goals, Marxists must build, and sink wider roots within, the workers' movement. But how do we do this?

The current approach of the ISA's leadership is exemplified by their call for Shawn Fain to form a new party - the same Shawn Fain who pays himself over \$200,000 per year, endorsed Joe Biden for US president, and signalled his willingness to work with Trump after the last election. We think that, although there is certainly nothing wrong in the abstract with placing demands on reformist leaders, we have a responsibility to fight for a way forward that will actually bear fruit. Powerful workers' movements will be built through a united struggle against our capitalist oppressors - not by elevating leaders like Shawn Fain, Sharon Graham and Andrea Egan, who seek collaboration with those oppressors.

3. To combat imperialism, Marxists must fight for revolutionary leadership in struggles for national liberation, which are a motor force of socialist revolution. This means that, when an imperialist power attacks an oppressed country, we do not take a pacifist position. Instead, Marxists defend the oppressed nations in their fight against imperialism. This does not mean politically supporting the government or ruling class on either side, but rather calling on the working class to bring about a particular outcome through their own independent organisation

and initiative. It is only by taking an active part in struggles for national liberation that Marxists can win the masses in oppressed countries to our programme. Since this point has been particularly controversial, we discuss it in more detail below.

Our faction came to comprise members from ISA sections in the US, Nigeria, China-Hong Kong-Taiwan and England, Scotland and Wales.

## Defend Iran!

As part of our fight for clarity, we have brought critical scrutiny to the ISA's political analysis, and have particularly questioned the leadership's insistence that the world situation is defined by an "inter-imperialist conflict" between the US and China. We certainly agree that the US is an imperialist power - it has been at war almost continuously since World War II, it has military bases in over 80 countries, it is the dominant naval power globally and it has a long history of overthrowing foreign governments that threaten the interests of American capitalists. But China has not invaded another country since the 1970s, and the ratio of US to Chinese foreign military bases in the world is 200:1.

We contend that, in actuality, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has pursued a strategy of export-oriented economic development within the US-dominated and dollar-based system of trade, finance and military power. Although the CPC bureaucracy suffers from grave political faults, at a global level these faults manifest as a decades-long accommodation to US imperialism, rather than (as the ISA leadership claims) the creation of a competing imperialist power.

The weakness of the ISA's "inter-imperialist" "analysis" was thrown into particularly sharp relief during the

war in Iran. The ISA has repeatedly sought to frame the war (along with, seemingly, every other world event) as a thinly veiled conflict between the US and "Chinese imperialism". In reality, even as the US escalated its attacks against Iran, the CPC leadership continued to emphasise its "positive and open" feelings toward the Trump administration, and pushed for closer economic cooperation between the two governments. Trump, for his part - far from trying to push "Chinese imperialism" out of the Middle East

- demanded that China send warships to help reopen the Strait of Hormuz. All of this underscores the fact that the war is not a fight between competing imperialisms: instead, what we see is the world's dominant imperial power, the USA, attacking an oppressed country, Iran.

For Marxists, the above points have an implication that is of the utmost importance. We know from history that, when workers and oppressed people challenge capitalism anywhere in the world, they face a

## Fighting fund

### Make sure!

**A**s I was hoping, the third week of April turned out to be the best so far - just as it almost always is, whatever month we are in. But it was the three brilliant *three-figure* donations that made all the difference - thanks a million to comrades SK, PM and JS!

Other bank transfers/standing orders came from MM (£75), TR (£40), GB (£25), GD (£24), DR and RN (£20 each), plus JL and AM (£10). Then there were very handy PayPal transfers from KS and PS (£50), as well as JV (£7) and RD (£5). Finally comrade GN sent us a £50 subscription cheque - but then decided he was going to read the *Weekly Worker* online only from now on, and told us we could keep that payment as a (very handy!) donation.

Well, all that came to an excellent £987, and took us past the £2k mark towards our £2,750

monthly fighting fund target. We now have £2,085 in the kitty, with eight days still to go, as I write.

But let's not get complacent. We really do need to make sure we reach that target - and preferably go shooting past it! Can you help us get the £665 we still need in April - or even take us up to £3,000? What a fantastically useful bonus that would be!

Please see details below relating to the *Weekly Worker* bank account, or go to the web address to get more information on the various ways you can contribute.

We need your help and I'm confident you'll play your part! ●  
**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)

# 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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massive risk of foreign invasion, CIA-sponsored military coups or economic strangulation by the US. This is why Marxists have always emphasised that imperialism is the chief enemy of the world working class, and have taken defencist positions in countries that fought back against imperialist powers. At issue here is the fundamental strategic necessity for socialists to weaken and defeat imperialism.

Thus, our position on the latest war in the Middle East is simple: we unapologetically call for the defence of Iran and the defeat of US imperialism. While we have no love for the Islamist state that currently rules over Iran, we believe that it matters how the regime is overthrown. If the Iranian masses mobilise to fight the imperialist onslaught through their own independent initiative, and in the process build mass organisations through which to rule the country themselves, then this would be an extremely progressive step; if instead the US overthrows the Iranian government and replaces it with a client state, this would be a blow against the interests of the world working class.

The ISA leadership would have members believe that this way of thinking is a break with its supposedly Trotskyist 'tradition'. But the correctness of our positions should be judged on the strength of our analysis, not fidelity to any tradition. And, in any case, Trotsky would agree with our position on defending oppressed countries against imperialism; in fact he was so emphatic on this point that he described his opponents as "idiots" who should "learn to think". The ISA leadership treats our position as being scandalous, but we have yet to hear a coherent political explanation for why they feel this way.

## Clampdown

In the months since we formed the faction, we have won over new members, and several others have demonstrated sincere engagement with our points. We were confident that, by staying in the ISA and patiently making our arguments, we would eventually win majority support. Of

course, we also understood that our ideas could be wrong, which is why we have always welcomed critiques and questions; we understand that we do not have all the answers, and that Marxists will only find unity around a correct programme through continued debate.

Unfortunately, instead of responding to our points with rational political arguments, the ISA leadership has resorted to bureaucratic suppression. In November, a leading faction member from the ISA's China-Hong Kong-Taiwan section was expelled. Rather than answering our questions about this or providing a chance to appeal, ISA leaders have acted like monarchs who feel no need to explain their actions. More recently, after a member in Nigeria announced his support for the faction, the ISA full-timers removed him from his elected position in the international leadership.

Since then, the bureaucratic clampdown against us has continued, with a vote to expel our Seattle faction members *en masse* at a hastily organised meeting on April 1. Meanwhile, our faction's documents have not been allowed to circulate at the international level. Comrades in the Swedish, Brazilian and German sections appear to know practically nothing about this debate so far.

We particularly object to the treatment of faction members outside the US, who made enormous sacrifices to build the ISA, only to be bureaucratically attacked after they expressed disagreements. Comrade H, who was expelled in November (without a trial or hearing), had been arrested by police while building the ISA in Hong Kong, and is consequently unable to return to the area where he grew up. Daniel A, in Nigeria, who was undemocratically removed from leadership almost immediately after he came out in support of the faction, had previously been arrested for his work as part of the ISA, and charged with crimes that could have carried the death penalty. We do not ask that these comrades be given any special privileges or consideration, but we do think it is revealing that the ISA leadership went to such lengths to

block these comrades from arguing their views to the wider membership.

The above examples are representative of a wider problem on the left. The ISA itself was formed when members were bureaucratically expelled from the Committee for a Workers International in 2019. Because political suppression and bureaucratic manoeuvring have substituted for principled debate, disagreements have consistently led to new splits, and the CWI has become fragmented into over a dozen small organisations. A similar dynamic has taken place in the rest of the Marxist left, giving rise to an alphabet soup of tiny sects.

Even in groups like the Democratic Socialists of America, which pride themselves on their 'multi-tendency' ethos, there is often an aversion to principled political struggle, which means that instead of unity around a correct programme we find a proliferation of working groups that each pursue their own small projects. The bottom line is that, because so many of us are separated into our own small fiefdoms and our positions are sheltered from critique, it has become possible for bad ideas to seemingly live on indefinitely, and the left's petty divisions have (rightly) undermined our credibility in the wider working class.

We have to fight for a different way forward. Therefore, we reject our expulsion from the ISA, because it is inseparable from the bureaucratic methods and programmatic capitulations that continue to weaken the international socialist left. We declare our formation of an external tendency of the ISA: the International Socialist Alternative (Revolutionary). Having been shut out of the ISA's 'democratic structures', the members of the external tendency will fight for the faction's positions publicly, while also reaching out to the wider left for principled political discussion and joint work on a united front basis.

Because we think the struggle against opportunism is so crucial for the development of the workers' movement, and because we remain committed to winning over all of our comrades in the ISA, our external tendency will gladly provide speaking rights to members of the ISA majority at any of our public events. We also offer to publish letters from the ISA majority in our paper.

Meanwhile, faction members who have not been expelled will remain in the ISA, continue their efforts to build the international, and patiently work toward majority support for the faction's positions. The faction will also continue to fight for democratic rights in the ISA, and it demands that its expelled members be reinstated immediately. Faction members have every intention of appealing against these expulsions at their sections' future national congresses/conventions, should that become necessary.

## Next steps

We end with a few thoughts about next steps for Marxists in the countries where the faction has a presence. In the US, we propose that Marxists work to forge communist unity by entering the DSA and collectively fighting for a clean break with the Democratic Party. This would be part of a larger project to build the foundations for an independent, militant workers' party by waging a collective struggle against opportunism in the labour movement and socialist left. Such a struggle would also help to clarify which of the political differences among Marxists are truly decisive, and help us to break through the left's current artisanal divisions.

In the People's Republic of China (PRC), the fundamental way to push forward the immediate struggle of

the working class is to harness the masses' anti-imperialist sentiment and drive it against the treacherous complicity of the CPC leadership in conciliating US hegemony. The bureaucrats in Beijing justify their course by proclaiming that China will never again suffer a century of humiliation - yet their defence of the country is on an entirely nationalist basis that has alienated the oppressed masses of the world. The infantile and abstract state of the Chinese revolutionary left must be overcome by starting with a programme - how to undercut the CPC's claims of building socialism and of fighting imperialism. For the proletariat of the PRC to move into struggle will mean a historic blow against the imperialist rulers of the world: Wall Street and Washington DC.

In Nigeria, as the working class faces an unprecedented crisis, revolutionaries face the urgent task of transforming widespread anger against poverty, repression and bad governance into a conscious, well-organised force capable of challenging imperialism, capitalism and the ruling elite. Achieving this requires an anti-imperialist programme that can cut across the religious/ethnic/regional divisions in the working class, the informal sector, the student movement and the peasantry. Communists must oppose the US-backed military campaign of the Nigerian state, and call on all armed groups to unite behind the working class to kick the US out of West Africa and break the colonial borders. This requires a concerted intervention against pro-imperialist misleaders in the workers' movement, and leadership of the NGOs in social struggle.

In Britain, the left is facing a massive crisis. The working class looks to the Starmer government with nothing but hatred and contempt, but there is no organised force of the left they look to as an alternative. Workers either look to the right wing, fall into apathy or look to the petty-bourgeois Green Party. The left must seek to bridge this divide between itself and the workers' movement. The task of communists in Your Party is to fight for the party to draw a class line between the movements of the workers and the oppressed and the City of London. However, the leading Corbynite camp has refused to draw this line, and the existing YP left has failed to politically challenge Corbyn. If this continues, the YP left is facing disintegration, and YP is likely to form a popular front with the Green Party and a soft-left Labour party to beat Reform. This will only further alienate workers and drive them to the right in the long term. Our programme is simple: YP must be working class, socialist, republican and anti-imperialist, and must refuse to build a chain between the workers and their class enemy.

In the spirit of open discussion and debate, we call on the ISA's leadership to publicly explain their disagreements with the points in this letter. We would also welcome responses from the ISA's rank-and-file members, the socialist left and the wider workers' movement. Anyone who would like to contact us directly is encouraged to email us at [revleadership.socalt@proton.me](mailto:revleadership.socalt@proton.me) ●

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# Matters of perception

Negotiations have not happened, the Strait of Hormuz remains closed and yet the ceasefire continues. Pushing the line that Iran has won is, though, not only factually wrong. It is dangerous, warns **Yasmine Mather**

**On** April 21, Donald Trump announced that the ceasefire in the war against Iran would remain in place for the time being. In a war where propaganda and perceptions play a vital role, both sides claimed the other was weakening.

Iran argued that its refusal to attend the second round of talks in Islamabad and negotiate under pressure had forced the US to back down. The US, by contrast, argued that Iran's absence showed desperation, claiming the blockade was pushing Iran towards economic collapse and that American military pressure had already badly weakened it. Iran may have won in terms of optics and short-term propaganda by refusing to surrender, but the country is still operating from a much weaker long-term economic and military position, as I explained in my article last week.<sup>1</sup>

A consensus has emerged among both leftwing commentators and large segments of the liberal, centre-left media that Iran has, thus far, emerged as the victor of this conflict. However, there are inherent dangers in making such an assertion.

First, this narrative could be leveraged by the US and Israel to justify further, more aggressive military action. Second, characterising the current situation as a 'victory' is absurd. While the stubborn resistance of the Iranian government is notable, the country's infrastructure lies in ruins: factories, bridges, hospitals and universities have been systematically destroyed. Speculation suggests that upwards of 15 million jobs have been lost due to the bombing campaigns. Consequently, despite its public posturing, the Iranian leadership is desperate for the ceasefire to hold. Meanwhile, Washington faces growing frustration: with the Strait of Hormuz closed and calls for 'regime change' exposed as empty rhetoric, the war is becoming increasingly unpopular, as domestic oil prices soar. The US president now finds himself under immense pressure, both internally and internationally.

Hence, much of what Trump is saying - regarding the blockade of Iranian ports and the future of negotiations - should be understood in the context of its global impact. Many economists are even suggesting that, given the current situation, it is surprising that the price of oil is not higher and markets have not dropped lower.

Therefore, both sides had good reasons to maintain the ceasefire; however, achieving a successful conclusion to negotiations between the US and Iran is far less likely. Following the failure of the first round of negotiations, JD Vance, the US vice-president, claimed that the talks failed because Iran "wants nuclear weapons". This is clearly untrue, and the Iranian delegation has responded extensively, stating: "Yes, we have enriched uranium, and the [International Atomic Energy Agency]

knows this. Yes, higher enrichment levels make it easier to build a bomb, but we are not pursuing that path." Iran has also indicated its willingness to discuss a pause in the enrichment of uranium. As far as I can tell, Iran is proposing a shorter time frame for this - perhaps five years - while the US is asking for a 20-year pause. Clearly, a wide gap exists between the two sides.

There are also proposals regarding enriched uranium. One idea is to move Iran's stockpile to a third country - a concept that was discussed before the war. However, there are no easy or simple solutions due to the risks involved. Iran had proposed sending its stockpile to a friendly country; however, the US does not agree with the country Iran has in mind, and negotiators have yet to find a solution.

Regarding shipping and the Strait of Hormuz, before the US/Israel-Iran war, an average of 120 ships passed through this waterway every day. During the ceasefire, that number remains very low. On average, only 12 ships have passed through the Strait of Hormuz daily, and this has affected not just the price of oil, but many other commodities, including fertilisers, helium, etc - all this affecting the price of food, computers, mobile phones ...

Politically, one thing we can say is that Israel is not fully in control at the moment. In the US, even among Republicans, there are questions about whether they have relied too much on Benjamin Netanyahu and whether entering the war was wise. It is also clear that the US pushed Israel toward talks with Lebanon and enforced the ceasefire. In this respect, the dynamic in US-Israeli relations is changing.

### Internal policy

Inside Iran, the government is encouraging the perception that Iran has 'won the war'; however, many point out the dangers of such perceptions. There is a concern that an overestimation of the country's position might lead to a situation similar to the Khorramshahr victory during the Iran-Iraq War. After Iran recaptured the city, there was an opportunity to end the war, but the regime decided to continue it, and this led to a much worse outcome later. There is a risk of repeating that mistake.

Despite what is often said in the west, there appears to be considerable unity within the factions of the Iranian regime. The foreign minister seems to have significant influence, even if others are more visible publicly. There is also speculation in academic circles about a new, more pragmatic younger generation within the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps leadership. Some argue this is evident in diplomatic initiatives, such as direct talks in Pakistan. However, much of this is speculative or even wishful thinking.

When it comes to continuing the war, one important constraint is public exhaustion. The level of internal support the government has



**Blocked and blockaded**

received may not last indefinitely. The economic situation is getting worse daily. According to UN-linked reports, by mid-March an estimated 600,000 to one million households (up to 3.2 million people) had been temporarily displaced inside Iran, with many leaving Tehran and other major cities for northern provinces and rural areas.

The government has opened public shelters and offered alternative accommodation for people leaving urban areas or whose homes were destroyed or badly damaged (families, informal networks and people's own resources play a significant role, so we are not dealing with a fully developed national shelter system). The government is providing food rations, mainly through its electronic coupon programme,<sup>2</sup> aimed at lower-income households rather than the whole population. Recent official and semi-official reporting says the programme has been funded in phases for those on the lowest income, and for households covered by support bodies like the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee and the State Welfare Organisation.

In March and early April, amid Israeli and American strikes on military and infrastructure targets, high-ranking officials issued formal calls for citizens to maintain a "crushing presence" in the streets. There are two aspects to these calls. Critics accuse the government of using civilians as human shields. As far as the supporters of the Islamic Republic are concerned, this presence is evidence of nationalist fervour and therefore enhances the legitimacy of the regime - projecting an image of national unity and popular support to the world, thus countering the narrative of internal collapse.

### Left tactics

Within the Iranian left, there are new debates about tactics. As expected, many outside Iran had called for the formation of workers' councils or 'soviets'; others inside Iran have commented on the limitations of such proposals. On the website *Naghd-e Eghtesad Siasi*, one article asks how can we expect citizens to build 'councils' during wartime, when everyday life and social connections are deeply disrupted. It begins with a critic of a widely shared call on social

media encouraging people to form local councils (in neighbourhoods, workplaces, etc). The author argues that, while this idea reflects a real and important need, it overlooks the harsh realities of war.

The article's central claim is that, although solidarity is essential in times of crisis, it cannot simply be created through large, formal structures (like councils). Instead, it must emerge from existing, small-scale social relationships and everyday acts of care, adding that war destroys not only physical, but also social infrastructure - schools, workplaces, public spaces and communication networks. Internet disruptions and the displacement of people all weaken communication. Urban life already lacks strong neighbourhood ties, and many people are also distant from family networks.

Because of this, calls for organised, large-scale collective action may be unrealistic under current conditions. The author argues that solidarity tends to emerge from existing small networks: friends, colleagues, classmates and trusted informal groups.

These 'micro-networks' can share resources, provide emotional support and exchange information, helping with safety and shelter. The key idea is that real trust already exists in these small circles, making them more effective than newly created structures during a crisis. The author introduces the idea of "prefigurative politics": people do not wait for a better society to be created later - they begin practising its values now in everyday life. Small acts of cooperation and care are not just survival strategies: they are early forms of democratic and collective life.

The article emphasises that care is political. Drawing on the 'ethics of care' theory, it argues that societies depend on networks of mutual care to function. In the absence of reliable state institutions, people themselves sustain social life. These acts will prevent social isolation, maintain trust and cooperation, while functioning as a training ground for a future democratic (republican) society.

There are some valid points in the article. However, by shifting the focus from collective political struggle to everyday care and interpersonal solidarity, while these are real and necessary under war conditions, there is a risk of naturalising crisis instead of confronting its causes (state power, class relations, imperialism, capital accumulation). In some of the text, the author reduces politics to ethical behaviour ("care", "responsibility", "checking on each other"), but there is no mention of how at the end of the day there will be a need for organised struggle over power and resources. In other words, we cannot turn solidarity into a moral practice, detached from class conflict.

It is correct to criticise the fetishisation of 'shoras' (councils) by sections of the Iranian left. However, the author replaces the call for councils

with a different kind of abstraction: small networks, it seems, produce inherently progressive spaces. But the key question is not what form people organise in, but what *politics* governs that organisation.

Without political content, neighbourhood groups, informal networks and councils will remain purely defensive, local and limited. So the crucial question remains: what demands should these networks advance? For sections of the left inside Iran, it has become fashionable to talk about 'people', 'society' and 'mutual care' in general terms, even though the reality is that society is divided into classes with antagonistic interests. In fact war *intensifies* exploitation, profiteering, and inequality. So failing to mention capitalists, state elites and war profiteers gives the impression that the present crisis is a shared human condition, rather than a class-structured reality.

### Political solidarity

In that respect, solidarity must be politically articulated through demands, not just practised as care. Instead of limiting action to sharing resources, emotional support and informal cooperation, a revolutionary perspective would push toward collective demands and confrontation. For example:

- Expropriation of private capital involved in war profiteering.
- Seizure and redistribution of hoarded goods and resources.
- Control of distribution systems by workers and communities.
- Prosecution of corrupt officials and profiteers.
- Opening of all accounts and supply chains to public scrutiny.
- Formation of armed popular militias for self-defence, independent of the state.

These demands transform solidarity from coping with crisis into challenging the structures that produce it. By contrast, networks focusing on self-help and mutual care may compensate for the failures of the state, reduce the pressure on the ruling class and unintentionally help stabilise the existing order during crisis.

In this sense, solidarity without political direction can become functional to the system that should be opposed. So we should not reject small-scale solidarity - but repoliticise it. Start from existing networks, yes - but organise them consciously along class lines and link immediate needs (food, shelter, safety) to political demands. Move from mutual aid to collective organisation and then political struggle.

The aim is not just that 'No-one should be left alone', but 'No-one should be exploited' - and the system producing that exploitation must be overturned' ●

### Notes

1. 'Two irreconcilable positions' *Weekly Worker* April 16: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1581/two-irreconcilable-positions](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1581/two-irreconcilable-positions).
2. *kalabarg-e elektroniki*.