

weekly worker



Zack Polanski's redwashing of the Green Party has fooled many on the left, including some of the organised left

- Letters and debate
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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Equating being Jewish with being Zionist is a big lie



LETTERS



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

Deeply shocking

It is still deeply shocking, although not at all surprising, that significant figures of the right, in the mass media and, I have to say, some leading figures of the Jewish community in Britain have used the recent apparent anti-Semitic attacks in London to call for the end of 'hate marches' in the capital.

I say 'apparent', because, yes, of course, the targets appear to be specifically Jewish, but certainly in the most recent case a Muslim man was also attacked (no mention whatsoever in the mass media), and I question how far mentally disturbed and possibly mentally disordered individuals can be consciously anti-Semitic.

What are the so-called 'hate marches' these people want banned? Presumably, these are the mass demonstrations, which especially since October 2023 have been calling for the end of Israel's genocidal and criminal war in Gaza, increasing 'ethnic cleansing' in the occupied West Bank and, more recently, Israel's leading role in the horrendous and criminal war on Iran. Plus, Israel's own war on Lebanon, where it is not only deliberately wiping out civilians and essential civilian and human infrastructure, but is obviously seeking to create a 'scorched earth' area in southern Lebanon.

Are these *really* 'hate marches', which are calling for the end of war, genocide, mass destruction and devastating loss of innocent life? And, calling for the national, democratic, social and indeed basic human rights to actually be able to live, for the Palestinian people? And calling for the sovereign and national rights of the Lebanese and Iranian peoples to be fully respected and implemented?

Yes, people are angry. We have every right to be - and frankly would be less than human if we weren't bitterly angry. Even Donald Trump appeared exasperated and angry at Israel deliberately violating the initial ceasefire negotiated with Iran by massively escalating its attacks on Lebanon. But this anger is clearly and unequivocally directed at the state of Israel. It has absolutely *nothing* to do with the fact that the perpetrators happen to be of the Jewish religion and culture and that many claim to be of Jewish ethnicity.

The state of Israel, a settler-colonial state, transplanted by western powers into the middle of mandate Palestine, was seemingly purposely designed to cause war, death, destruction and destabilisation across the Middle East, on behalf of western imperialism. (The different imperialist powers also, of course, have different and conflicting interests and rivalries between themselves, hence individual powers have at different times alternately supported Israel, the Arab states and nations, and some Arab and other states against each other.)

None of the above is due to anyone being of the Jewish religion, culture or ethnicity. It may be pointed out that large sections of the *Old Testament* are explicitly violent, vile and implicitly genocidal, but this applies to all of the Abrahamic religions, and as materialists we cannot accept that ideological texts written thousands of years ago by flawed human beings are actual drivers for modern-day actions and behaviour.

The real 'hate marches' are surely those which are explicitly pro-Israel and at least implicitly supporting the current wars, mass murders and destruction being committed by that state. As a human being, let alone as a proud, committed, dedicated and disciplined communist, advocating the liberation of all humanity, I know it is *those* marches which are full of poison, bile and hatred, and they make me and I'm sure millions of others very angry.

So, when leading figures in Britain call for the ban on Stop the War and pro-Palestinian marches and demonstrations, what in fact are they opposing? They are opposing the simple and basic fact that these marches and demonstrations are strongly and powerfully criticising the actions and behaviour of the state of Israel, calling for the end of the wars, and the peaceful reconstruction of the affected societies.

Why do they equate criticism of the state of Israel with alleged 'anti-Semitism'? Surely the automatic equation of Jewish people anywhere and everywhere with the state of Israel is itself deeply anti-Semitic? Do these people not realise the trap they are falling into? Yes, I think they do: they are *deliberately* trying to equate attacks of Israel with 'anti-Semitism' in order to undermine and ultimately neutralise those mass, democratic and vociferous condemnations of Israel.

Of course, it may be pointed out that the majority of people who define themselves as Jewish in Britain have some degree of inherent sympathy and support for both the concept of the state of Israel and its existence. It seems to me that is entirely natural and understandable, given Israel is an explicitly Jewish state, obviously embraces the Jewish religion and culture, and claims to be located in the region of the Holy Land, where the biblical Israelites are said to have lived.

But for me, as for surely most logical, rational people, there is a world of difference between having a degree of sentimental attachment and sympathy for the notion and existence of Israel, and actively endorsing and supporting the murderous wars and destruction being carried out by the actual regime in operation there. Those who do actively support the wars, destruction and genocide of the present state of Israel should surely expect to face the real anger and condemnation of the great majority of decent working people in this country. Israel's supporters obviously include large numbers of people who are not Jewish, but who actively endorse its extreme rightwing politics and actions and are progressing the interests of western imperialism.

We do not hold Jewish people responsible for the state of Israel. Those supporters of Israel who do face or fear the full wrath of the mass of decent, dignified and democratic working people should be really clear that this has absolutely *nothing whatsoever* to do with the fact some of them may identify with the Jewish religion, culture or ethnicity.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

YP Scotland

More outrageous shenanigans from the Jeremy Corbyn-Karie Murphy clique heading Your Party over the Scottish seat on the central executive committee vacated by comrade Niall Christie.

Yes, him of Steve Freeman's utterly delusional petty nationalist Republican Your Party. Instead of remaining in YP till it adopted a programme, Labourite or

republican, Niall simply threw in the towel and walked. A pity. I was relishing the prospect of working with him in YP Scotland ... and debating with him too.

Using a clause in YP Standing Orders, the Islington clique are avoiding another election by "recalculating" the previous result, "given the proximity of the last election". So - surprise, surprise - they have awarded Niall's seat to Jim Monaghan.

This came through a vote by the CEC, who were given a day's notice to vote. Here's YP democracy in action.

Given the huge split that has taken place in Scotland, the election should have been rerun and if Jim had any integrity that's what he would have called for.

At the same time, there should have been a call that Scotland is given two CEC seats, as the regions of England all have.

But Jim has straight away taken up the position and it now ties in neatly with what he expressed way back - that he only joined Your Party through Karie Murphy's persuasion. Further proof of this is that Craig Murray has just posted that Murphy called him almost a year ago and said she didn't want an autonomous Scottish party. Instead, Jim Monaghan should be *her* Scottish organiser.

So once again we see that what Karie wants, Karie gets, and democracy can go hang.

What of Niall and his comrades? Amazingly, they imagine themselves to be Marxists! They seriously believe that when Lenin called for the 'right of nations to self-determination', he meant 'independence'! Can you credit it. The naivety is astounding!

Frankly, that is like saying the right of a husband and wife to divorce is akin to advocating that every couple *should* divorce. In fact Lenin, like Rosa Luxemburg, advocated working class unity as the overriding principle. In a single state and in a single party too.

Where Niall and his little band of left nats will go next is anyone's guess. The Scottish Socialist Party is a busted flush. Alba is no more. It dissolved. The same happened to Tommy Sherridan's Solidarity fan club. There is the thoroughly dubious Alliance to Liberate Scotland and the Scottish Republican Socialist Movement. But the logical course for Scot nats is to embrace the Scottish National Party. Go find a cosy little niche in running Scotland in the interests of Scottish capitalism.

The comrades certainly do not have a clue about the elementary principles of working class struggle, unity, internationalism or socialism.

But, maybe, they are willing to learn and - despite their departure from YP Scotland - maybe they are up for an 'internationalism versus nationalism' debate.

We live in hope.
Tam Dean Burn
email

Prostitution

John Smithee's letter (April 23) pushing for the complete legalisation of prostitution caught me off guard. By the end of it I began to suspect that I had already read it before and, sure enough, it's a rewrite of a letter from 2022 (August 4) with some of the least temperate language removed.

That version decried "militant feminism" for shutting down "sex venues", before closing with this eyebrow-raising claim: "All

men should have their first sexual experience with an escort - a polite term for a prostitute. By doing so, men would learn how to respect and treat women (in Australia a session in a brothel is often given to men as an 18th birthday present.)"

To start, his contention that legal brothels will reduce rape does not stand up to even the most basic statistical scrutiny. In his own choice example of Australia 136 rapes are reported for every 100,000 people, which is almost 20% *worse* than the rate in Britain. The burden of providing empirical evidence is clearly in comrade Smithee's court. I will refute his underlying conceptual argument in more detail.

First of all, he claims: "Sex work is just like being a car mechanic ... Mechanics enjoy working on cars and look forward to meeting their clients - some even become friends." Well, comrade Smithee, mechanics may have enjoyed working on cars when they entered the profession, but the gruelling commitment of spending every single week, rather than the occasional weekend, fixing cars is enough to grind away any passion they may have initially had for the act. As a DIY mechanic myself, I can attest that there is a widespread stereotype of professional mechanics neglecting to maintain their own vehicles. There is a well-known proverb for this phenomenon: "The shoemaker's children go barefoot."

This is just one reason why a brothel would be the worst place to "learn how to respect and treat women". By definition, the women (and apparently now some men) there would not be there if they weren't receiving payment for services rendered. And paying 'Johns' will insist on getting their money's worth: any prostitute that still enjoys sex enough to insist on more than being selfishly used as an animated sex toy will quickly be pushed aside (or worse) in favour of market competitors that cynically pretend to love this degrading treatment.

None of this needed explaining to the socialist movement of

Lenin's time, which, Leninists take note, universally condemned prostitution as something to be eradicated. Back then prostitution was rampant, and it was the norm for young men to sneak off to brothels to get secret lessons on how to "respect and treat women" in preparation for marriage.

The 1913 novel *Comrade Yetta* gives us an authentic period view of the social impact of this education: "Men learn their first lessons of sex from [prostitutes] - poor, pallid women who have never known what love was. It doesn't matter whether a boy goes to them or not. Indirectly, if not directly, he learns their lore. The older boys who tell him about women have learned from them.

"Prostitution is the blackest blot on this civilisation we socialists are trying to overthrow ... these women, whom we despise and consistently degrade, are the teachers who instruct our youth in this business of sex. It is the holiest thing in life. Its priestesses are the most polluted class in the community. Not that I blame them. They are victims. But they get their revenge - a horrible revenge."

The context prompting this quote is how Yetta, expecting "a Great White Sacrifice to Love", discovered the "mystic, inexpressible joy of sex" with her socialist husband (the sweaty details are not provided). It is worth noting that *Comrade Yetta* was translated into Russian and printed in 1919, during the most austere early years of the revolution.

Nowadays brothels are far less prevalent than they used to be - for today's youth, the expectations of what sex should be like are shaped and warped through online porn. Length prevents me from going into details here, but the same objections made to in-person prostitution still apply: instead of two individuals meeting as equals, one person receives payment to submit to a sexual script catering to the selfish and mechanical lust of the other.

Comrade Smithee will surely object that, his praise of capitalist Australia notwithstanding, he

Fighting fund

Do your bit

Well done, everyone! We managed to squeeze past that £2,750 *Weekly Worker* fighting fund target for April!

On April 29 I reported that we were just £22 short with just a day left and, sure enough, three comrades chipped in on the last day of the month. In fact comrade JS transferred exactly £22, while MD donated £10 and AS added £4 to his £96 annual subscription to make a nice, round £100. In other words, we exceeded the target by £14!

To be honest, I was hoping for a bigger excess, to make up for the shortfall in March, but, not to worry, let's do that this time around, in May! And we've had a more than useful start to the month, with £615 already received after just six days.

The largest contribution came from comrade AC with his £100, while the same JS who transferred £22 on the last day of April did us another favour: he's had to leave home to look after his elderly mother for some time, so he said

we should stop sending him the paper - even though he's just paid his own £96 annual sub! But no refund, thank you - add that amount to the fighting fund too, he says!

Other bank transfers/standing orders came from LC, BO and AG (£50 each), MM (£31), CG (£30), RG (£25), LM (£24), DL and MT (£20), IS (£17), CP (£16), AN (£15), RM (£13), RP (£12), MM (£11), DI (£10) and BG (£5). On top of that comrades MH (£10), TM and JN (£5 each) played their part using PayPal.

So now we have to make sure that we go shooting past that £2,750 target in May! How about £3,000 this month? That would really help us out. Please do your bit if you can ●

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

was only arguing for *socialist* prostitution; our socialist government will step in to enact pro-social regulations of a socialised sex industry. My answer to this argument is that a socialist sex industry is an oxymoron: nothing is more inimical to our final goal of free association than an institution based on using money to objectify our fellow humans. All capitalist industry is based on objectification to some extent ('the customer is always right', etc), but prostitution presents it in its most naked form. It casts a shadow over all other aspects of society, visible not least in the enormous number of rapes reported each year.

Therefore, after we take power, we should not tolerate prostitution the same way we would tolerate other petty industries like car mechanics. All the largest-scale forms of the sex industry should be shut down: brothels and other 'sex venues', porn studios - OnlyFans and so on. As for individual-level operators like Smithee's "friend", Suzy, it will be impossible to fully suppress the trade without levels of surveillance and censorship inimical to democracy.

I haven't studied this subject enough to prescribe exactly how petty prostitution should or should not be criminalised, but we must make it clear that our final goal is to eradicate this inhuman 'profession', and promote this message through sex education in schools and elsewhere.

Bill Wright
USA

Blind rage

I saw an online article recently titled 'Will more warehouses burn?' (*Jacobin* April 17). It was about a chap allegedly burning down a

1.2 million-square-foot warehouse "in anger over low pay".

The warehouse was owned by the Kimberly-Clark Corporation and the writer found that between 2015 and 2025 the company had a \$21.5 billion net income. Over that same period it spent \$22.8 billion on stock buy-backs and dividends - the modern way forward for capital to accumulate - for the benefit of the owners and their top managers. The man charged said, "All you had to do was pay us enough to live. Pay more of the value we bring. Not corporate. Don't see the shareholders picking up a shift."

This story reminded me of the UnitedHealthcare CEO, Brian Thompson, who was fatally shot in Manhattan outside the Hilton Midtown hotel in 2024. The shooter said that it was over "health insurance parasitic practices", which sounds reasonable. Again, people at the top get incredibly rich, while people at the bottom get shat upon.

And now we have another, failed, attempt to kill Trump. This is not something to advocate, but it is hardly surprising. In the absence of a strong, organised communist party or even strong trade unions, some individuals get frustrated.

We can also see why the ruling class are keen to get rid of juries. In 1969 the late Ted Honderich, who was a Canadian-born British philosopher, wrote a book called *Punishment: the supposed justifications*, which, as I recall, looked at reasons for punishment and debunked them. So we had retribution, rehabilitation, deterrence, etc, but he wrote that, for the wealthy, punishment was "just deserts", which was very satisfying to them, as it implied that their own wealth was just deserts

as well. Certainly that seems to be the judgement of the billionaires and multi-millionaires that we see in the media. They have what they have because they've earned it (not true, of course), and poor people need to work harder. A little bit of charity might be in order - but we mustn't get carried away.

A few years ago there was much talk about 'flyover states': that is, those between the east and west coasts of the US that the rich would fly over with little or no consideration of those beneath. We now have a 'flyover' world, I think. The ultra-rich have their private jets and they have multiple homes around the world. Those 'beneath' them are of no concern.

Not all capitalists are nasty bastards (though a lot of them are), but capital as such cares nothing for anybody or anything except accumulation. In fact I would guess that for many of the rich they care no more for their employees or their customers that Al Capone did. I'm sure, however, they do recognise that they owe Capone a big debt - always make sure you have the best tax lawyers!

Jim Nelson
email

All change

I'd like to thank the *Weekly Worker* for its consistent willingness to host debate. Carl Collins's piece on the 'No war but the class war' slogan being a case in point ('Sloganeering on autopilot', April 23).

Much of comrade Collins' argument rests on the support Marx and Engels gave to particular national movements in the 19th century: Hungary in 1848-49, German and Italian unification, Poland, Ireland, the Union cause in the American civil war. The 1869 letter to Engels on Ireland is invoked as more or less decisive. And the article culminates in a defence of Connolly's strategic orientation in 1916.

My question is this: why does the article not engage with the structural shift that, for the communist left, divides these examples from our own moment? Marx and Engels were writing in capitalism's ascendant phase, when bourgeois-democratic revolutions could still clear feudal and absolutist debris, expand the productive forces, and create a working class. In that period, particular national movements could plausibly be weighed as progressive. From 1914 onwards, with the entry into the imperialist epoch, no such room for manoeuvre exists. Every 'liberated' state has to insert itself into a global hierarchy of capitals already constituted; the 20th century record, from Vietnam to post-colonial Africa, arguably vindicates Luxemburg over Lenin on this point.

If that periodisation is wrong, I would like to see it argued against. But to settle a question posed in 2026 by reaching for Marx on Ireland in 1869, without addressing what changed in between, is surely the move that risks becoming 'mechanical'.

Sian Grech
email

People's football

Fan-owned Clapton Community FC men's team won promotion in dramatic fashion on May 2, overcoming Rayleigh Town 4-2 after extra time in the Eastern Counties League Division One South play-off final at the Old Spotted Dog ground.

Roared on by a diverse and

colourful record crowd of more than 2,400, Clapton drew first blood early on when David Makisi complemented a driving run by feeding Fred Taylor to cut inside and curl the ball expertly into the top corner.

Clapton were soon in dreamland when James Briggs swung in a wicked free-kick from the right that Julian Austin flashed past the keeper on the volley.

Rayleigh regrouped though and pulled one back from the penalty spot through Dylan Jones after a harsh handball decision against Briggs.

The visitors carried a swing in energy and momentum into the second half but were reduced to 10 men when the referee judged midfielder Rob West to have made a challenge worthy of a straight red card. Despite the setback, Jones pounced amid a scrap in the box to secure a brace and send the match into extra time.

Far from downbeat, the Clapton faithful and players relished the extra 30 minutes of football, feeling like nothing could spoil the sunny carnival atmosphere.

How Raleigh lasted the distance was a testament to their determination and spirit as an injury cut them down to nine players, with all of their subs having been made.

Clapton's persistence finally told. Before the break, Taylor once again provided the spark, skilfully opening up space on the left flank before crossing for Cameron Gordon to glance home a smart header for 3-2, sending the Old Spotted Dog ground into rapturous jubilation as victory now surely beckoned.

Clapton sealed the result when Gordon turned provider, teeing up Taylor to finish emphatically and ensure a long celebration into the night.

With football increasingly shaped by the distant control of autocratic oligarchs, Clapton's success is a boon to all football fans who dream of belonging to a club rooted in its community, sustained by its supporters, and driven by the principle that football should belong to the many as a social good, rather than serving capitalists as a commercial price-gouging extraction machine.

This was a powerful vindication of fan-owned football - hard-won, exciting, and shared by everyone who helped build it. Clapton now move up to step 5 in English league football, back to the same level where predecessors Clapton FC competed.

Ted Reese
London

Boycott Aviva

Twelve shareholders disrupted the Aviva annual shareholders meeting on May 6 by blocking access to the boardroom. They were calling on the insurer to stop "propping

up companies involved in fossil fuel extraction, the genocide in Gaza and abuse of migrants in detention".

Protesters condemned the company for underwriting and investing in a number of companies, including Serco, Saudi Aramco and Elbit Systems. Some protesters had to be carried out from the building, while others were escorted away.

Amid the proceedings, Beth Jones from York said to the attendees: "Aviva is investing £2 billion in Israeli weapons companies, bankrolling the slaughter of civilians though companies like Elbit Systems, who market their weapons as battle-tested on Palestinians".

Our research into the UK insurance market shows that Aviva insures more migrant detention and surveillance contractors than any other company, underwrites oil majors such as Saudi Aramco, and invests billions in fossil fuel and weapons companies.

Our data shows that Aviva:
 ■ Insures border detention companies Serco, G4S and Mears.
 ■ Invests \$8 billion in fossil fuel companies, including in Shell and BP.
 ■ Invests \$2 billion in weapons companies complicit in the genocide in Gaza.

Aviva's client, Serco, runs four 'immigration removal centres', including the infamous Yarl's Wood, as well as the UK's GPS tagging programme for migrants and asylum-seekers, subjecting them to 24/7 surveillance. In this way Aviva is enabling companies to profiteer from the abuse of migrants. Private companies are raking in millions, while subjecting people fleeing war and persecution to cruel and dangerous conditions.

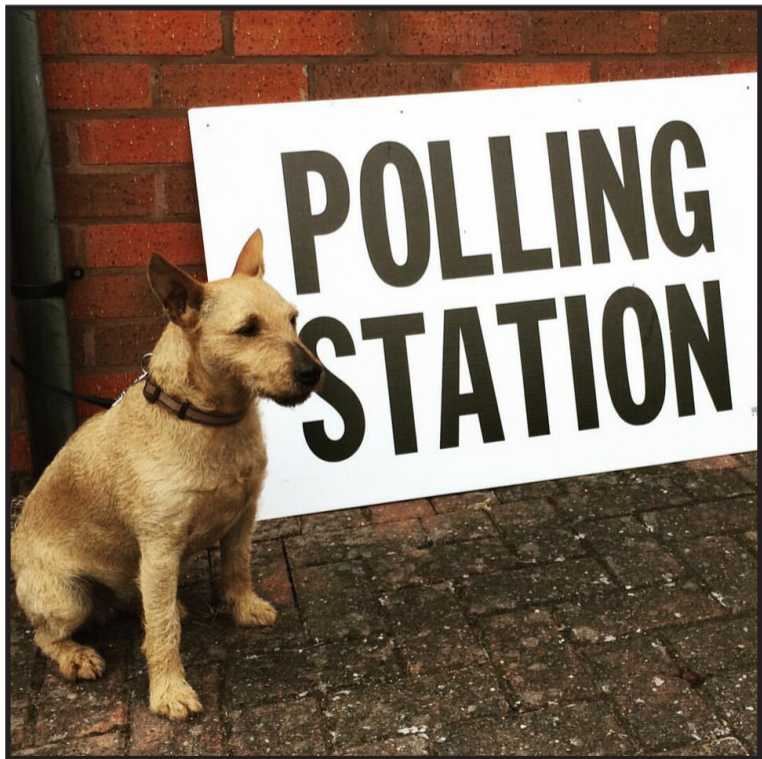
A 2025 government review admitted private providers made "record profits" amid "profiteering" accusations, yet conditions remain appalling - overcrowding, infestations and staff mistreatment. Workers at Serco-run Liverpool hotels have described "institutional abuse" there.

Other shareholders disrupted the AGM to press Aviva on their ongoing support for fossil fuel companies. One shareholder called out Aviva's investments in ExxonMobil, "which ran a decades-long campaign of climate denial and misinformation that has led to inaction and devastating impacts on communities across the world".

Aviva likes to present itself as an ethical business, but, when you look at the companies it supports, that turns out to be a sham. We are calling on Aviva to be stripped of its ethical accreditations and for organisation across the UK to boycott their products and services until that changes.

Andrew Taylor
Boycott Bloody Insurance

Online Communist Forum



Sunday May 10 5pm
What to make of May 7? Political report from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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

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

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 Central London venue, near Great Portland Street tube station
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GOLDERS GREEN

Never let a crisis

No time has been lost in exploiting the Golders Green stabbings. The whole establishment is being mobilised to clamp down on so-called anti-Semitism. **Paul Demarty** calls for a robust defence of our right to protest and, hand-in-hand with that, a new culture of free speech on the left

We should begin, against prevailing fashion, with the facts of the case.

On the morning of April 29, a middle-aged man, living in sheltered accommodation under the watch of South London and Maudsley NHS trust, snapped. He had been trying to reach a friend, presumably in the grip of some kind of crisis, and - having failed to do so - travelled to the friend's home in Borough. There he assaulted the friend with a knife, but failed to seriously injure him.

He then made his way to Golders Green, where he began assailing visibly Jewish passers-by, stabbing two men. He was apprehended - quite brutally, as videos make clear. He was later charged with three counts of attempted murder.

Stated baldly, it is a frightening story of the social safety net failing to do its job. This man had a history of violence and severe (as yet unspecified) mental health problems. It is another story of the failure of 'care in the community' as a model for treating people with such problems, and something that should leave the NHS trust in question with questions to answer.

The political and media narrative around this is, of course, completely unrecognisable from the bare facts. This incident was immediately and ludicrously treated as an act of terrorism, attributed without question to a supposed Iranian-backed terror cell (in reality, a Telegram channel of dubious provenance). The first victim, a Muslim acquaintance of the perpetrator, has all but disappeared from public discussion. The trip to Golders Green and selection of targets makes it clear that anti-Semitic hatred was a motivating factor; but those in the grip of psychotic delusions tend to fill in their persecution stories with materials ready to hand, and the trope of the manipulative Jew is certainly a common element. To treat him almost as if he were a hardened Isis operative is frankly preposterous.

State bans

The political payoff, of course, is further restrictions on the freedom of pro-Palestine protests. We are days into another full-court press against the slogan, 'Globalise the Intifada'. Is it seriously the belief of Sir Keir Starmer, Met commissioner Mark Rowley or MI5 that this man was driven insane by exposure to a political slogan? Of course not: but a crisis cannot be allowed to go to waste. Any and all anti-Semitic attacks, even those with no visible connection to general politics at all, must be exploited to delegitimise opposition to Israel's genocide and Britain's participation in it.

Feeling the full force of the British state's immune system at the moment is poor old Zack Polanski. In vain might he protest that he is, after all, the only Jewish leader of a significant political party. He has shed his old liberal Zionism in favour of an explicit, if imprecise, identification with the Palestinian cause. Now he gets the full Jeremy Corbyn-style witch-hunt treatment (some justice, you might say, for his active participation in that older witch-hunt; but, of course, in the present context he is a voodoo doll of all of us).

The main line of attack against



There is a world of difference between the Jewish religion and Zionist nationalism

him was initially that he retweeted without comment a video of London coppers beating the living hell out of the assailant, including several kicks to the head. This was taken to be an enormous insult to the boys in blue, and Rowley, laughing in the face of the conventions of 'purdah' in the run-up to elections, wrote a rather petulant public letter of protest. This gave Starmer the opportunity to put the boot in, saying that Polanski was not fit to lead a political party (a bit rich...).

Polanski's response to this onslaught has been Janus-faced. He has avoided total capitulation, but made conciliatory noises towards Rowley and promised to 'kiss and make up' (Polanski is, of course, a member of the London assembly, so to some extent his job is to oversee the activities of the Met). He also said he would "discourage" use of the 'Globalise the Intifada' slogan, though clearly opposed it being banned.

While he could have collapsed more despicably than he did - certainly Corbyn put up much less of a fight when it was his Labour leadership in the crosshairs - I cannot help but return to a theme from a recent article of mine.¹ Polanski is supposed to be some kind of 'populist' firebrand, yet his response is just a load of politician's equivocation. When racism and anti-Semitism accusations piled up against Nigel Farage not long ago, he had the gumption to kick back hard, denouncing his accusers and producing the impression of a dastardly plot against him. Say what you like about Farage, he is better at this game than Polanski, or at least more committed to playing it properly. Polanski's 'populism', on the other hand, is entirely fraudulent: for all the leftist hype, he is a Lib Dem to his bootstraps.

There is, of course, a narrowly electoral aspect to Labour's exploitation of this crime in particular. You may be reading this on May 7, a date on which Starmer's merry men and women are expecting an almighty thrashing in local and devolved-parliament elections. With Reform still apparently marginalising the Tory vote, and the Greens with

their tails up, the municipal political landscape is perhaps set to change considerably. Painting Polanski as a 'terrorist sympathiser' may not be any more successful than it was when Theresa May tried it against Corbyn in 2017, but forcing him into ticky-tacky defensive statements may be marginally demoralising for Green voters.

Readers have the advantage over me on that point. What is certain is a new wave of attacks on freedom of association, more nuisance bans and route changes imposed on pro-Palestine and anti-war demonstrations, more opportunities for outrageous prosecutions like that of Ben Jamal and Chris Nineham recently.

Old and new

It is perfectly valid to argue, as the left often does, that this sort of full-court press to identify British Jewry wholly with support for Israel, and pro-Palestinian sentiment wholly with anti-Semitism, in fact tends to exacerbate it in the large. After all, the classic anti-Semitic canard of our day is 'ZOG' - the 'Zionist-occupied government' - which is hardly refuted by the impenetrable united front of the British political and media class around the state of Israel. The effect, as days turn into months and years, is to reinforce the sense that Israel enjoys 'special treatment', compared even to other morally questionable allies like the Gulf monarchies, and to invite conspiratorial views of this alliance.

These views are, in fact, false: support for Israel in this country's governing elite is in the end a token of obedience to our true 'masters', the Americans, who prefer to keep Israel around as a rabid attack dog, and seem quite happy for the Middle East to otherwise be reduced to a blasted landscape of failed states. ("They make a desert and they call it peace," said a British chieftain of the Romans, in the telling of Tacitus: one can easily imagine Pete Hegseth, a few whiskeys deep, enthusiastically embracing that insult for himself.) But this falsity is only established by careful analysis: the absurd logic-chopping required to identify the safety of British Jews with the military success of the state

of Israel is all too clangingly obvious.

This is a valid line of argument, as I said, and it is in fact borne out by the unfortunate and increasing vulnerability of sections of the left to Zionist-conspiracy tall tales. Yet it is also off the point. At this juncture, run-of-the-mill leftwing people, who support Palestine and occupy much of their time with anti-racist activism, are working with a completely different definition of 'anti-Semitism' altogether from the establishment. For us, it means prejudice against Jews as Jews. If, as seems to be the case, the Golders Green attacker was walking around looking for Jewish people to attack, then he was perfectly straightforwardly engaged in anti-Semitic violence on this definition, which used to be broadly shared in society.

Today's establishment, however, simply uses 'anti-Semitism' to mean opposition to the state of Israel. In former times, this was snuck into the previous definition as an additional element - the 'new anti-Semitism', as it was called around the turn of the millennium. Now, however, it has completely supplanted the old definition. Arguably, the establishment was *only* able to treat this event as anti-Semitic by somehow roping Israel into the matter with wild conjectures about Iranian terror cells. If the spectacle of gentiles lecturing the Jewish Polanski about anti-Semitism seems absurd to a leftwing generation raised on intersectional standpoint theory, it is only so because they have not noticed that the relevant standpoint is no longer Jewishness, but Zionism.

Speech controls

The ease with which this piece of ideological prestidigitation has been accomplished is one more piece of evidence in favour of the position long argued in these pages: that it is in the interests of the left to defend free speech *just as such*.

It has been all too easy, over the years, for the left to support constraints on 'hate speech', or at least enter into diplomatic silence on the matter, so as not to alienate our more censorious allies. Within our own movement, the adoption of

'no platform for fascists' as a dogma has always undermined our broader commitment to free expression, such as it is, and indeed the operative domain of 'no platform' inevitably expands, as people lazily excuse themselves from answering opposing political positions by casting them into the outer darkness.

We may be surprised - even insulted - to find ourselves cast as racists by those cheering on the vaporisation of Arab children by thermobaric weapons. So we should be, but insult is easily brushed off (imprisonment is not). When we consider the rights and wrongs of laws against hate speech, we should always bear in mind that the definition of 'hate' is not in our hands, but in those - to simplify a little - of stupid or malignant cops, like Mark Rowley or Wayne Couzens. If somehow Reform's poll lead lasts into the next general election and the Farage *Reich* begins, my bet is not that he repeals 'woke' legislation against hate speech, but that people suddenly start getting prosecuted for 'anti-white racism' under it.

The left needs to fight new restrictions on protest, yes, but it also needs to build a *culture* of free speech. We are laughably far from this: the organised left groups censor their own factional minorities, and unorganised left opinion is still too reliant on 'cancel-culture' mob justice to get its kicks. I received a Stand Up To Racism leaflet through the door yesterday, warning of a far-right demonstration at a nearby primary school. "We must not let the racists divide us," I was told. But we - as in the ordinary folk of cities like mine - are *already* divided. So what now?

The left must get off the fainting couch and have the necessary resilience to *convince* people. Mark Rowley, Keir Starmer and their ilk will not protect us ●

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Notes

1. 'Getting the right headlines' *Weekly Worker* April 2: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1579/ getting-the-right-headlines.

GREENS

Not red on the inside

Under Zack Polanski the Greens have attempted to redwash their policies. This has fooled many on the left, including some on the organised left. In reality the Greens remain a thoroughly petty-bourgeois party, says **Carla Roberts**

While an analysis of the local election results will have to wait for next week's issue, there can be no doubt that many tens of thousands of self-declared socialists and lefties will have ended up voting for the Green Party.

This is disappointing, from our perspective - but not really very surprising, for a number of reasons. The increasingly frantic campaign against the Greens by the entire establishment will have convinced many - wrongly - that a vote for the Greens presents a real challenge to the system. Every time the *Daily Mail* runs another article under its banner, 'Beware the Green menace' (*The Sun's* equivalent is the logo, 'Wacko Zacko'), a few more people will have been convinced to vote for Zack Polanski's party. Ditto the 'open letter' by Met commissioner Sir Mark Rowley, who expressed his "disappointment", when Polanski criticised two police officers for kicking the mentally disturbed Golders Green knife attacker in the head, when he was already writhing on the ground, paralysed by a taser gun. Apparently, that is what you have to do when you think somebody is about to detonate a bomb - kick them really hard.

There is also the ongoing campaign to label as 'anti-Semitic' any criticism of the crimes of the genocidal Israeli regime, a campaign which worked extremely well to get rid of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party. Mark Rowley, for example, writes in his open letter to Polanski that "anti-Semitism is a disease"¹ - reinforcing the Zionist myth that there is something about gentiles that makes them despise Jewish people.

Christian hatred

Yes, anti-Semitism is deeply rooted in Christian culture. And anti-Semitism was given a new lease of life with late 19th century social conservatism, not only by a visibly tottering tsarism in Russia, but by social conservatism in central and eastern Europe too. Paradoxically, Jews were collectively blamed, on the one hand, for Marxism, mass social democracy and the rise of the labour movement, and, on the other hand, for finance capital and the exorbitant interest rates suffered by peasant agriculture and small businesses.

Then came blood and soil Nazism which culminated in the gas chambers and industrial-scale mass murder. However, modern Zionism was the ideological mirror image of this anti-Semitism. It too wanted a solution to the 'Jewish problem'. Not by violently uprooting anybody, that almost goes without saying. But by persuading the 'eternal foreigners' to voluntarily leave the country of their birth and relocate in their own 'homeland' many thousands of miles away. At last, promised the Zionists, the Jews can become a 'proper' nation.

Having carved Israel out of Mandate Palestine and dispossessed much of the indigenous population, the Zionists now seek to delegitimise any opposition to their ongoing colonial project by branding it as 'anti-Semitism'. As a result the meaning of 'anti-Semitism' is being shifted, so that it basically equates with 'anti-Zionism'. In fact the two are entirely different: anti-Semitism is prejudice against Jews as Jews; Zionism is a Jewish supremacist ideology. However, because Israel is closely allied to US imperialism, the big lie which fuses together



No roots in the working class movement

anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism is something which the entire British establishment is more than happy to weaponise.

The re-trial of the Filton 24, in which a jury found four of the defendants guilty after a first jury acquitted them, is very much part of this, as is Sir Keir Starmer's campaign to clamp down on dissident voices in the arts, universities, the health service ... and on the mass pro-Palestine protest demonstrations.

With the growing popularity of the Greens, who could win 22 seats at the next general election, it makes obvious sense to ramp up the campaign once more. According to the hysterical front page of the *Mail* on June 6, the Greens themselves are investigating 30 of their own candidates, two of whom have been arrested. The evidence is as sketchy as you would expect. Most of the comments and social media posts in question express criticism of *Israel and Zionism*, not Jewish people. The *Daily Telegraph*, for example, "unearthed" that "Zack Polanski liked several social media posts which accused Sir Keir Starmer of being on the payroll of powerful Jewish people" - in fact, the post talked about Starmer being supported by "Zionist philanthropists".²

Polanski is slightly less of a pushover than Jeremy Corbyn, but the suspension of a number of Green Party members - among them Tony Greenstein - shows that the campaign is certainly working once again.

Left fragments

Another reason the Greens currently loom so large is that the left is almost entirely invisible, in the aftermath of the implosion of Jeremy Corbyn's Your Party. The decision to ban socialist groups was the last step needed to turn YP into what Corbyn wanted all along: an organisation tightly controlled by his right-hand woman, Karie Murphy, without any pesky branches that could bother the dear leader with criticism or democratic conferences, where members could put forward the kind of programme a real working class party

would have to adopt to effectively challenge the system. YP will now be a mere, tiny footnote in the left's history, another Momentum-style, pointless organisation.

A third of the 16,000 councillors in England will have been elected on May 7, in addition to the 129 members of the Scottish parliament and the 96 members of the newly enlarged Senedd in Wales. Socialist candidates were few and far between. The Socialist Party in England and Wales electoral front - the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition - was the 'left front runner', promoting "289 council candidates who applied to use a Tusc description", as it states on its website. And indeed, the moniker was handed out to "every trade unionist, anti-cuts campaigner, community or social movement activist, and socialists from any party or none". So long as they agreed to Tusc's "six policy guarantees", they were able to become a Tusc candidate.³ With an alleged membership of around 1,000, it is rather puzzling that SPEW did not manage to put up more candidates than that.

The six policies are, as you would expect, all about SPEW's focus on "no-cuts budgets", and also include opposition to "raising council tax to make up for cuts in central funding". You see, Tusc councillors promise to use "council reserves and prudential borrowing powers to avoid making cuts in their 2026-2027 budgets and demand from the Labour government the additional funding needed to make up any future shortfall". Inspiring it is not. Tusc councillors basically promise to shuffle money around, while asking for more from the Labour government. There are no political demands in the platform. All the while, SPEW is still campaigning for a federal party, in which trade union leaders would be allowed to set the agenda - ie, they are fighting for a Labour Party mark two.

George Galloway's Workers Party in Britain grandly announced back in June last year that it would stand 1,000 candidates.⁴ Nothing wrong with being ambitious - unless you massively

underdeliver. Despite the implosion of Your Party, it managed to find only a rather measly 83 candidates.

There is no WPB programme for the local elections, but its general *Manifesto*⁵ is a truly horrific read, summed up by its national-chauvinist title, 'Britain deserves better'. In the 'Defence of the nation' section, it outlines that under prime minister Galloway "our armed forces will be highly trained and equipped with modern, reliable weaponry and equipment. Any threat to our country or our interests will be met with a highly effective military response."

The chapter on 'Mass migration' promises that a WP government "will undertake investment in border security, including heightened sea-going and coastal patrols" and that it "will make a regular calculation of the sustainable levels of migration". There is not much red in this red-brown offering!

Jeremy Corbyn's Your Party endorsed a very short list of 47 candidates, only 25 of whom were given the title "Your Party candidates", with the other 22 "Your Party-backed candidates". To make matters more complicated, YP also endorsed a list of 14 'local community groups', whose candidates are *not* listed on the YP website. They include Lutfur Rahman's *Aspire in Tower Hamlets* - very much not on the socialist spectrum, whichever way you look at it. Small mercies perhaps that at least the *Walsall Community Independents* are no longer listed on the YP website - among their candidates are three former Tory councillors, who only discovered their love for independence after they were deselected by the local Tories in January 2026. No matter, Jeremy Corbyn was keen to attend their launch event and was happy to endorse them: the three even featured the beaming Corbyn on their leaflet.⁶

An attempt by Grassroots Left members on YP's executive to require all endorsed groups to at least *claim* that they are "socialist" was voted down by the majority of Corbyn's leadership faction, *The Many*. In any case, it is rather questionable if the phrase, 'Your Party', in the description will have helped the electoral chances of any of the candidates.⁷

There were also thousands of 'independents' standing in various wards, covering all shades of the political spectrum. And, yes, there are even some with a socialist persuasion, like the *Islington Independents* or *Haringey Socialist Alliance*. The key problem here is all too obvious: what possible opposition can local independent councillors put up to the system of globalised capitalism? The absence of an internationalist, democratic working class party in Britain is all too painfully obvious.

SWP goes Green

In most areas in Britain, voters have not even had such a choice. Most of those wanting to vote 'left' were confronted with the unenviable choice between Labour or the Greens. While Labour should still (just about) be characterised as a bourgeois workers' party (not least because of the affiliated trade unions), there can be no doubt that it is not just socialists who find the Starmer government more than disappointing: it has delivered nothing but misery, rising prices and expensive support for Nato's proxy war on Ukraine, all the while aiding and abetting Israel at the behest of the USA.

While it is *understandable* that many people will have voted for the Greens as the most 'leftwing' or 'progressive' choice on offer, we believe that socialists have a *duty* not to sow the illusion that the Greens present an actual alternative to the rotten capitalist system - as, for example, the Socialist Workers Party does. There is nothing wrong with inviting Zack Polanski to speak on a platform - but socialists should use that to at least question and critique him and his political outlook.

We are more than a bit puzzled by the *Socialist Worker's* editorial on April 28, entitled rather hilariously 'Will Greens stay red?' A variation of the old rightwing joke about the Greens being 'red on the inside'. With the SWP, however, it seems that the Greens are 'red on the outside' too. Either way, this must count as an *explicit* call on their members and readers to vote Green: "We celebrate whenever Polanski gives Starmer or Farage a bloody nose. But we still need a socialist alternative that sees building struggles outside of electoral politics as key to winning change." 'Vote Green and continue holding SWP placards on demonstrations' seems to be the message here. Under its new leadership team, the SWP is drifting further and further to the right, while working class politics are quietly being abandoned.

Hence the editorial says nothing about the fact that the Green Party is clearly not anti-capitalist, let alone socialist. It does not try to characterise the Greens in class terms: they are a petty bourgeois formation - ie, they fight to reform capitalism in the interests of the small and medium-sized businesses that apparently constitute the "backbone of the nation".

No, socialists should explain that Polanski is rather good at walking a political tightrope - giving eco-populist speeches, while assuring capital that he is not about to nationalise their businesses.⁸ 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. He has made no attempt to overturn the Greens' commitment to the IHRA misdefinition of anti-Semitism, adopted under former leader Caroline Lucas. He opposes Nato, but wants a European (capitalist) defence pact instead.

Polanski's Greens might soon enough make the transition from being a petty bourgeois party to becoming a thoroughly bourgeois party, especially if they get called into a potential anti-Reform coalition government after the 2029 general election - not an impossible prospect. In other words, the Green Party is not an option for genuine socialists ●

Notes

1. www.thetimes.com/uk/crime/article/sir-mark-rowley-metropolitan-police-british-jews-threat-tc2gcx7w0
2. www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2026/05/04/zack-polanski-liked-post-zionists-control-government
3. www.tusc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Local-elections-core-policies.pdf
4. www.workerspartygb.org/may_2026_local_elections
5. www.workerspartygb.org
6. www.thecanary.co/trending/2026/04/03/corbyn-three-ex-tory-councillors
7. www.yourparty.uk/independent-candidates-supported-by-your-party
8. www.thecanary.co/uk/news/2026/03/28/green-party-conference-votes

OUR HISTORY

Considerations of defeat

Making the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee pivotal has become a shibboleth. But the argument does not add up. Jack Conrad says we should stop repeating tired clichés about the 1926 General Strike and learn to think instead

U ndaunted by all the evidence to the contrary, Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein try to make the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee the fulcrum for the degeneration of the CPGB (of course they are far from alone).¹ Ignoring its initial crop of fly-by-night ‘official’ left recruits and subsequent lack of clarity when it came to trade union and Labour Party ‘official’ lefts, both the Great Leader and the Respected Son claim that the “decisive shift of the Communist Party to the right” was “spurred on by the establishment of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee”.²

The whole project was wrong from start to finish, say the SWP duo.³ This was Trotsky’s argument - in 1928. Nevertheless, when the agreement was signed in April 1925, he enthusiastically went along with it. Just a few months before the General Strike began he was still waxing lyrical. His speech to Soviet textile workers in January 1926 acclaimed the Anglo-Russian Committee as the “highest expression of the shift in the situation of all Europe and especially Britain, which is taking place before our eyes and will lead to the proletarian revolution”.⁴

Ready to take up even a flimsy polemical weapon with which to fend off Stalin, the United Opposition urged a break with the TUC after the sell-out of the General Strike. In July 1926, under the signatures of Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, Nadezhda Krupskaya, Leon Trotsky and Yuri Pyatakov, the United Opposition stated that, while it was absolutely correct to form the committee with the TUC, the time had arrived for a “break with them in event of their betrayal”.⁵ Maintaining the Anglo-Russian Committee allowed the TUC pseudo-lefts to keep their militant image intact, they said. Snubbing them with the maximum publicity would help the workers in Britain make the transition from militancy to communism.

Stalin dug up ancient Lenin quotes ridiculing German ‘lefts’, who established pure, but tiny, ‘revolutionary’ trade unions, and his criticisms of Trotsky for ‘skipping over the peasantry’. More to the point, he accused the United Opposition of wanting communists in Britain to abandon the ‘old organisations’. To my knowledge, a complete red herring. His main point was, though, that the Anglo-Russian Committee put British workers into contact with Soviet unions and thereby hastened the day when the reformist leaders would be ousted. The Anglo-Russian Committee also helped the movement opposing new imperialist interventions against the Soviet Republic - for Stalin a clincher.

Was such a bloc by its very nature unprincipled? Surely not. According to Stalin, as long as communists in Britain and the Soviet trade unions kept their “freedom to criticise the reformist leaders”, then the Anglo-Russian Committee was permissible. He cited the denunciations not only of the likes of Walter Citrine, but ‘official’ lefts too. In point of fact, Stalin defended the Soviet trade unions from the localist protests of the British delegate to Comintern, JT Murphy. Murphy sought to “compel” them to cease-and-desist with their “criticising” of the TUC’s general council.⁶ Soviet trade unions had, of course, accused the TUC of “treachery” and called out the refusal to even “lift a finger” to help the locked-out miners. Not to have done that, said Stalin, would have been to



Joseph Stalin, Alexei Rykov, Lev Kamenev and Gregory Zinoviev in 1925

“commit political and moral suicide”.⁷

Incidentally, refusing to brand the TUC general council as ‘traitors’, because by their very nature the likes of Walter Citrine, Ernest Bevin and JH Thomas stood a world removed from any authentic socialism and therefore working class principles, is *politically* dumber than dumb. Calling off the General Strike after just nine days and leaving the miners isolated is not something that should produce a knowing shrug of the shoulders from communists. These people, including ‘official’ lefts such as Alf Purcell and George Hicks, were elected leaders of mass organisations and in the eyes of their militant members they had done something unforgivable, something criminal. That had to be made into the common starting point of a prolonged struggle designed to replace reformist with communist leaders.

A ‘demonstrative break’ with the TUC might have helped to clarify matters for communists in Britain. But then again, so would Soviet leaders damning the pack of them “traitors” ... and that is exactly what the Stalin-Bukharin faction of the apparatus did. There was, however, the other, defencist, prong to the Anglo-Russian Committee. Diehard reactionaries such as Winston Churchill and Neville Chamberlain would have been delighted by Soviet trade unions ditching their TUC allies. A self-inflicted wound. Trotsky’s attempt to “torpedo” the Anglo-Russian Committee would, Stalin reasoned, therefore, play “into the hands of the interventionists”.⁸

It is quite clear that the argument around the Anglo-Russian Committee was primarily to do with internal struggles in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In an attempt to counter the growing bureaucratisation, the United Opposition tried to show that every international setback was Stalin’s personal responsibility. In the conditions of 1926, understandable. But that does not mean that today we are obliged to faithfully echo past

polemics as if they were the expression of some unvarnished truth. We shall happily leave that to others. Instead we freely plead guilty of re-examining the past in order to learn from the past.

Clean break

In all probability a ‘demonstrative break’ with the TUC in May, June or July 1926 would have had no significant impact in Britain. The working class had already been defeated. The bureaucracy as a whole was moving rapidly to the right. So much so, indeed, that in 1927 the ‘official’ lefts were joining the anti-communist witch-hunt. In such a climate of reaction the TUC had no compunction in taking the initiative to dissolve the Anglo-Russian Committee. If Soviet unions had preempted them, it would probably not have caused a political earthquake. A judgement, obviously. But only those whose hearts are ruling their heads could seriously imagine that a ‘demonstrative break’ would have resulted in masses of workers leaving behind reformist illusions and coming over to communism.

The advanced stratum of the working class can learn through theory, polemics and factional struggles. Communists such as JT Murphy clearly needed teaching a lesson or two when it came to exposing the ‘official’ lefts. Holding back from using frank language out of fear of upsetting, offending, alienating important allies is, yes, to “commit political and moral suicide”.

That said, we should never forget that the masses learn primarily through their own infinitely more complex lived experiences. What is meant by that needs qualifying. After all, it is no good expecting workers to spontaneously come over to communism simply through being misled by trade union bureaucrats. The same goes for experience of Labour governments or capitalism as a system.

Those who think broken promises,

unemployment, poverty and wage cuts are almost to be welcomed, because they cause disenchantment with existing leaders, ideas and institutions, forget just how overarching, how dominant bourgeois ideology is. So there needs to be more than negativity. The working class must be *positively* convinced that communists speak for them and should therefore be heeded, trusted and actively supported. Without that, disenchantment resolves into passivity, bewilderment, resentment ... even large numbers angrily embracing overtly reactionary conclusions.

In denial

Rajani Palme Dutt, the CPGB’s main thinker, gave events a vastly overoptimistic spin. Immediately after the defeat of the General Strike he argued that it was “not only the greatest revolutionary advance in Britain since the days of Chartism, and a sure prelude of the new revolutionary era, but its defeat is a profound revolutionary lesson and stimulus”.⁹ Not that the masses were defeated. What had been defeated was “the old leadership”, along with its trade unionism, reformism, pacifism and parliamentarianism. Palme Dutt’s judgement was that “the British bourgeoisie has taught the proletariat a lesson of inestimable revolutionary value. The defeat of the General Strike is itself a gigantic piece of revolutionary propaganda”.⁹ All that remained was for the Communist Party to assume, as it were, its rightful place as the leadership of the whole working class movement.

Subsequent events tell us that life did not and does not work in such a generous fashion. The collapse of the General Strike was not the “final collapse” of the “methods of the old trade union economic struggle”. Nor were the workers now face to face with the “legal and armed forces of the state”.¹⁰ Indeed capitalism’s defensive barriers against discontent below had been strengthened, not weakened.

It might have been a 162 million strike-day record in terms of statistics, but politically 1926 was a debacle. With its rulers inflicted a strategic defeat on the working class and overcame the ‘direct action’ enemy within, which had been defying, frustrating and challenging them since 1910 and the beginning of the Great Unrest. David Torrence says trade union power was viewed as “a boil that needed lancing” by the “British public”.¹¹ Obviously untrue, unless one equates systematically manufactured Tory popular opinion with the “British public”. No, it was our rulers who viewed trade union power as “a boil that needed lancing”.

Anyway, as can be seen from table 1, the defeat of the General Strike saw class combativity sent reeling, not taken to a new, higher stage, as Palme Dutt gallantly hoped. The number of strike days crashed through the floor and trade union membership was further driven down in an orgy of sackings.

Table 1
Strike statistics

Year	Number of strikes	Strike days (thousands)
1924	710	8,420
1925	603	7,950
1926	323	162,230
1927	308	1,170
1928	302	1,390
1929	431	8,290
1930	422	4,400
1931	420	6,980
1932	389	1,070
1933	357	1,070
1934	471	960
1935	553	1,960

Source: H Pelling *A history of British trade unionism* London 1963, pp262-63

Employers refused to take back ‘commies’, ‘militants’ and ‘trouble makers’. They imposed all sorts of onerous terms and conditions. In

November 1926 George Spencer led a section of the Notts miners in a breakaway from the Miners Federation of Great Britain. The government introduced the Trades Disputes and Trade Unions Act in January 1927, which made all sympathy strikes, mass picketing and "intimidation" illegal. Civil service unions were banned from affiliating to the TUC too. In other words, there was a shift in the balance of class forces, as seen with April 14 1921 (Black Friday) ... only more so.

Instead of 'backs against the wall' resistance, the TUC and Labour Party added fuel to the reactionary fire. Crawling on their bellies before the class enemy, they became red-baiting advocates of Mondism, industrial peace and national efficiency.¹² Scabs betray and always find themselves betrayed: having served its purpose, the TUC 'official' lefts were themselves ousted by an ungrateful right and consigned to a neither power nor glory purgatory.

Of course, British imperialism was still suffering relative decline. Though the Bank of England would have had it otherwise, Britain could not maintain the gold standard. Despite the strategic defeat inflicted on the working class in May 1926, sterling could not recover what Susan Strange calls its position as the *top currency* - the main currency of reserve and transaction in the world market, which it occupied between 1815 and 1918.¹³ In point of fact, from 1931 the pound was losing its status as a master currency.¹⁴

Nevertheless, there was another side to decline - an ability to manage it. Though losing ground to its rivals, British imperialism successfully escaped war with Germany till 1939 and kept the US in splendid isolation before the 'arsenal of democracy' entered World War II in 1941 (the war between Britain and the US Trotsky had predicted in the many ways magisterial *Where is Britain going?* was fought out, but in alliance against Germany).¹⁵ Then there was the division of Ireland. Britain kept this most troublesome country quiet for nearly 50 years. Above all, containment of the Soviet Union worked. Sanctioned, sealed in by a *cordon sanitaire*, subjected to repeated war threats, during the 1930s the world revolutionary centre began eating its own children in a repeated series of bloody purges and meanwhile seeking a permanent coexistence with capitalism.

Domesticating

So, without pressing overseas distractions, Britain's ruling class had a comparatively easy time domesticating the TUC. But there was more to it than that. Not least because it still held the world's largest empire, Britain could temper its frontal assault on the working class at home. It could, while shifting the balance of class forces, strengthen the political role of the labour bureaucracy¹⁶ and, most importantly, as can be seen from table 2, refrain from driving down the *real* wages of those in work (remember, this was in a period of falling prices).

From within the Tory establishment, even before the General Strike had met its final *dénouement*, Robert Cecil, Leo Amery and Lord Percy were warning against further reductions in living standards imposed on vulnerable sections of the working class. With the ending of the strike the PM, Stanley Baldwin, promised that there would be no general cut in wages and even Winston Churchill spent the summer of 1926 trying to persuade the coal owners to moderate their demands on the miners. This flexibility was the result of both continued economic standing and fear of revolution.¹⁷ As it turned out, those who bore the main burden of the reorganisation of capital in Britain, those who

suffered poverty and degradation, as it is today, were primarily not those in full-time employment: rather it was the unemployed, casual and home workers and those subject to imperial exploitation.

Table 2
Index of average real wages

1924	111
1925	112
1926	113
1927	117
1928	118
1929	118
1930	122
1931	129
1932	129
1933	131
1934	130
1935	130

Source: B Mitchell and P Deane
Abstract of British historical statistics
London 1962, pp332, 345

Under these hugely unfavourable conditions the CPGB found itself dangerously isolated from employed workers. Membership fell away in droves. What remained became increasingly based on students, housewives and above all the unemployed, who, unlike many of their employed brothers and sisters, maintained an organised opposition to capitalism and a readiness to fight.

An indication of the setback suffered by militant trade unionism, and in turn the CPGB, was the decision in 1929 to wind up the National Minority Movement. The main thrust of activity became the National Unemployed Workers' Movement and its great hunger marches of the late 1920s and 1930s.

False diagnosis

The limitations of the CPGB in 1926, the loss of membership till the early 1930s and the ideological flip from 'social fascism' to 'popular fronts' do not in the least prove the thesis of the left academics, James Hinton and Richard Hyman, that the "basic weakness" of the CPGB in the 1920s lay in its failure to understand that "objective conditions" in Britain made it "impossible" to build a mass Communist Party.¹⁸ A thesis which, of course, is unconsciously (one presumes) repeated nowadays by all manner of so-called 'Marxists'. Which is why Hinton and Hyman are still worth discussing (incidentally, they inhabited the Cliffite milieu in the early 1970s, Hyman being a member of the International Socialists from 1964-76).

Citing Lenin's *What is to be done?*, Hinton and Hyman claim that Britain in the 1920s was more like Russia 1902 than Russia 1905 or 1917. "This was not the time to build a mass revolutionary party," they say.¹⁹ Instead what should have been fought for in the 1920s was a "cadre party placing primary emphasis on the quality rather than the quantity of its membership". In "such unfavourable circumstances" as the defeat of the General Strike this "less ambitious" strategy would, they maintain, have sustained "the British revolutionary tradition".²⁰ Presumably, the CPGB would not have succumbed to the empty leftism of the late 1920s, let alone the popular frontism of the 1930s.

That is conceivably true. A sect would be quite content with regurgitating its immutable truths and initiating the chosen ones and twos into the mysteries for the next hundred years and more (think of the Socialist Party of Great Britain). But is the "British revolutionary tradition" before the formation of the CPGB anything to aspire to? Hardly. After all, we are not talking about the Chartists here: rather groups such as the Socialist League, the Socialist Labour Party and the

Social Democratic Federation, and mercurial individuals such as Henry Hyndman, Sylvia Pankhurst and John McLean.

Let us revisit Lenin's answers to the question he poses in the title of *What is to be done?* They are certainly not the ones put forward by Hinton and Hyman. The key points of Lenin's 1902 pamphlet are as follows.²¹

Firstly, the importance of theory and a ruthless struggle against economism, and by extension revisionism, specifically in Russia those grouped around *Rabocheye Dyelo*, *Credo* and *Rabochaya Mysl*. Those who wanted to leave high politics to the liberal bourgeoisie and limit the working class to trade unionism should not be allowed to hide their opportunism under the guise of 'freedom of criticism'. Marxism is not out of date, as they maintained: rather it is the scientific - ie, rational - theory of working class self-liberation. The foundation and massive growth of European social democracy, above all in Germany, being cited as living proof.

Secondly, the need to understand the limitations of spontaneity. Lenin was insistent that the theory of working class self-liberation comes from outside the economic sphere of employees versus employer (an orthodoxy he took directly from Karl Kaustsky and his 1892 booklet *The class struggle*). The task of communists was not to rely on trade union struggles step by step taking the working class to full political maturity. No, communists base themselves on the most advanced theory and thereby can provide a fully rounded *programme*, which, if grasped by the mass of workers, enables them to become the champion of all oppressed classes, the revolutionary vanguard against tsarism and a future ruling class.

Thirdly, Lenin repeated his plan outlined in 1901 in *Where to begin* for the organisation of communists. There had to be an end to "primitiveness", by which he meant local groups of political activists doing what they could by way of agitation and propaganda. Nowadays we are still cursed with similar groups, which sometimes manage to huddle themselves together in this or that loose national network. Indeed this is the normal form taken by the 'anti-sectarian' left and is, of course, collectively incapable of rising above campaignism, trade unionism and sectionalism. Programmes and drawing sharp lines of political demarcation are either contemptuously dismissed or consigned to an endlessly delayed future. In Russia that did not just mean being politically ineffective: it meant arrest, prison sentences and Siberian exile. Against the tsarist secret police, the okhrana, the local groups did not stand a chance. Their average life expectancy was measured in months, sometimes just weeks, before discovery.

Fourthly, to create a real party it was necessary to lay the programmatic foundations and then build it through the girders provided by an illegal paper. Published and directed from abroad, this paper would conduct polemical war, equip workers with a systematic world view and organise day-to-day revolutionary activity. From the writing, editing, production and distribution of the paper, from the fund-raising, reporting and readership, would arise the outline, the basic structures, of the party. Inevitably, given the specific conditions of tsarist Russia, that posed not open-door recruitment, bottom-up elections and operating in full public view. No, members would have to be carefully vetted,

trusted local secretaries appointed from above and the whole underground party apparatus staffed by professional revolutionaries (or revolutionaries by trade, if you prefer). In other words, a party that was as close as possible programmatically, organisationally and culturally to the model provided by the Social Democratic Party in Germany that objective conditions in Russia allowed.

Yet we know, when conditions changed in 1905, Lenin was quick to urge - indeed demand - the opening up of the party to the worker masses. By 1907 the Bolshevik wing alone numbered some 45,000 members. This transformation, as repeatedly argued, in no way entailed an abandonment of *What is to be done?* Ruthless polemical struggle continued, there was no tailing of spontaneity. What of the organisation of the party? Changed conditions required the combination of illegal activity with open activity, a legal press and bottom-up elections. For Lenin there was no principle involved here. After all, the only 'principle' concerning party organisation is that there *are* no timeless principles, no fixed set of commandments, no dogma. The party is a tool to make revolution. It exists, not for itself, but to organise the great mass of workers in their struggle to achieve self-liberation. Therefore everything about the party's organisation must be flexible, ready to deal with new dangers and new possibilities.

If we approach Hinton and Hyman and their 'cadre' party in this light, we can see it is a recipe for sectarian posturing, sterility and failure. The reason for Lenin's 'cadre' party was dictated not by fear of the working class masses, but objective conditions of Asiatic despotism and absence of open opportunities.

How do conditions stand on that score in mid-1920s Britain (or mid-2020s Britain for that matter)? We operate in conditions of relative freedom. Communists can freely publish books, pamphlets and papers, with only the occasional problem from the police. We can put forward candidates for parliament and local councils. We can work in the trade unions without facing bans and proscriptions, though not the Labour Party (or, nowadays, Your Party). We can sell our literature door to door, at work or on the streets.

That is not to forget the numerous prison sentences meted out to our comrades in 1926, the banning of the *Daily Worker* at the beginning of World War II or the constant stream of anti-communist disinformation that comes from every orifice and pore of bourgeois society. Nevertheless for our purposes here, Britain was and is just like Russia in 1905. Not that there is a revolutionary situation. Obviously not. But there is relative freedom for communists to openly organise, agitate and educate (freedoms won by the previous generations, not granted by the state).

Anyway, that means we face very different "objective conditions" to Russia 1902. The precondition for communist organisation is not an illegal paper, conspiracy, forged passports, ciphers and secret readers' groups. As for the idea of *aiming* for a small, *high-quality* party, that is, in fact, to flatter, glorify, be satisfied with the *low-quality* confessional sects whose only worth lies in maintaining their particular revolutionary tradition.

Fundamentally, the high quality of communists comes not from their ability to slavishly mouth the barren mantras of this or that confessional sect. No, it comes from

putting the Marxist programme into practice by leading millions of workers in economic, political and revolutionary struggles. Our aim is, and can only be, a mass Communist Party●

Notes

1. It is worth reminding readers about the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee. It was formed in April 1925 at the initiative of the left-moving TUC. This fitted in with the broad drive by Comintern to secure trade union unity and undermine the Amsterdam Trade Union International. The committee's aim was to "promote cooperation between the British TUC General Council and the All-Russian Trade Union Committee in every way". It was greeted with a furore by the British capitalist press.
2. T Cliff, D Gluckstein *Marxism and trade union struggle* London 1986, pp125-26. However, what they write is in this respect no different from the whole Trotskyite spectrum. Eg, M Woodhouse and B Pearce *Essays on the history of communism in Britain (1975)*; P Taaffe *1926 General Strike: workers taste power* (2006); C Kimber and J Cox *Revisiting the General Strike of 1926: when workers were ready to dare* (2026).
3. Remember, this from an organisation which prides itself on founding the popular frontist Anti-Nazi League and Stand Up to Racism, establishing Respect alongside George Galloway, the Muslim Association of Britain and various British-Asian businessmen and which today stands candidates as independents on the most minimal platforms. Put another way, the SWP is far to the right of the 1926 CPGB.
4. L Trotsky *Writings on Britain* Vol 2, London 1974, p149.
5. *Ibid*.
6. JV Stalin *Works* Vol 8, Moscow 1954, p207.
7. *Ibid* p208.
8. *Ibid* p197.
9. Quoted in R Page Arnot *Twenty years*, London, no date, p31.
10. *Ibid* p32.
11. D Torrence *The edge of revolution: the General Strike that shook Britain* London 2026, p320.
12. In November 1928 Sir Alfred Mond, chair of ICI, together with 21 other industrialists, wrote to the TUC suggesting cooperation. Their letter argued that "the prosperity of industry can, in our view, be fully attained only by full and frank recognition of the facts as they exist and an equally full and frank determination to increase the competitive power of British industries in the world's markets, coupled with free discussion of the essentials upon which that can be based. That can be achieved most usefully by direct negotiation, with the twin objects of restoration of industrial prosperity and the corresponding improvement in the standard of living of the population" (*TUC Annual Congress Report* London 1928, p220). The TUC accepted the invitation. The first discussion took place at Burlington House on January 12 1928, with Mond and the TUC's Ben Turner alternatively taking the chair. The meetings became known as the Mond-Turner talks.
13. See S Strange *Sterling and British policy: a political study of an international currency in decline* Oxford 1971.
14. The master currency is dominant in a particular currency area: eg, the Overseas Sterling Area.
15. See L Trotsky *Writings on Britain* Vol 2, London 1974, pp5, 9.
16. While union membership fell from a high of 8.3 million in 1920 to a low point of 4.4 million in 1933, the number of trade union officials seems to have increased throughout this period (see HA Clegg, AJ Killick and R Adams *Trade union officers: a study of full time officers, branch secretaries and shop stewards in British trade unions* London 1961, p38).
17. Six days after the general strike Lord Salisbury wrote the following cabinet memorandum: "I will not dwell on the familiar history of industrial suspicion and its disastrous effect ... [It] is not only widespread, but has gradually grown in power, if not intensity, and has now developed into a settled determination to have a change. And this determination to secure a change has since the war assumed a dangerous and therefore urgent character. Up to that date the workers sought their ends in parliament ... It is, however, clear that they are beginning to lose faith in that road to relief. The favourite method is now direct action, which is, in its logical development, revolution ... Unless government and parliament bestir themselves, the change of method may become stereotyped: revolution may become a conviction. The worst of it is that unconstitutional pressure and direct action have been proved to be effective and the present triumph of the forces of order is an exception ... If we look at the attitude of the workers and at their intentions - no doubt largely subconscious, but nonetheless formidable for that reason - the situation is essentially unstable" (quoted in J Foster 'Imperialism and the labour aristocracy' in J Skelley *The general strike: 1926* London 1976, p49).
18. J Hinton and R Hyman *Trade unions and revolution* London 1975, pp50-51.
19. *Ibid* p51.
20. *Ibid* p73.
21. See VI Lenin *CW* Vol 5, Moscow 1977, pp347-528.

POLEMIC

Socialism requires democracy

We on the left are a minority, we Marxists are a minority of that minority and we partyists are a minority of that minority. How do we change that? Not, argues **Mike Macnair**, by silencing ourselves through factional bans and speech controls

Last week in the first part of this series I looked at three articles directed against 'factionalism'. Firstly, former MP Claudia Webbe's defence of the Corbynista leadership of Your Party's decision to adopt a regime of bans and proscriptions of far-left groups.¹ Secondly, Tristan Colum on the Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century website, criticising the (in his view) excessive pluralism of *Die Linke* and of leftists in the party's allegedly excessive attention to debating with other party members.² Thirdly, Duncan Chapel on his *Red Mole* Substack site, polemicising specifically against the CPGB (and me individually) and our advocacy of 'permanent factionalism'.³

I suggested that the partial coincidence of the appearance of these arguments reflected the fact that the UK left's 'common sense' of anti-factionalism is beginning to be called into question.

There is a common problem that emerged for me from reading Webbe, Colum and Chapel; but not one explicitly addressed (except in a partial and indirect way by Webbe). This is that the left is a minority; the self-identified Marxist left is a minority of this minority; and, I can add, 'partyists' - including the CPGB, but also some others - are a minority of this 'minority of a minority'.

Of course, the working class as a class is a majority, both globally and in the UK.⁴ But that is not at all the same thing as the left being a majority. This is why I say that Webbe addresses the issue in a partial and indirect way: when she argues: "... a socialist movement could not succeed through the imposition of a pre-formed programme on communities - even communities experiencing acute exploitation and oppression. It had to meet people where they were, develop their political voice from within their own experience, and build power that was genuinely theirs."

This point is a recognition, of a sort, that leftwing ideas are minority ideas; but Webbe's conclusion is that what has to be done is to self-silence the leftwing ideas in order to "meet people where they were, develop their political voice from within their own experience". The practical result of policies of this sort is that, while the leftist minority silences itself, the capitalist minority continues to dispose of mass-circulation, advertising-funded media ('new media' as well as 'old') and the left, therefore, has to become a political tail to ideas promoted by the capitalists: either liberal (as remains the case of Podemos and *Die Linke*) or nationalist/social-conservative (as is an aspect of La France Insoumise (seen in its title) and was the character of Sahara Wagenknecht's Bündnis Sahara Wagenknecht (Sahara Wagenknecht Alliance) which failed to get into the German Bundestag at the last elections.

The far-left alternatives offered by Colum and Chapel actually have the same character as Webbe's argument. The essence is the idea that the masses are to come to socialism "from within their own experience" (Webbe) or through "a successful campaign run or a strong local organisation built" (Colum). Chapel argues that "the correct response to a limited programme in a broad formation is to argue within it, to win people through the experience of struggle ..." The demand in all cases is for self-silencing



Claudia Webbe and Jeremy Corbyn: bans

for the sake of breadth in mobilisation. The expectation is that "struggle" will solve the problem of the left being a minority. Or, maybe, that "struggle" is enough and socialist/communist ideas should be altogether discarded (the argument of a good many former Eurocommunists).

Another symptom of the same phenomenon is the fear of using the names, 'socialist' and 'communist'. The Mandelites are particularly striking in this respect (given their Trotskyist past). "Ecosocialists" (a very ill-defined idea) for their internal/theoretical project, they are publicly named in Britain Anti-Capitalist Resistance, in France the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (*L'Anticapitaliste*), in Spain Anticapitalistas, in Italy Sinistra Anticapitalista ... These are small-scale imitations of the larger-scale Podemos, La France Insoumise, Your Party and other attempts to rebrand the left as not socialist.

These are recognitions that socialism/communism are minority ideas; but they represent a belief that by disguising ourselves as something else, socialists/communists can overcome the problem through "the experience of struggle". This approach is one I have in the past characterised as the idea that it is necessary to "lead workers by the nose" to make revolution.⁵ Put another way, it is to try to scam the masses into revolution.

The blunt fact is that socialism and communism are (fairly small) minority ideas, because we still live in the shadow of Stalinism. The generation who were adult and active before 1989-91 are now getting elderly, and there is a certain revival among a small minority of the young of using the communist name and Soviet imagery to épater les bourgeois; but every schoolchild is taught the calamitous history of the USSR and its fall. The large majority view among all classes, outside (perhaps) China,⁶ is that socialism is either undesirable, because it is tyrannical, like the Soviet and east European regimes; or infeasible, because economically radically inefficient, again like the Soviet and east European regimes.

It is nonetheless objectively necessary to promote socialism and communism. And it is true, first, that the working class needs socialism in order to defend its elementary interests. Second, society needs socialism - and this needs to be what Marx called in 1871 "*la domination politique du prolétariat*": the political dominance of the working class over the other classes and in particular management and the state apparatus. And, third, this is only possible with radical democracy and unrestricted freedom of speech, communication and association, and transparency of information.

Working class

The working class needs a socialist project.⁷ The starting point for this is that 'the working class' means, as I have argued before, the whole social class - in and out of work, home-makers, elderly, adults and children - which lacks property in the means of production and in consequence is dependent on the wage share of total output: either directly through wage-work, indirectly through dependence on a wage-earner, or on the 'social wage' (state benefits and charities).

This class is driven towards collective action for two-sided reasons. The first is that the individual bargaining position of wage-workers, faced with the capitalists who own the means of production (and retailers, and landlords ...), is weak. This is not an absolute truth: capitalist development may throw up skills bottlenecks that allow individuals to negotiate for high wages (IT specialists for a period of time were in this position, able to just walk out and into a better job); but such circumstances strongly incentivise capitalists to automate/de-skill the work in question.

The second side is that the competitive structure of capitalism drives capitalists to attempt to force down the wage share. Not only capitalists proper, but also middle class 'savers and strivers' saving through financial markets, need to earn an average return on investments if their relative value is not to fall. Since the

average can only be known after the fact, the only way to earn an average return is to seek an above-average return. Productive firms, which need capital, need to offer to pay their lenders (whether lenders in the strict sense, or shareholders) the going rate and not less.

The result of this competitive dynamic, which operates globally, is that capitalists can never be satisfied with the existing wage share. It is always necessary to attempt to reduce it: whether by direct wage cuts (including below-inflation 'wage increases') and job cuts, or by pushing in politics for reductions in the 'social wage' to allow tax cuts. The global wage share cannot permanently fall below the global aggregate cost of reproduction of labour-power; and local wages cannot fall below what is necessary to supply 2,500 calories a day, plus the most basic possible accommodation and clothing (because without this workers cannot actually keep working). But that still leaves a lot of scope for a falling wage share in most countries.

The result is that workers need trade unions - and cooperatives and renters' organisations, etc - for defensive struggles to maintain their elementary position. Karl Marx characterised the necessary strikes and other actions as "guerrilla struggles".⁸ Through these struggles it is possible for some sections, who for one reason or another have particular economic leverage, to win sectional gains from capital. In particular, under boom conditions more concessions may be made; though the competitive pressure to push the wage share down persists, and concessions generally need to be extorted. In the slump phase of the business cycle the pressure is intensified.

Sectional gains are always vulnerable to being taken back - precisely because they are sectional, and capital can manoeuvre around them (as, for example, replacing British-mined with imported coal and with gas-fired power stations). And capital can politically attack the sectional gains as unfair to other workers. This was how the 1978-79

'Winter of discontent' was used to bring in Thatcher's government; and similar ideological offensives about supposed unfairness to other workers are under way now, in relation to disability and sickness benefits and public-sector pensions.

This problem creates an objective dynamic towards what Marx calls "political action" of the working class: that is, struggles for general legislation, like the Ten Hour Day Act in 1847. That, in turn, has a logic that leads to the creation of workers' political parties - whether socialist or merely 'labour'.

As long as the workers' movement accepts the notion that capitalism will always exist, it also inherently accepts that at the end of the day the wage share must fall. This is true if the point is to preserve the competitiveness of the firm (if, like the 19th century workers' free trade advocates and today's 'Atlanticists for Workers' Loyalty' (Alliance for Workers' Liberty), you accept the Ricardian case for free trade⁹). It is true if it is to preserve the competitiveness of the nation in international trade and in the competition to attract investment capital (the common argument of centre-left and centre-right politicians). And it is true if it is to pay for armaments: Adam Smith's 1776 "defence, however, is of much more importance than opulence", or Herman Goering in 1936 (following US policy debates in 1916-17) arguing for guns to take priority over butter: an argument currently revived.¹⁰

The working class's alternative needs to involve democratically organised planning of production in kind. At one level this should be obvious from the fact that the Ten Hour Day Act, public education, and so on, are already interferences with the market allocation of resources to secure goods identified in kind (more free time; the actual education of children whose parents cannot afford to pay ...) rather than money for free choices.

At another level, suppose there is a 'market socialism' of worker cooperatives linked by money and markets: each cooperative would be driven by market imperatives to self-exploit, to attempt to drive down the wage share. This was part of Karl Marx's arguments against the 'mutualism' of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and it is empirically confirmed by the effects of marketisation in Yugoslavia in the 1960s-70s.¹¹

The result is that 'labour' parties and 'broad left' coalitions that do not pursue the strategic goal of socialism - the conscious replacement of market society by common ownership and planning in kind - inevitably fall in behind one of the two political parties that are inherently thrown up by capitalism: free-market liberalism or patriarchalist nationalism. Both turn out to be scams when they get into, or close to, government office. The result is demoralisation and yet another step in the ratchet movement towards the right in politics that has been going on for the last 60 years (eg, Heath to the right of Macmillan, Thatcher to the right of Heath ...) and has merely become more obvious in the last 20 years.

Planning

It is not just the working class that needs socialism. At a superficial level of analysis, since the 'neoliberal

turn' in the later 1970s-80s, in the 'west' we have been living through an experiment in testing whether (as the neoclassical economists claim) free markets can deliver superior outcomes through financial engineering to the *partial* planning in kind, which had in fact characterised earlier capitalism, and had intensified after the failure of free markets to deliver in war conditions in 1914-16.¹² The neoliberal experiment has, in fact, resulted in systematically *more expensive* outcomes in health and other areas, and *worse* outcomes in public education, housing and transport infrastructure maintenance. The last of these affects everyone (potholes in Britain are a *minor* example), the first three affect everyone except the top 5% of the income distribution.

Equally, politico-legal free markets in public regulation now transparently support what has been called the 'Epstein class' - that is, practical immunity of the rich from the operation of laws. Put another way, the free market in legal services amounts to the sale and denial of justice, in violation of chapter 29 of the Magna Carta; Epstein is merely a single illustration of a general principle, also illustrated in Britain in the inability of the state to hold the water companies to account, the Grenfell Tower story, and the spectacular cronyism and sleaze of 21st century UK governments. Overcoming these dynamics requires at least partial *de-marketisation* of politics, media and law; and these in turn require explicit rationing in kind of access to decision processes, as opposed to price rationing. Again, these problems affect everyone except a very small minority (considerably smaller than the top 5%) who are not 'priced out' of justice and political access.

More fundamentally, avoiding catastrophic consequences from human-induced climate change is quite unavoidably going to involve extensive planning in kind. We need to reduce carbon emissions to avoid climate change accelerating to the point of human extinction. That is a choice in kind, even if it is to be achieved by 'market' mechanisms of 'carbon markets'. In fact, it is perfectly clear from the last 10 years that it will *not* be achieved by 'market mechanisms' - these are at most creating forms of 'greenwashing'. We also need a mass of measures for mitigating consequences that are already unavoidable - which will again involve planning in kind to deal with population movements due to changes in sea level, in fresh water availability, in land fertility, and so on, which are all already visibly in progress.

The inability to get anywhere with international conventions to deal with climate change reflects another side of the problem. The money system entails the state and the regime of many states, geopolitics and the drive towards war.

There is insufficient gold, silver and copper in the world for the transaction needs of money exchange in a moderately complex market economy. Hence already in the later middle ages *credit money* shows up. But credit money depends on state enforcement of debts; and state enforcement of debts depends on the ability of states to discriminate against foreign debtors.

Hence, in turn, capitalist states are driven towards competition in a semi-stable hierarchy. The process throws up a hegemon state, whose currency is the global reserve currency: Britain in the 19th century, the USA since 1945. But the position of *being* the hegemon state leads to inward investments that push up housing costs and in consequence wages, undermining *industrial* competitiveness, leading to offshoring, and the *relative* (not absolute) decline of the hegemon.¹³

Britain managed relative decline through expanding its empire and 'non-tariff barriers' on trade with its colonies, and from around 1900 a policy of aggressive encirclement of Germany. This issued in 1914-18 and 1939-45: and with 1939-45, the destruction of British military power radically reduced British financial parasitism and allowed a new 'long boom' in 1950-70.

The USA has managed relative decline since the 1970s by exporting *simple destruction*: in Mozambique, Angola, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Syria... and also since around 2000 pursuing a policy of aggressive encirclement of China, which has driven the current wars in Ukraine and on Iran. This drive to war is not a false policy choice by US leaders: it results from the inherent dynamics of the USA's position as a (relatively) declining world hegemon.

This too affects all of us. If we do not break with the money mechanism, the logic forces more and yet more destructive wars; and in the end the choice between human extinction through generalised nuclear exchange, or the 'Somalification' of the whole world outside the USA (leading, in turn, to the collapse of the USA itself).

Overall then, the point is that *society* needs to shift sharply into planning in kind of major productive activities, because the continuation of capitalist rule and decision-making through money and markets threatens us not only with worsening immediate conditions, but also with human extinction - either through runaway climate change or generalised nuclear exchange.

USSR

But - as I argued above - socialism is unpopular, because we still live in the shadow of the disastrous Soviet experience.

We have to recognise that the Soviet regime began with an attempt to construct socialism and continued to ideologise itself as 'socialist'. It was not capitalism. If it had been capitalism, its fall in 1989-91 would not have dealt such a body-blow to the *idea* of socialism as, in fact, it did. The USSR (perhaps more than the eastern European satellites) did *aspire to* planning of productive activities in kind. It failed.

This failure is partly the product of the siege warfare conducted by the capitalist powers against the Soviet regime between the failure of open warfare in 1921 and 1941, and between 1946 and 1991. The actual *survival* of the USSR under this siege warfare reflected partly the support of the USA and British empire in 1941-45 and the ability to take equipment from eastern Germany in 1945-50. It reflected partly the fact that this was never socialism in one *country*, but socialism (of a bureaucratic sort) in one of the great European *empires*, including both an industrial core and a large agricultural periphery. This made siege warfare ('sanctions') less immediately effective than they have been in other cases. The lesson from this circumstance is that socialism needs, for us in Britain, to be posed on a *European* scale.

The second element, however, was the absolute dominance of falsehoods in Soviet 'planning'. This flowed from the career interests of managers, party bosses and other full-time officials, in *pretending success in order to keep their jobs or obtain promotion*. The result was 'garbage in, garbage out' in the planning process, and a dynamic towards the Soviet workers' joke: 'They pretend to pay us and we pretend to work'.

Now, incentives for managers and bureaucrats to lie, and pretend things are going better than they are, are not in the least unique to the USSR. They are perfectly visible in ordinary western business management and the

state bureaucracy. They can be seen even in the small-scale bureaucratic hierarchy of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain. The ideologues of capitalism tell us that markets provide the necessary consumer feedback to control managers' lies. This is at most a *partial* truth: while small businesses collapse rapidly if their business models fail, established firms can go on losing money for decades before collapse. Checks on managerial lies and self-deceptions are nonetheless essential to any rational decision-making.

The problem is that the essence of private ownership is monopoly control over decision-making in relation to the asset that is said to be owned. This was already recognised by Bartolus of Saxoferrato (1313-57) in his widely adopted definition of ownership as 'the right of free disposal of a thing, unless prohibited by statute'. The converse of this, however, is that monopoly control of decision-making *is* ownership (even if it is not juridically recognised as such).

The effect of the regime of career managers and bureaucrats without anyone to whom they were effectively answerable was thus to make each manager owner of 'his' factory, or whatever, each regional party boss owner of 'his' region, and so on - subject only to the occasional arbitrary interventions of the Renaissance court-style cliques at the centre. The result is what American property lawyer Michael Heller in 1998 called an 'anticommons' (though he did not apply it to the Soviet regime itself, but to the transition in the 1990s): the excessive proliferation of ill-defined property rights paralyses economic decision-making.¹⁴ Marx already identified the issue in 1843-44 in his critique of Hegel's idealisation of the Prussian state bureaucracy: state bureaucrats do not express the 'general interest', but their particular turf interests.¹⁵ Bureaucratic or managerial socialism thus turns into the opposite of genuine socialism; and *tends towards capitalism* - either by way of collapse, as in 1989-91, or by way of the managed expansion of capitalism, as in China.

Answerable

To whom are the bureaucrats and managers to be answerable, if they are not to be Soviet-style informal owners, or answerable to capital (as western bureaucrats and managers are)? They can *for some purposes* (in relation to *local* decisions) be made accountable to those immediately below; but this does not solve the problem of *planning as coordination* on a national and international scale, which we need to solve (at least to some extent) in order to get beyond market ordering. Local answerability alone winds up as (at best) market-linked co-ops or Yugoslav-style 'self-management' under marketisation; and, as noted above, this fails.

The answer is that the bureaucrats need to be answerable to *the working class as a class*: as I already said, to the whole social class - in and out of work, home-makers, elderly, adults and children - which lacks property in the means of production and in consequence is dependent on the wage share of total output: either directly through wage-work, indirectly through dependence on a wage-earner, or on the 'social wage' (state benefits and charities).

That the proletariat is in charge and subordinates the middle classes (including management and state bureaucracy) to itself is what Marx meant in 1871 by "*la domination politique du prolétariat*", proletarian political rule, which is more commonly called among Marxists "the dictatorship of the proletariat".

And again, as I already said, this class is *driven* to collective activity - trade unions, cooperatives, collectivist

political parties - because its *separation from* the means of production means that organised collective action is its only strength. It is this proletarian drive to collective activity that is the ground of the Marxist wager on the working class. It is not, contrary to the ideas of the revolutionary syndicalists (who imagine that they are Trotskyists), the employed workers' strength at the point of production, which can always be dislocated by capitalist manoeuvres.

Proletarian political rule thus implies everyone gets one vote, one voice, freedom of access to information and communication, and freedom of association. Freedom of association is critical. It is critical precisely because collective action is the indispensable weapon of the working class as a class. And, conversely, socialism - getting beyond capitalism - means conscious collective action to take control of the major means of production, through at least partial planning in kind. The rejection of freedom of association is fatal to the project of socialism.

Meaning

The consequence is that the meaning of anti-factionalism is, necessarily, to tell the broad masses that you intend to repeat one of the fundamental reasons for the failure of Soviet planning. What you are offering may be obvious Stalinism - as is true of the SWP and a lot of the far-left groups.

Or the message may be merely that there is no alternative to the capitalist managerialist regime under which we live. This is the meaning of proprietary branding operations like Momentum, like La France Insoumise, and like what the Corbyn leadership is attempting to do.

It is also the meaning of the idea common to a lot of the left, which is committed to codes of conduct and speech controls. These express the popular-front alliance with the corporate and governmental Human Resources departments that has characterised the 'intersectionalist' left since before the term 'intersectionality' was coined.

In this context, no amount of rebranding - as 'anti-capitalists', as Podemos, as La France Insoumise, as Your Party, and so on - can prevent the message getting through, that what the left *really* stands for is just more of the same crap - or something worse.

Rejecting anti-factionalism and bureaucratic speech controls, and so on, in the workers' movement is not at all a secondary question, compared to 'political line'. It is the absolute core of the question: do you stand for working class rule to break beyond capitalism? Or are you for a futile attempt to re-run Stalinism or a managerialist project, in which nothing much will change, and at the end of the day the victors will be the far right? It is radical democracy that can *enable* workers' rule and socialism; and it is radical democracy within the movement that can make the idea of socialism a believable alternative to broader forces.

In this article I have focussed on fundamentals. In the third and final part next week, I will return to the Mandelites' 'soft' version of anti-factionalism and the balance sheets of their own disastrous policies towards 'broad-front' parties ●

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Notes

1. morningstaronline.co.uk/article/your-party-what-kind-socialist-party-does-british-working-class-actually-need-2026.
2. revsco21.uk/2026/04/08/the-charms-and-pitfalls-of-extreme-pluralism-lessons-from-die-linke.
3. redmole.substack.com/p/flat-pack-leninism-why-mike-macnair.
4. On the working class being a majority in the UK, see M Macnair, 'Class composition in a snapshot' *Weekly Worker* August 21 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1549/class-composition-in-a-snapshot) and August 28 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1550/class-composition-in-a-snapshot). Globally

a 3.73 billion labour force (data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TL.F.TOTL.IN) of the total global population of around 8.3 billion (www.worldometers.info/world-population), which, with a global age dependency ratio of 58% (40% children, 14% elderly - data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.DPND), yields around 67% working class. The point that the working class is more in the 'global south' is made by several authors: eg, R Munck, 'Class, labour and the global working class' in M Atzeni *et al* (eds) *Handbook of research on the global political economy of work* Cheltenham 2023 chapter 1.

5. 'Spontaneity and Marxist theory' *Weekly Worker* September 5 2007: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/687/spontaneity-and-marxist-theory. The following article is *headlined* 'Leading workers by the nose' (September 12 2007 - weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/688/leading-workers-by-the-nose, but is actually mainly about how far the question of power was or is actually posed. (More context of these arguments available at communismiversity.uk/mike-macnair-programme-and-party-articles).

6. I take it that there is probably considerable mass support for 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', which is highly economically successful, though the workers are savagely oppressed and exploited. Compare E Griffin in *Liberty's dawn: a people's history of the industrial revolution* (New Haven CT 2014), arguing from autobiographies, diaries, etc that, in spite of the awful conditions in 18th-19th century British industry, working there was perceived as an emancipation from the petty tyrannies and *worse* material conditions of village life. On the other hand, North Korea, Vietnam or Cuba may well display the fragile political consensus of late Soviet society.

7. Here and below I use 'socialism' as we do in the CPGB (and as Leon Trotsky did in his 1907 *Results and prospects*, to mean what *immediately* follows the overthrow of capitalist rule: that is, a contradictory society under workers' rule on the road to communism as a stateless, classless society.

8. *Value, price and profit* (1865) chapter 14 (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/value-price-profit/ch03.htm); 'Trade unions: their past, their present, their future' (Geneva Congress of the First International, 1866): www.themilitant.com/2012/7632/763249.html.

9. See 'Free trade tailism' *Weekly Worker* November 22 2018: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1228/free-trade-tailism. (More argument in 'Free-trade illusions', December 13 2018 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1231/free-trade-illusions), and 'Working class trade policy', December 20 2018 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1232/working-class-trade-policy).

10. *Wealth of Nations* book IV, chapter 2: www.marxists.org/reference/archive/smith-adam/works/wealth-of-nations/book04/ch02.htm (defending the English Navigation Acts as a defence measure); Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guns_versus_butter_model) summarises the history of 'guns or butter'. Current: see, for example, 'Cabinet ministers back welfare cuts to fund defence' *Telegraph* April 16; 'Badenoch and Starmer clash over welfare spending at PMQs' *BBC News* April 29 (www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/ce35dwdvwt). For the current political dynamics of the issue in Europe see, for example, S Sacchi, G Buzzelli and C de la Porte, "'Guns versus butter'" in public opinion: the politicization of the warfare-welfare trade-off', *Journal of European Public Policy* Vol 33 (2026), pp1199-1225.

11. See C Samary, *Le marche contre l'autogestion: l'expérience yougoslave* La Brèche 1988; also *Plan, market and democracy* (www.iire.org/node/663), lectures 2 and 3.

12. For the characterisation of earlier capitalism, see J Guldi *Roads to power: Britain invents the infrastructure state* Cambridge MA 2012 (18th century Britain); DF Noble *Forces of production* New York 1984 (19th century USA). World War I: see JE Hutton *Welfare and housing: a practical record of war-time management* London 1918.

13. More elaboration on these points and supporting references in M Macnair, 'Imperialism and the state', four-part series of *Weekly Worker* supplements, March 17 2022 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1387/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-i); March 24 2022 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1388/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-ii); April 7 2022 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1390/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-iii); and April 14 2022 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1391/supplement-imperialism-and-the-state-part-iv).

14. 'The Tragedy of the anticommons: property in the transition from Marx to markets' *Harvard Law Review* Vol 111 (1998), pp621-88, available at scholarship.law.columbia.edu/context/faculty_scholarship/article/1323/viewcontent/111_Harv_L_Rev_621_Heller.pdf. Heller's argument is an inversion of the 'Tragedy of the commons' proposed by neoclassical economist and ecologist Garrett Hardin in 1968 (*Science* Vol 162, pp1243-1248 - available at math.uchicago.edu), that the absence of ownership creates overgrazing, but which empirical studies have shown merely to drive customary or explicit rationing agreements. More recently see W Li and C Kerven, 'Between commons and anticommons: a nested common-private interface framework' *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* Vol 11 (2024): www.nature.com/articles/s41599-024-02992-9.

15. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/ch03.htm.

IRAN



Iran has been badly bombed ... but not beaten

Standoff amid talk of a deal

No surprise, the Tehran regime has survived. Nor has it been forced to sue for an unequal peace. But the country is economically on its knees and the latest Pakistani-brokered deal could easily flounder. **Yasmine Mather** gives her assessment

The Persian Gulf is currently about as stable as a house of cards in a hurricane. By the time you finish reading this - if you have not already been distracted by the next crisis - the situation will have changed again. But, as of May 6, as I write, we are all witnessing Donald Trump's strategic masterpiece that is the 'pause' or 'cancellation' of 'Project Freedom'.

After the US navy managed to heroically escort a grand total of two American-flagged merchant ships (and one Maersk subsidiary) through the Strait of Hormuz, Donald Trump has decided to effectively ghost the operation. Apparently, the passage of three ships is enough to declare victory before claiming "great progress" in negotiations. Thousands of other commercial vessels are still sitting there.

This does not mean that the US has suddenly lost its military superiority: US naval power remains overwhelming. But it does show the limits of that power, when military escalation threatens wider economic disruption, fuel-price shocks, domestic political pressure and the possibility of a wider regional war. A superpower can send warships through the strait: what it cannot easily do is guarantee that such a move will restore normal commercial circulation, discipline

Iran, reassure markets, maintain allied support and preserve the ceasefire all at once. In that sense, the reversal is a sign not of American collapse, but of imperial overstretch: Washington is strong enough to threaten and intervene, but not strong enough to impose a clean settlement. The fact that Trump had to dress up retreat as diplomatic progress through Pakistan underlines this shift.

Pakistan

Last weekend Trump publicly said he is "not satisfied" with Iran's latest proposal, although he added that he had not read it! According to reports from Pakistan, Iran has now sent a number of responses to Washington's amendments, but the details have not been made public. According to Al Jazeera, the latest Iranian proposal appears to centre on reopening the strait, delaying nuclear talks, and seeking sanctions relief, guarantees against further attacks, and other concessions. Taken together, this suggests that Washington is trying to shape any settlement on terms it can accept, while Tehran is still bargaining through its own counter offer, although according to the country's foreign minister negotiations were still progressing in Pakistan (as of May 6).

According to the *Financial Times*,

the world is caught in a race between two blockades: the United States restricting Iran's oil income; and Iran threatening the Strait of Hormuz, through which a huge share of global oil flows. Markets have stayed relatively calm, because oil supplies were high before the crisis, inventories are still comfortable, and future prices suggest traders expect the disruption to ease. But if the standoff lasts, the impact will be much more serious. Although the world economy uses less oil per unit of output than in the past, that does not make the situation safer. Oil is now more concentrated in essential transport and freight uses that cannot easily be replaced, so disruption could hit hard and suddenly. In that sense, modern economies are more vulnerable than they look. However, Iran's ability to suppress economic pain is also in doubt, even if it has often managed to endure hardship, using a combination of subsidies for the allies of the regime and repression of economic protests.

Those who follow the social media posts of the section of the Iranian left who were or have become uncritical supporters of the Islamic Republic, as well as the global supporters of the Iranian regime and its 'Axis of Resistance', will be very familiar with the quotes from two US academics:

Jeffrey Sachs and John Mearsheimer. Sachs frames the Iran war as a symptom of a broader historical shift: in his view, it reveals "the limits of US power" and belongs to a longer process, in which western hegemony has been steadily declining since the end of World War II and the cold war's unipolar moment. Mearsheimer makes a complementary, but more operational, argument, saying the war is "not going well for the United States", that Washington lacks a credible "off-ramp" and that no decisive victory has been achieved; he therefore describes the conflict as tending toward a war of attrition rather than a clean American success. Taken together, the remarks suggest that the conflict is best understood less as a demonstration of US control than as evidence of strategic overstretch, Iranian resilience and the erosion of Washington's ability to impose a rapid or decisive settlement. Others like Robert Pape speak of Iran's emergence as a fourth global power that controls the Strait of Hormuz.

The problem with such assertions is that in reality the situation can change quickly and dramatically. Washington is not retreating because it has become weak in military terms: it is being constrained because military escalation now carries serious

economic and political costs. Iran's survival so far should not be interpreted as victory. Such assessments ignore the disastrous internal situation after weeks of war and a new blockade that can potentially change the situation dramatically. Iran's employment sector is grappling with its most catastrophic wave of contract terminations and rising joblessness in recent memory. A combination of a serious economic slump, ruined industrial assets, extended digital blackouts and plummeting consumer demand has forced numerous businesses to downsize staff or cease activities entirely.

Economy

In addition, the economic outlook is very bleak. According to an April 2025 report from the Statistical Centre of Iran, the annual inflation rate has just surged to 53.7%. This burden is felt most acutely by those with the lowest income, who face a rate of 58.2%, while food prices have skyrocketed by over 115%. Reports from industrial zones and the tech sector suggest that the combination of military conflict, inflation and severed trade routes has triggered a domino effect of layoffs and insolvency across both major corporations and small enterprises.

Ahmad Meydari, the minister of

labour, noted in early May 2025 that over 150,000 individuals filed for unemployment benefits in a matter of weeks. Alireza Mahjoub of the House of Labour has mentioned the loss of 700,000 jobs, specifying that 130,000 resulted directly from military strikes, while 600,000 were indirect casualties of the conflict. Providing an even grimmer outlook, Gholamhossein Mohammadi, deputy minister of labour, estimated that the war has obliterated over one million jobs directly, with the total number of affected workers - both direct and indirect - reaching approximately two million.

The recruitment site, JobVision, recorded a staggering 318,000 job applications in a single day - a 50% spike. At the same time, the unemployment insurance system is buckling. Hassan Sadeghi of the Labor Community Veterans Union observed that, since the attacks began, the pool of applicants surged toward one million, overwhelming a fund that previously serviced only 180,000 people. In response, the state has launched the 'Reducing layoffs' initiative, which provides new credit for the insurance fund and temporary tax breaks for companies that avoid further staff cuts. Postwar data reveals a fragmented landscape regarding Iranian employment. While certain regions are in shock, others have maintained a level of stability.

The western provinces are struggling most significantly, as the missiles and bombs landed mainly in these regions. Kermanshah officials talk of a 15.2% unemployment rate, followed by Kurdistan at 13.7% and Khuzestan at 13.3%. These areas, already facing structural issues, were further crippled by infrastructure damage and supply chain failures. Lorestan has an unemployment rate of 11%. Conversely, Mazandaran and Yazd have shown more resilience (credited to Mazandaran's agricultural diversity and Yazd's mining and manufacturing sectors). However, even here, declining economic participation suggests that many discouraged workers are simply exiting the workforce.

The unemployment surge is the result of long-standing structural weaknesses meeting the sudden shock of war. Beyond direct combat damage, government policy failures - specifically regarding power stability and persistent internet outages - have played a significant role. Industrial hubs report that power cuts have made operations untenable for heavy industries, which form the backbone of the national supply chain.

Mehdi Ghodsi, an economist at the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, believes the Iranian economy is suffering from simultaneous inflation and recession. He points out that the destruction of 'upstream' sectors like steel has caused a ripple effect, starving 'downstream' units of materials and forcing closures. Ghodsi also emphasises the 'neither war nor peace' atmosphere. This political limbo has caused both investors and consumers to retreat, pushing the economy into a critical state that can likely only be resolved through de-escalation and a reopening of the economic environment.

Small and medium-sized enterprises are perhaps the hardest hit. Reports from industrial towns like Pakdasht and Alborz show employers preparing layoff lists immediately following the holidays. The internet blackout has specifically devastated online retailers and freelancers, essentially zeroing out their income. Even giants like Digikala reportedly laid off hundreds of staff across administrative and logistics sectors. The media industry has not been spared: the ILNA news agency has moved to a freelance-only model after dismissing its permanent staff,

reflecting a broader trend of media outlets facing imminent closure. There have been displays of euphoria about the war by regime supporters on the street, but all this can change quickly if the economic crisis worsens.

For more than four decades, the US has used sanctions against Iran as a tool of pressure, beginning in 1979 and intensifying in later waves. In practice, these measures do not simply 'punish' a state: they squeeze ordinary people first, fuelling inflation, shortages, poverty and social tension. They also create space for profiteers, black-market networks, and rent-seeking elites who grow rich from scarcity, while the rest of society is pushed deeper into hardship. That widening inequality breeds resentment, anger, protests and, at times, unrest. This is why sanctions are often seen not just as economic warfare, but as part of a broader strategy of destabilisation that can be exploited for regime-change ambitions, even if that goal has not been achieved so far. No-one should assume it could never happen.

The point, then, is not that Iran is winning, nor that the US is simply losing. Such a reading would flatten a contradictory situation into propaganda. Iran's ability to endure pressure, disrupt regional calculations and survive military escalation does not amount to victory, when its own society is being pushed deeper into inflation, unemployment, repression and uncertainty. Equally, Washington's retreat from a clean military or diplomatic settlement does not mean the end of American power. The US remains militarily dominant, but it is increasingly forced to exercise that dominance through sanctions, blockades, threats and destabilisation rather than stable leadership.

What we are seeing is therefore a crisis in the form of imperial power itself: a shift from confident hegemony to coercive management of decline. This is why the immediate conflict in the Gulf has to be placed inside the wider structure of imperialism, energy control and inter-capitalist rivalry.

Imperialism

The history of global power does not move in a straight line from strength to collapse. It changes unevenly, through decline, adaptation and reorganisation. The US remains the strongest single state in the world, but the form of its power has changed.

Giovanni Arrighi and Immanuel Wallerstein both help explain why decline does not necessarily look like sudden breakdown. Arrighi's account links US decline to financialisation and military overstretch, while Wallerstein argues that the US has been "fading as a global power" since the end of the Vietnam War. The important point is that decline does not end an empire at once: it often pushes that empire toward more coercive methods of rule. In that sense, the crisis of hegemony does not remove imperial power: it changes its form. This matters if we consider imperialism not as a final and abnormal stage of capitalism, but a system built into capitalism's normal functioning, dependent on states, hierarchy and competition between political units. Imperialism is therefore not just a symptom of late decay: it is a mode through which capitalism manages crisis and reproduces itself across unequal territories.

Modern imperialism is not driven by one factor alone: it works through several linked systems. Unequal exchange transfers value from poorer regions to richer ones through trade, investment and supply chains. Dollar power allows the US to discipline other states through finance, sanctions and debt. Military reach secures bases, routes and chokepoints. Ecological crisis is also pushed outward, with the costs of extraction and pollution shifted onto the global south. In David Harvey's framework, this is part of

the wider logic of "accumulation by dispossession", while Ellen Meiksins Wood argues that capitalism creates a new form of domination by "purely economic means", alongside "unlimited militarism".

The energy question belongs inside this structure. Timothy Mitchell's argument in *Carbon democracy* is especially useful here. He shows that oil from the Middle East gave western powers a way to rely on "cheap and abundant energy", and that this helped produce a political order that became "dependent on an undemocratic Middle East". The point is not that oil matters only as a commodity: it matters because control over energy helps shape the wider organisation of power, production and dependency. In the current context it is far more important to deprive China of access to cheap oil.

As US hegemony weakens, 'multipolarity' has been presented as an alternative - and at times a positive one. Samir Amin argued that poorer countries need the ability to "sever connections with the main mechanisms of imperial dominance". In his view, this required "delinking" from the logic of the world market, so that domestic development could take priority, and a more plural world might create space for autonomous development. His arguments have some supporters among sections of the Iranian left, hence the need to argue against it.

First of all, multipolarity is not the same as anti-capitalism. Even if a nation 'delinks' from the US-dominated International Monetary Fund or World Bank, it remains trapped within the global law of value. If a country in the global south 'delinks', but continues to organise its domestic economy around profit and commodity production, it is still subject to the same systemic pressure. The competition between 'poles' (eg, the US vs China) often leads to a 'race to the bottom' for labour rights and environmental standards, as each pole tries to out-produce the other. Multipolarity is not the end of imperialism: it is the localisation of exploitation.

In reality a plural world is only a liberated world if that plurality exists in the form of socialist cooperation, not competitive accumulation - Amin's vision of "autonomous development" is impossible under global capitalism. Because capital is international, any 'delinked' state that tries to build a socialist or even an independent social-democratic system will face immediate capital flight, sanctions or 'scissors' crises (where the cost of imported technology rises, while the price of exported raw materials falls). The key question is not whether US power is declining, but what kind of order is replacing it. Currently, China is a potential rival and there is no sign of multipolar centres. However, even if such a scenario were to exist, it would not mean a better, more equal world.

Strategic zone

The escalation toward war with Iran should be understood in this wider context. It is not about nuclear technology or Iran's regional influence. It is about the strategic control of energy in a period of sharper rivalry between the US and China. The deeper issue is not oil in the abstract, but who can secure access to cheap energy, on what terms and under whose protection. In a world economy still shaped by hydrocarbons, that question has direct effects on industrial growth and long-term power.

This is why the Middle East remains central. It is a strategic zone, where energy production, shipping routes, military bases and financial power come together. Control over this region matters because it shapes

the conditions under which other powers can grow. From this angle, hostility toward Iran is not simply a response to one state's behaviour: it is part of a larger attempt to keep the region inside the strategic orbit of the US and prevent China from securing stable, cheap access to energy on favourable terms. That is the real political meaning of 'energy security'.

When it comes to China and the current war in the Middle East, here we have a classic case of short-term geopolitical advantage colliding with long-term economic vulnerability. China has gained some strategic and diplomatic room from the conflict: Washington's attention and military resources have been pulled deeper into the Middle East, while Beijing has tried to present itself as a sober mediator, especially through its behind-the-scenes role in encouraging Iran towards the April ceasefire talks. But the same conflict has also exposed China's biggest structural weakness: its dependence on imported energy and on shipping routes through the Gulf. The war has distracted the US from the Indo-Pacific, at least temporarily, reducing some pressure on China over Taiwan and the South China Sea.

However, China has also lost. The conflict has hit energy security hard - the country's crude oil imports reached a record 11.6 million barrels per day in 2025, and over 70% of its oil consumption depends on imports. The wider economic risks are also real. Higher oil prices, disrupted shipping and weaker demand in Europe and the US all threaten China's export-led growth model. Chinese and Hong Kong markets have already shown sensitivity to the conflict. Reports in March said Hong Kong stocks fell sharply, as investors worried about stagflation, oil prices and weaker demand. Market instability could turn a geopolitical opportunity into an economic liability.

Meanwhile, if the conflict produced regime change in Tehran or a strongly pro-western Iranian government, Beijing would lose an important sanctioned-energy supplier and a strategic partner operating partly outside the US-dominated financial system.

Iran therefore stands at the centre of several overlapping contradictions. For Washington, it is a pressure point in the struggle to preserve regional dominance and restrict China's access to cheap and secure energy. For Beijing, it is both a useful strategic partner and a source of dangerous exposure to Gulf instability.

But for the Iranian people, the conflict is neither a symbol of heroic 'multipolar' resistance nor simply a chess move in great-power rivalry. It is experienced through sanctions, inflation, unemployment, factory closures, internet shutdowns, repression and the constant threat of wider war. The survival of the Islamic Republic under pressure should not be mistaken for victory, just as the limits of American power should not be confused with emancipation.

The only genuinely progressive alternative lies in opposing imperialist aggression, while also refusing to prettify the Iranian state, and in placing the social needs, democratic rights and independent struggle of Iran's working people at the centre of anti-war politics ●

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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Reform is a party of spiv capitalism

He who pays the piper

Nigel Farage likes to present himself as one of your mates down the pub, but in reality, writes Eddie Ford, his friends are filthy rich. Then there is Christopher Harborne, the crypto billionaire and Reform mega-donor

Everyone expected Reform to do well on May 7. Politics are moving to the right across the world and mainstream liberal parties are getting hammered. It should be added that the right is extremely well financed, including, of course, Reform and its effective owner, Nigel Farage.

Farage likes to act as if he is an ordinary Brit who enjoys nothing more than a pint down the pub with his mates, but in reality his real friends are multimillionaires and - as we must all surely now know, thanks to recent headlines - billionaires. Or rather, one billionaire in particular, the Bangkok-based Christopher Harborne - a tech capitalist who has global business interests, not least in what is for many the mysterious world of cryptocurrencies. Harborne makes the vast majority of his fortune from early crypto bets, including a sizeable stake in the stablecoin platform, Tether. He also holds Thai citizenship under the name, Chakrit Sakunkrit, which (thanks to the Panama Papers revelations) appears to be a separate identity for business purposes - he uses that name as a director of the investment company, Seaminco Securities.¹

On August 1 last year Harborne gave Reform a £9 million donation - the largest ever by a living individual, meaning at the time that Reform had raised more in donations than the Tories, Labour and the Liberal Democrats combined.² Since then, of course, the only way is up - he donated another £3 million in March this year, making him the largest single donor to a UK political party in any financial year ever. As of last month, his overall donations so far to Reform UK amount to more than £22 million in total - roughly *two-thirds* of all the party's donations since its foundation.

However, another British billionaire who helped build one of the world's first major crypto trading platforms, and currently based in Hong Kong, Ben Delo, says he has given £4 million this year to Reform.³ He wrote in the *Telegraph* that he had made the donation before the government's cap on donations to political parties by British citizens living abroad - Labour recently announced a new limit of £100,000 a year. Delo is now planning to move back to the UK and therefore will not be subject in the future to the new rules for donors. The cap may limit further contributions from Harborne, who is now based in Bangkok, though undoubtedly he will attempt to find a way around it, as he can literally afford the best lawyers money can buy.

In what must be music to Farage's ears, Delo went on to tell the *Telegraph* that "the biggest obstacle to national recovery is the entrenched self-deception of our elites" - not referring to the likes of himself or Harborne, of course - and describes himself as a champion of free speech. Telling you how fabulously wealthy individuals like Delo like to operate, he has



Nigel Farage: a puppet pulled by golden strings

also given support to Rupert Lowe MP, who is challenging Nigel Farage from the right in the form of Restore UK,⁴ while also connecting with more mainstream figures, including Kemi Badenoch and former cabinet minister Michael Gove.

Gift

But we now have the furore over Nigel Farage receiving a £5 million 'gift' from Christopher Harborne in 2024 to apparently fund his personal security shortly before he became an MP - therefore that did not count as a 'political donation', argues Farage (and, of course, was not subject to tax).⁵ We were further told that the Reform leader was only revealing details about the 'gift' because "someone has got hold of material about my personal finances, which is outrageous" - strongly hinting that the information had been illegally obtained, but did not say by whom or why.

Remember, before the general election Farage had said that he did not intend to stand as an MP. He told his no doubt sympathetic friends - but not the guys in the local boozer, you can guarantee - about the onerous financial toll his political career had placed on him. He had previously declared, Boris Johnson-like, that "there's no money in politics". But he suddenly changed his mind in June 2024. He also committed to remain Reform leader for five years, that, shortly before receiving Harborne's donation (sorry, 'gift'). So maybe there's money in politics after all!

Farage also revealed that he was victim early last year of a firebombing attack on his home. An incendiary device was pushed through his letterbox. Hence "this money was given to me so that I would be safe and secure for the rest of my life". Plucking the heartstrings, he explained how he has "tried and failed

in the past to get security funded by the home office and I don't think the state will ever help me." He went on to complain about the "inexplicable" decision to reduce his government-funded security detail. But luckily Christopher Harborne is an "ardent supporter" who was deeply concerned about the Reform leader's safety. So Farage can now afford his own private security. Apparently, the reason for this concern goes back to 2019, when Harborne accompanied Farage on the campaign trail when he was attacked ... with a milkshake!

But this account does not entirely make sense. The firebombing that Farage mentions happened last year - a year after the gift from Harborne. Prior to publication, in correspondence with *The Guardian*, which broke the story of Harborne's gift, neither Farage's nor Harborne's representatives mentioned security as being an issue at all. Or so it seems.

Whatever the exact timeline of events, the two have a strong connection, going back years. Previously, Harborne had given Reform's forerunner, the Brexit Party, millions, already making him one of the largest British political donors in the modern era. Before that he had donated smaller sums averaging £15,000 per annum - coming to a total of about £270,000 - to the Conservative Party. In November 2022, Harborne actually donated £1 million to the office of Boris Johnson Ltd, one of the biggest donations ever made to an individual British politician. In turn (you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours), the government awarded Qinetiq, a company in which Harborne was the largest single shareholder, an £80 million ministry of defence contract in January 2023. Harborne is a perfect example of someone hedging their rightwing bets.

On the other hand, Ben Habib,

another rightwing critic of Nigel Farage and former co-leader of Reform - now the leader of Advance UK - says that Harborne "controlled" the Brexit Party through Farage, and both he and Farage "anointed" Boris Johnson in the 2019 general election "It stank," Habib declared - an example of "when politicians dance to the tune of their donors".

Conflict

Farage has been accused of a "conflict of interest". He took millions in a "personal gift" from Harborne, that just months before pledging to slash tax and regulation on the digital assets industry if he becomes prime minister. Quid pro quo? Thus last year Reform published a draft bill in May 2025, which promised to deregulate the crypto industry, create a state-owned bitcoin reserve, as well as cutting capital gains tax on its transactions.

Indeed, Farage has eagerly courted crypto voters and financiers, positioning himself as their "champion" in an echo of Donald Trump's enthusiasm for the digital assets sector - Farage has a personal stake in crypto after investing nearly £280,000 in the London-listed Stack BTC, whose purpose is to buy and hold bitcoin. Not everyone is impressed. Dan Neidle, founder of Tax Policy Associates - which exists to "expose avoidance and abuse" and "propose practical reforms"⁶ - has said Reform's proposal to cut capital gains tax on crypto would not make the UK "particularly competitive", given the fact that many countries did not have any levy on that asset class. He also wonders why any government would want to make crypto more attractive than other investments, such as equities.⁷

Regardless of all that, the Reform leader has presumably broken House of Commons rules - approved in 2022 - over Harborne's donation, which

explicitly states that "new members must register all their current financial interests, and any registrable benefits (other than earnings) received in the 12 months before their election within one month of their election", further adding: "Both the possible motive of the giver and the use to which the gift is to be put should be considered. If there is any doubt, the benefit should be registered."

Naturally, a Reform spokesperson has stated any suggestion that policy development "is connected to or influenced by individual donors is false", further insisting that Harborne's "unconditional gift" to Farage and his decision to stand as an MP, or Reform's policy stance of the crypto industry, are "entirely unrelated" - the money was given purely to ensure Farage's personal safety as a citizen rather than a politician. Good luck in finding anyone who really believes that.

As it stands, Nigel Farage has been referred to parliament's standards watchdog by the Conservative Party, with Kevin Hollinrake, the Tory chair, believing that Farage had been "obliged" to declare the gift. Kemi Badenoch got in on the Farage-bashing act too, saying on the BBC's *Today* programme that there was something "fishy" about Farage's undisclosed £5 million donation - "What was that money for? Who's bought him?" She sternly rebuked the Reform leader as "not someone who plays by the rules" - as opposed to some like herself, of course, as a virtuous Tory Party leader.

As a result of his referral to the parliamentary standards commissioner for investigation, Farage could face censure - perhaps even suspension from parliament and a possible by-election in his seat, if they decide to come down on him like a ton of bricks.

But that is very unlikely to happen, and it is sheer hypocrisy for a Conservative leader to complain about someone receiving generous donations from a wealthy business person - the Tories have been perfectly happy to accept such money in the past, while never missing an opportunity to attack the Labour Party for receiving trade union cash, which is paltry by comparison.

No, it is just sour grapes on the part of the Tories, because big business and the very wealthy are not *automatically* backing the Conservative Party any more - they can now go elsewhere to get their agenda pushed! ●

Notes

1. www.thenewseuropean.co.uk/brexit-news/westminster-news/farage-hangs-up-on-bbc-journalist-investigating-brexit-party-donor-93540.
2. donation.watch/en/unitedkingdom/party/REFORM/donors.
3. theguardian.com/politics/2026/apr/08/british-crypto-billionaire-ben-delo-says-he-has-given-4m-to-reform-uk.
4. rupertlowe.co.uk.
5. archive.is/Uuh5e.
6. taxpolicy.org.uk.
7. archive.is/UjVy5.