

weekly **worker**



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No 1459 September 21 2023

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

AMERICA STAGGERS TOWARDS ITS NEXT CRISIS



LETTERS



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

Chile defeat

Mike Macnair's article on Chile 1973 follows a familiar pattern ('National road to disaster', September 7). The arguments presented by a range of currents on the left are reviewed, summarised and quoted from, then pronounced deficient: "stories of failure to learn lessons from the experience of the Allende government".

The logic behind such an approach is, I suppose, as follows. It is necessary to expose the errors of all competing tendencies on the left. When all have been discredited, the masses will have no alternative but to flock to the banners of the correct programme, thus creating the mass communist party. Well, perhaps. But I doubt if I shall live to see it.

In dealing with the Socialist Workers Party, Macnair refers several times to the article by myself and Chris Harman from 1973: 'Chile: end of the parliamentary road' (*International Socialism* September 1973). Now if there are inadequacies in this piece, it would be scarcely surprising. It was written within a week of the coup, and based on such information as we were able to glean from the bourgeois press.

A great deal more information has become available since then, and Macnair makes some useful and valid points. But it is, to say the least, surprising that in his treatment of the SWP position, he makes not a single mention of the various articles by Mike Gonzalez: in particular 'The left and the coup in Chile' (*International Socialism* winter 1984). Macnair can scarcely claim ignorance of Gonzalez's work - five minutes Googling would have been enough to make it available. If one's aim is serious political clarification rather than scoring cheap debating points, then surely one should confront one's opponents at their strongest point, not their weakest.

Thus various writers are criticised by Macnair for "not taking the MIR [Revolutionary Left Movement] seriously". He alleges that "subsequent SWP authors ignored it". Yet Gonzalez discusses the MIR at some length and makes a sharp political critique of its role: "Its politics were Guevarist, devoted to the preparation of armed struggle, which would be conducted by a small group of professional revolutionaries ... Thus the revolution could be conducted by the revolutionaries on behalf of an undistinguished mass of 'the people' ... So, while the MIR declared itself militarily and organisationally independent of the [Popular Unity] UP government, politically it remained fatally dependent on it." If Macnair wants a serious debate, then he should refer to and confront this analysis.

Likewise Macnair claims the SWP and others "play up the *cordones industriales*". Now in our 1973 piece Harman and I had relatively little information on the *cordones*. Gonzalez, on the other hand, had studied them in some depth. He quotes extensively from the statements and documents issued by the *cordones*, and refers to their newspaper *Tarea Urgente*. For Gonzalez the *cordones* were "the organs of workers' democracy generated by the class in the struggle". As he argued, "they did not arise out of thin air. They were

the outcome of an upward spiral in the class struggle, the product of workers' activity that had moved to a higher level in the last two years of the Frei regime and continued to develop after Allende's election."

And Gonzalez argues that the *cordones* offered a potential alternative to the terrible defeat suffered by the Chilean working class: "How different it would have been, had the left achieved roots in the working class movement, which had created what was effectively the embryo of dual power ..." Macnair may not accept this conclusion. Fair enough; any discussion of alternatives must be speculative. But at least he should have had the intellectual honesty to confront Gonzalez's arguments and the detailed evidence they were based on, rather than simply ignoring their existence.

Macnair supports his arguments with reference to Trotsky's criticism of the "fetishism of soviets". But the way he cites the point is somewhat misleading. He is honest enough to give a link to what Trotsky wrote in *The lessons of October*. Here it is quite clear that Trotsky is juxtaposing soviets to factory committees - also products of the self-activity and self-organisation of the working class. In different contexts working class self-organisation takes different forms - in Chile it was the *cordones*.

I am no longer a member of the SWP, but I would defend its line on Chile precisely because of the importance given to the *cordones* as a recognition of the centrality of working class self-activity in any revolutionary confrontation.

In the Trotskyist tradition (and this very much includes the SWP) there has always been a tendency to explain any defeated revolution with the formula, 'There was no revolutionary party'. True, but inadequate. Why do revolutionary parties come into existence - or fail to do so? It is not as a result of an act of will on the part of a minority, but a transformation of mass consciousness and creativity. Parties emerge from specific historical circumstances - in particular the level of class struggle and the self-activity of the working class. Macnair accuses his opponents of neglecting "the role of mass parties in creating and leading the soviets". But this is a very one-sided account of the interrelation of party and soviets - one which seriously downplays the centrality of working class self-activity and self-organisation.

The emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself. That is why any account of the Chilean defeat must put the way in which workers attempted to organise themselves at the very centre of the picture.

Ian Birchall
email

Anti-Semitism

The responses of both Mike Macnair ('Anti-Semitism of useful idiots') and Daniel Lazare (Letters, September 14) to the defence of David Miller by anti-Zionists are problematic in different ways.

Both drag in absurd red herrings to excuse their softness on Zionist and imperialist racism, and both excuse the racism of oppressor peoples with logic chopping. Thus, Lazare claims that to accuse the CPGB of "philo-Semitic" racism is to say that the CPGB is "in the pocket of the Jews". But this accusation bears no logical relation to the point: philo-Semitism is a form of racism that treats Jews as

morally superior and incapable of being 'really' racist.

Lazare is a defender of the Israel lobby, and considers that Zionism cannot be 'really' racist. He clearly supports a variant of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance fake definition of 'anti-Semitism'. However, when he tries to answer Tony Greenstein, he has no qualms in accusing "heavily armed ... black militias" - who have taken to the streets "in America in recent years", resisting armed white supremacism - of being equally "rightwing" and "racist", and insists that the racism of the ruling class is "the same" as the anger of those on the receiving end of cop lynchings like that of George Floyd and many others.

That's why he is hostile to the facts about the material basis of the Israel lobby - the outside social weight of Zionist Jews in the ruling class (almost all Jewish bourgeois today are Zionist). He compares the citation of these facts to the *Protocols of Zion*, following the hackneyed path of other apologists for the lobby, including the CPGB. Zionism and racist anti-Semitism both arose at the dawning of the epoch of imperialism in the 1880s, and were rival projects of what Hitler called *Lebensraum*: the settlement of others' land in expansionist imperialist projects. The *Protocols* are a racist caricature of Zionism that tries to drag all Jews, including communist Jews, into their schema of Zionism supposedly seeking world domination.

But Zionism is a racist colonial movement. Its (ultimately) successful bourgeois strategy was always to enable Jews to join the world's oppressor peoples, which they duly did with the formation and consolidation of Israel and the growth of influence of the 'lobby'. Apparently to cite facts on this is to echo the *Protocols*. This again is a variant of the IHRA - a stratagem to try to prevent discussion of relevant social and political facts.

The capitalist property of bourgeois Zionist Jews is way out of proportion to the preponderance of Jews in the population at large (whereas the capitalist property of black bourgeois in America is massively underrepresented, compared to the weight of the black population). A good part of the distinction of oppressor and oppressed peoples is related to their respective weight in the capitalist ruling class, but the Zionist/racist prejudice of Daniel Lazare is expressed in political aversion to this basic Marxist truth.

Absurdly, he takes advantage of the editor's decision to cut Norman Finkelstein's words, as quoted by me, to exclude his point that Jews are even more overrepresented in the US ruling class than they are in Britain, and Lazare shoots back: "What's important about such rich Jewish Brits is not so much the money at their command, but their power in a world ruled by vast capitalist forces. The answer is that it's nil. Where they have billions, US capitalism has hundreds of trillions. Where they control individual corporations, the US can make or break entire nations and is also capable of incinerating the world in a flash."

Of course, since Zionist Jews are equally, if not more, disproportionately represented in the US ruling class than here, it logically follows that Zionist Jewish bourgeois have disproportionate power over those 'hundreds of trillions' which are part of the US bourgeoisie's collective wealth. But again, this is not supposed to

be discussed. The material facts are deemed to be 'anti-Semitic' when they find their way onto the printed page, and so yet again we have a form of 'cancel culture' - cancelling Marxism on behalf of Zionism.

Mike Macnair's circuitous nonsense claiming that no-platforming fascists is somehow connected with the popular frontism of those who hail Churchill's and Roosevelt's 'war for democracy' (ie, imperialist war) is another, even more feeble, piece of hackery. One example proves that it is not true - Cable Street 1936, when tens of thousands of Jewish and non-Jewish workers joined forces in militant action to deny Oswald Mosley a platform in the East End. According to Macnair logic, they were popular frontists! This is arse-backwards: it is easy to show that the Trotskyists in the 1930s did indeed advocate that militants should 'no-platform' small groups of fascists by, among other things, 'acquainting them with the pavement'.

Likewise, Macnair's absurd and illogical amalgam claiming that those in favour of the revolutionary Comintern's strategy of the anti-imperialist united front were supporting Dimitrov's popular front. The most outspoken advocate of the anti-imperialist united front was Trotsky, who ridiculed Dimitrov repeatedly.

Macnair attempts to elide around this with the following: "Zionism is already an example of what began as 'nationalism of the oppressed' turning into 'nationalism of the oppressor'. But there are many others. And - for example - the Islamic Republic of Iran is both an oppressed country *vis-à-vis* the USA and an oppressor state *vis-à-vis* its own population and minority national groups."

This is simply nonsense, as Israel is a transplanted imperialist entity, and its international dimension - the 'Israel lobby' - is in fact a euphemism for the Jewish-Zionist caste within the imperialist bourgeoisie of west Europe and North America. Iran is *not* imperialist and, whatever forms of oppression exist within it, its ruling class fits the paradigm of Trotsky's point about "a semi-ruling, semi-oppressed class".

This is at the root of the third-camp, semi-Shachtmanite politics of the CPGB (AWL-lite, as it were). Refusing to take sides in conflicts between imperialism and its victims has nothing to do with revolutionary politics or opposing popular frontism. It is the politics of capitulation to imperialism.

Ian Donovan

Consistent Democrats

Cancel culture

In a somewhat hysterical article Tony Greenstein states that "cancel culture" is "an ideologically loaded term for those opposed to racists and bigots being given a platform to spew their foul ideas" ('Placing anti-Semitism in context', September 7).

Greenstein does not give any definition of cancel culture, but he is definitely for it and anyone who contradicts him is automatically a racist and bigot. This is a 1984 protocol: Big Brother has decided that cancel culture is good speak and anybody against it is an enemy. Because there is no definition, anyone can at any time run into trouble. Free speech for Greenstein is limited to what he agrees with.

And here we come to the crux of the matter: who is it who will decide which speech will be permitted and which banned? Would anyone sane trust someone like the (frankly not very intelligent) narcissist,

Greenstein, to be arbiter of their speech?

A problem for the 'left' which has increased over the last decade is that every barney idea is being immediately classed as 'leftwing'. In the recent period it has been noticeable that the so-called 'antifa' brigade wish to normalise paedophilia by relabelling a paedophile as 'MAP' (minor-attracted person), which does not sound too bad at all. Sexual grooming of young children is considered a progressive activity. Most of the left press concurrently consists not of any type of Marxist analysis, but rather regurgitated identity politics and intersectionality arguments.

Greenstein's rantings are a part of this milieu, which, whether consciously or not, is well on the way not only to destroying the remnants of the 'left', but destroying rational thought itself. How come that it is appropriate for an "anti-Semite" (the courts' description, not mine) to be pontificating on free speech? The real reason that Greenstein is against free speech is that he is acutely aware that his 'ideas' could not stand up in a rational debate.

Phil Devonshire
email

Climate disaster

The declaration of the latest Group of 20 meeting on climate change is full of the usual platitudes. It states that its member-countries will "pursue and encourage efforts to triple renewable energy capacity globally through existing targets and policies, as well as demonstrate similar ambition with respect to other zero and low-emission technologies, including abatement and removal technologies, in line with national circumstances by 2030" (emphasis added). Crucially, though unsurprisingly, there is to be no deadline for dumping fossil fuels. Inevitably, so-called "national circumstances" (ie, fragmented capitalism's essential profit-seeking) trump all, as usual.

Recently, UN secretary-general António Guterres rightly called air pollution a "global emergency". But, however much Guterres rants, the gangs of criminals heading each and every country within the UN are incapable of doing anything but puff hot air, since capitalism is inherently unable and unwilling to accept any constraints on its existential need for profit.

Neither is it helpful to imagine that all will be fine, once we establish socialism with Promethean features: in other words, pretending that technological might conquers all, including nature. The idea that the revolutionary class, once in power, can somehow take control of technology and (if Trotsky were to be believed) literally move mountains to solve climate change threats in the here and now is cloud cuckoo land. Such efforts in Soviet times produced ecological disaster. This dream-cum-nightmare will lead the world to hell. We need to gain clarity and understanding of the gargantuan tasks humanity faces from climate change and work soberly toward overcoming them.

Nonetheless, we certainly must use technological means to the fullest to begin reversing global warming. In this emergency, there must be a rapid and drastic reversal of dependence on fossil fuel, including for vehicles and power generation. The current nonsense about simply 'replacing petrol and diesel' vehicles must be rebutted: the energy required to produce electric vehicles is so inordinately high, it makes them only justifiable

for use as public transport.

We must campaign for a gigantic increase in public transport provision. And we need an infrastructure to match, integrally including accessible, direct and safe routes for cyclists and pedestrians. As for air travel, it is unregulated from the perspective of its contribution to pollution and climate change and it requires immediate restriction. It is clear that the overwhelming majority of air journeys are unnecessary, and are merely taken for pleasure purposes.

Massive change is also necessary when it comes to sea transport, with rapid replacement by wind and solar power of the means of propulsion of the world's commercial fleets of ships. Goods now moved by sea are brought by vessels powered by the foulest, most polluting oil-based fuel: as a result, one ship's voyage typically pollutes more than the equivalent of many thousands of cars. The question of whether goods should be transported thousands of miles must be tackled in tandem, raising the further question of whether particular goods need to be manufactured at all.

For Marxists, it cannot be denied that the crisis of climate change is upon us. But if we do not bring about working class-led change for the benefit of the whole of humanity, capitalism will do its damndest to ensure that its ruling class stays in control by implementing drastically undemocratic means to tackle climate change. Barbarism instead of socialism.

The challenge for working class politics is to lay out the way forward in such a way that our class takes the lead in environmental questions; it is impossible to leave it to bourgeois ideologues and their truly dreadful technological 'fixes', which will lead to reducing and reviling democracy and certainly curtailing working class advance toward revolution.

It is socialism/communism or barbarity - that is the naked truth. This fightback starts now, and through organisation in communist parties it needs the overwhelming working class majority to ensure the job is done in the interests of the whole of humanity.

Jim Moody
email

Utter hypocrisy

So now we see plain as day what those 'green jobs' look like - 1,500 new jobs recycling old steel at the expense of 5,000 jobs making capital steel lost, along with the second-last steel-making plant. This is Labour's much vaunted 'green steel', as well the Tory new deal on steel.

It's not actual primary steel used for capital projects - just recycled existing steel. They like it because it does not require coal (or those damn bolshie coal miners) - the coal has already gone into the old steel, which is then recycled. You can make a new bike and a new wok, but not a high-rise block of flats, a suspension bridge, a ship or railway chassis. So is this the 'just transition' they all boasted about? Well, 4,500 workers - and thousands more ancillary and service workers - will now be thrown onto the scrapheap.

And what is it for? Britain is the sixth biggest economy in the world, producing 1% of the world's CO₂ emissions - 2% of that 1% is from steel-making! So on this all-party crusade to kill CO₂ emissions, close down coal and steel (and, if they have their way, petrol and diesel cars, oil and gas, boilers and holidays abroad), what have they achieved? They will

close down capital steel-making in Britain, and for now 80% of steel production will be recycled old steel - this made using the widely misunderstood electric arc, which does not produce CO₂ in resmelting old steel.

But it doesn't produce the quality of steel we need for most big vital projects either. So not wind turbines, not planes, trains, ships, flats, bridges, etc - these require blast-furnace steel. So that steel will be made abroad - using coal, of course, and sending skyward our emissions in someone else's country. The steel will then be imported here. With any luck the coal will be from our new mine, shipped to Europe for them to make our steel.

Makes you feel all clean and green inside, doesn't it? No, it's utter hypocrisy. The steel unions were kidded along with this green steel capper, but they don't seem to have been aware (certainly their members weren't) that this means the end of steel-making in its usual meaning - 80% of the world's steel and 100% of all capital steel is made using blast furnaces, but Britain will be the only major economy in the world not to make its own primary steel and entirely depend on imports.

Of course, it will still be made, and there will still be CO₂ emissions - only not by workers here. They have been sacrificed on the altar of the Church of the Burning Earth, along with anything resembling common sense.

David J Douglass
South Shields

Unity shouters

A letter writer to *Weekly Worker* back in December 2012 reiterated this Engels quote: "One must not allow oneself to be misled by the cry for 'unity' ... Those unity fanatics are either the people of limited intelligence who want to stir everything up together into one nondescript brew, which, the moment it is left to settle, throws up the differences again in much more acute opposition ... or else they are people who consciously or unconsciously ... want to adulterate the movement. For this reason the greatest sectarians and the biggest brawlers and rogues are at certain moments the loudest shouters for unity. Nobody in our lifetime has given us more trouble and been more treacherous than the unity shouters."

Caitriona Rylance seeks input on unity (Letters, September 14). To quote Wilhelm Liebknecht, who covers this subject at great length in *No compromise, no political trading*, "When common interests exist ... no compromise, fusion or contract is necessary."

Jon D White
Email

Great mix-up

The great mix-up in the debate over the class nature of the state in the USSR, eastern Europe and China results from the identification of the economic basis with the superstructure.

A workers' state came into being in Russia in October 1917, despite the fact that the economy remained in capitalist hands until the months after January 1918 - the political intentions of the Bolsheviks and the fact that they held state power left no doubt on that. The only question was how that transition was to be implemented. They were forced to take control by diktat, as grassroots workers' democracy was not sufficiently developed, and later the best and most class-conscious Bolshevik workers were fighting and dying in the civil war.

Ted Grant has a 1948 article placing transitional demands on the communists in Czechoslovakia, where there was a Stalinist Communist Party with substantial ranks, because a far stronger tradition of workers' control existed there. In his article, 'Czechoslovakia: the issues involved' (April 13 1948), Grant writes:

"Lenin reduced the essence of a workers' state to four fundamental principles. After the expropriation of the capitalists and the statification of the means of production, there would be: 1. The election of soviets with the right of recall of all officials. 2. No official to receive a wage higher than that earned by the average worker. 3. The abolition of the standing army and its replacement by the armed people. 4. No permanent bureaucracy. Each in turn would fulfil the functions of the state. When everyone was a bureaucrat, no-one could be a bureaucrat."

He goes on to explain: "The backwardness of Russia and the isolation of the revolution rendered this process impossible. But on the basis of the cultural level in Czechoslovakia the advantages of communist methods would be apparent to the whole world ... Czechoslovakia under Stalinist leadership will develop in the same direction ... All the rights which the workers still possess will be strangled and an uncontrolled bureaucracy will ride roughshod over the masses, as in Russia."

And that's what happened, although it took until 1948-49 for Stalinism to crush that movement.

Jack Conrad objects that he is not a state-capitalist despite picking the same date for the overthrow of the workers' state (1928-29) as Tony Cliff. And, although he does not champion the state capitalists, it is clear he prefers the right bureaucratic collectivists like Max Shachtman, etc, to them (better again are the left bureaucratic collectivists like Hal Draper) - until eventually Sean Matgamna shouldered the Shachtman burden and raised the flag of 'genuine Trotskyism' after about 1983, he claimed. This impressed the CPGB so much that the left bureaucratic collectivists waltzed in the early 2000s into that famous fusion attempt.

In distinction from all these and agreeing with Andrew Northall up to when he credits Stalin with any of this from any motives other than preservation of his own privileges, we hold that there were five successive phases of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the USSR from October 1917.

In some cases Stalinists conquered territory and never overthrew capitalist property relations at all (Austria, Finland and Afghanistan, to name but a few). In some cases, they only did it after attempts to maintain capitalist property relations failed (eastern Europe from 1945 to 1948, China in 1951-53).

It was never the case that the degree of nationalisation determined the class character of the state. We must appreciate how essential the subjective factor is; how the Bolsheviks and then the Stalinists were capable of creating workers' states when they controlled the entire state bureaucracy. But Lenin's state was based on the programme of the world revolution; the Stalinist states were based on finding a compromise with world imperialism to maintain their own privileges in their own bailiwick.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

ACTION

Barclays: don't bank on apartheid

Saturday September 23: Day of action outside Barclays Bank branches. Demand the bank stops investing in companies that supply Israel with weapons and military tech used to assault Palestinians.

Birmingham: 11.30am, 79-84 High Street, Birmingham B4.

Bolton: 11am, 1-5 Market Street, Victoria Square, Bolton BL1.

Brighton: 12 noon, 139-142 North Street, Brighton BN1.

Bristol: 12 noon, 55 Broadmead, Bristol BS1.

Cardiff: 11am, St David's Way, 28 Working Street, Cardiff CF10.

Coventry: 12 noon, 25 High Street, Coventry CV1.

Edinburgh: 11am, 10-15 Princes Street, Edinburgh EH2.

Harrow: 11am, 355 Station Road, Harrow HA1.

Hastings: 12 noon, 207-208 Queens Road, Hastings TN34.

Hull: 11am, Queen Victoria Square, Hull HU1.

Ilford: 10am, 93 High Road, Ilford IG1.

Kingsbury: 11am, 505-507 Kingsbury Road, London NW9.

Manchester: 12 noon, Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester M1.

Newport: 11am, 14 Commercial Street, Newport NP20.

Nottingham: 12 noon, 2 High Street, Nottingham NG1.

Oxford: 11am, 54 Cornmarket Street, Oxford OX1.

Plymouth: 11am, 140-146 Armada Way, Plymouth PL1.

Reading: 12 noon, 90-93 Broad Street, Reading RG1.

Sheffield: 12 noon, 2-12 Pinstone Street, Sheffield S1.

Shrewsbury: 11am, 44-46 Castle Street, Shrewsbury SY1.

Tunbridge Wells: 10am, 8 Calverley Road, Tunbridge Wells TN1.

Walthamstow: 12 noon, 278 Hoe Street, London E17.

Willesden Green: 11am, 5 High Road, London NW10.

Worthing: 12 noon, 1 Chapel Road, Worthing BN11.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign:

www.facebook.com/events/9714385958636351.

Stop US nukes coming to Britain

Saturday September 23: Day of action across Britain to condemn the return of US nuclear weapons to RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk.

These warheads will make Britain a target in any nuclear war.

Manchester: 11.30 am, Market Street, Manchester M1.

Greenwich: 12 noon, Wolfe statue, Greenwich Park, London SE10.

Brandon: 11am: Marketplace, Market Hill, Brandon IP27.

Salisbury: 10.30am, the Library, Market Walk, Salisbury SP1.

Hackney: 1pm, Outside M&S, 351 Mare Street, London E8.

Newport IoW: 11.30am, St Thomas Square, Newport PO30.

Newcastle-under-Lyme: 2pm, High Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme ST5.

Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament:

cnduk.org/events/stop-us-nukes-coming-to-britain-day-of-action.

March to end food poverty

Saturday September 23, 12 noon: Demonstration. Assemble outside Tottenham Hotspur stadium, High Road, London N17.

March to Tottenham Green for festival of resistance. Demand good-quality, affordable food for everyone and an end to foodbanks.

Organised by Haringey Right to Food:

haringey.org.uk/haringey-residents-to-march-for-end-to-food-poverty.

Workers' summit

Saturday September 23, 2pm: Conference, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Discuss key issues facing unions,

including how to reject bad deals that fall short of demands. Devise plans for joint working and growing grassroots networks.

Registration £11.55 (£6.13). Organised by Strike Map:

www.facebook.com/events/1948514978839160.

What it means to be human

Tuesday September 26, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology. Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building,

14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1 and online.

This meeting: 'The sex-strike theory of human origins'. Speakers:

Chris Knight and Camilla Power. (UCU strike may affect this talk.)

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group:

www.facebook.com/events/1034170921094597.

No welcome for the Saudi crown prince

Wednesday September 27, 6pm: Protest opposite Downing Street, Whitehall, London SW1. No welcome for the leader of the regime

which dismembered Jamal Khashoggi, executes political opponents

and conducts the siege, occupation and war against Yemen.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Booting bailiffs from Haringey

Thursday September 28, 6pm: Public meeting and workshop,

Bernie Grant Arts Centre, Town Hall Approach Road, Tottenham

Green, London N1 Haringey Council passes 8,000 households to

bailiffs every year over council tax debt. Learn how to deal with

bailiffs and build the campaign to boot them from the borough.

Organised by Acorn: www.acorntheunion.org.uk/events.

Cramlington train wreckers

Friday September 29, 7.30pm: Illustrated talk, Harton and Westoe

Miners' Welfare, Low Lane, South Shields NE34. During the 1926

general strike, miners who derailed a passenger train were jailed for

eight years. Narrated by Ed Waugh, with songs by Jamie Brown.

Tickets £2. Organised by Harton and Westoe Miners' Banner Group:

eventbrite.com/e/the-cramlington-train-wreckers-tickets-686461864917.

Protest at Tory Party conference

Sunday October 1, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble

near Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester M13. Oppose

this vile, vicious and corrupt government. Resist the Tory austerity,

privatisation, profiteering, deregulation and attacks on democratic

rights. Then prepare to hold the next government to account.

Organised by the People's Assembly Against Austerity:

www.facebook.com/events/772136577575237.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's

name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in

your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

AGGREGATE

Two forms of unity

There are any number of broad unity projects being plotted, floated and pushed at the moment. All will fail. James Harvey reports on our assessments, debates ... and a membership application

September's aggregate of CPGB members, supporters and invited guests had two main items on the agenda: the development of new left initiatives, such as Transform and an application for CPGB membership from a Socialist Fight comrade. There was also a review of Communist University 2023 which I shall not cover here.

The aggregate's main political discussion focussed on the current state of the left and the various attempts at some form of left unity, such as the Transform initiative involving Left Unity and various other failures and fragments. Opening the discussion, Mike Macnair of the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee argued that Transform was "deeply unserious" and essentially a rebranding of the Left Unity project drawing in some smaller groups around it.

The project will go nowhere, not least because of the timing of the initiative in a pre-election period, when the focus of many is on unity against the Tories and the need to elect a Labour government. However, the question of an alternative to Labour will be posed within a few years if Sir Keir wins the election - and governs, as we can safely predict, in the interests of capitalism.

The central issue for comrade Macnair was the nature of that alternative and the character of the various initiatives that were now being and had been advanced in the past by the left. The working class movement objectively needs a mass Communist Party with a revolutionary programme, with links European-wide and to similar parties internationally. A mass party means one of millions with a real presence and clear impact throughout society, not merely a grouping of even tens of thousands operating on the margins.

In Britain the Labour Party stands as a block in the way of the construction of such a mass Communist Party because it pretends - as its very name suggests - to represent the working class as a whole. The history of Labour from its origins in the late 19th century from an alliance between the trade union leadership and essentially Lib-Lab MPs, producing a party unswervingly loyal to the constitutional order and British imperialism, and giving Labour its doubled-sided character as a bourgeois workers' party.

Comrade Macnair's perspective was that in order to build a mass Communist Party Labour in this form has to be broken - either by its development as a real united front of the class through the ending of bans and proscriptions, thus allowing communists to affiliate and campaign within its ranks, or through the party leadership itself breaking with the trade unions and making Labour an openly pro-capitalist party. Thus, for communists the Labour Party remains an important strategic focus that can not be ignored in the struggle to build a mass Communist Party.

Reviewing attempts at left unity since the 1970s and then subsequent projects such as the Socialist Labour, Socialist Alliance and Respect, comrade Macnair catalogued a history of failures, splits and unprincipled unity projects, which were explicitly 'broad-based', as opposed to Marxist. He also reviewed the various ways that



George A Romero 'Night of the living dead' (1968). There is something of the living dead about today's post-Corbyn soft left

CPGB comrades had participated in such projects, including their attempts to argue within them for a Communist Party and a specifically Marxist programme, instead of a nebulous 'broad unity'.

Comrade Macnair also stressed that the experience of the defeat of the Corbyn movement and the impact of its "clicktivist" form of activism needs to be taken into account in assessing the current demoralised and incoherent state of the left. He concluded that we need serious initiatives and a real process of regroupment, not a repetition of past failures which simply create yet more blocks on the road to a mass Communist Party.

Debate

In the discussion that followed there were no challenges to the strategic perspective that Mike outlined, with comrades adding their individual experiences to illustrate the arguments about the political and strategic weaknesses of broad unity formations. However, the discussion broadened out to consider how we should respond to any new initiatives and the organisational issues that this will throw up for our political work.

Lawrence Parker described the cycle of demoralisation that produces, and is indeed reinforced by, such unity projects. He contrasted the older partyist tradition of many on the left in the 1990s and 2000s with the specifically anti-party culture. Comrade Parker argued for engagement and debate with those groups and individuals talking about a Communist Party alongside critical polemics pointing out both the political and strategic limitations and contradictions in their positions.

Scott Evans related his experience of some of the recent meetings organised by Transform and the ways it reinforced the low-level clicktivism that comrade Macnair had mentioned. Carla Roberts described how the post-Corbyn projects had not learned anything from defeat. She agreed that the appeal of communism was growing, but it was important that in a period of fluidity we need to show those on the left who use this language what real Marxist unity looks like, how we understand a real revolutionary programme and

how a Communist Party should organise itself. Comrade Roberts added some specific suggestions on our propaganda work and how it should be improved, such as the development of Communist TV and our regular Online Communist Forum meetings.

In her contribution comrade Farzad Kamangar outlined the impact of our ideas and arguments on the wider left, especially when presented through the *Weekly Worker*. The paper was widely read and had a degree of influence amongst sections of the left, both in Britain and internationally. Even so, she counselled comrades to be realistic and not expect rapid growth: a Starmor victory will not lead to an immediate change in the dynamics of the left. Drawing on the experience of 1992, she thought it was still possible that Labour might not win.

For the left, the lessons of the Corbyn period have not been addressed, much less learned, although we might expect that in the aftermath of defeats people might begin to question long-established ideas and begin to think strategically. We too must continue to think strategically over the longer term, and not be tempted to react simply in terms of the immediate ups and downs of politics.

For Jack Conrad the important issue in this period was politics and programme, not numbers of supporters. He criticised the lack of seriousness of the far left and the failure of many to come to terms with the defeat of the Corbyn movement. Even those who called themselves communists lacked real seriousness, as evidenced by Socialist Appeal's refusal to debate with the CPGB. We need to be clear about what we mean by communism and the key historical and current strategic questions of our movement and how we can link these issues to the idea of communist unity.

In summing up the discussion, Mike Macnair agreed that those on the far left who were pro-partyist were a small current, but one that we should address in our paper and work as a propaganda group arguing for Marxist unity and a mass Communist Party. He agreed that the discussion

on how comrades should orientate towards these currents on the far left and the role of the paper and other aspects of our propaganda work had been useful. Projects like Transform were doomed to failure and would only produce more disappointment and disillusion amongst genuine leftists who got involved. We must continue with our serious, principled politics around the need for a revolutionary programme and party, and develop our strategy from those imperatives.

Application

Discussion on the application of a supporter of Socialist Fight for CPGB membership was opened by Jack Conrad, who said it had been referred by the PCC to the aggregate because of the wider issues of communist unity that are a central issue in our

politics. In his application letter the comrade asked to join the CPGB as part of a tendency, although in effect it was an individual application, and so the PCC treated it as such.

The application had arisen from a discussion at Communist University on communist unity, in which CPGB comrades had said to the Socialist Fight supporter, "You're welcome to join the CPGB with factional rights and subject to the same rights and responsibilities as all members of the party." With these provisos the PCC was in favour of accepting the application in line with our principled position on Marxist unity.

The resulting discussion touched on these wider questions, as well the history of factions and oppositional currents in the CPGB, alongside the specific details of the application itself. All the comrades who spoke in the discussion supported accepting the application. It would be a healthy demonstration of the type of party that we want: namely one which encourages the debating of differences and unity in action. Moreover, we might hope to see more applications of this type and there could be no principled reasons for rejecting the application. Such an approach did not involve 'soft unity' or the submerging of differences: on the contrary, communist unity demanded a serious exploration of political differences and a clarification of ideas and strategies.

Summing up the discussion, comrade Conrad said that communist rapprochement was not a process of adding numbers, but was one of serious political discussion and overcoming muddled ideas. What have Marxists to fear in open debate and the honest disagreements amongst comrades committed to the communist programme? ●

Notes

1. See the CPGB draft rules for further details: communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme/7-draft-rules.

Fighting fund

No complacency

Our wholehearted thanks to all those comrades who contributed to the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund over the last seven days - your solidarity and generosity has put us right back on track towards making that £2,250 monthly target for September!

Can you believe it? No less than £935 has come our way since last week. Thanks in particular go to those comrades who made a three-figure contribution - there were no fewer than five of them: SK, KB, PM, AN and GB. Brilliant stuff!

All those donations were in the form of standing orders or bank transfers, along with those for smaller - but no less essential - gifts paid using the same method by comrades MM (£75), TR (£40), OG (£24), GS and DR (£20 each), SS and CS (£15), and JS (£5). On top of that, comrade MZ made his regular monthly contribution of £20 via PayPal, while LM (£20) and comrade Hassan (£5) came up with their

usual banknotes.

So, as I say, it's been a fantastic week and that £935 has taken our running total up to £1,620. In other words, we need just £630 with 10 days left until the end of the month. Obviously that's much more than possible, but this is not the time for complacency! The third week of the month, which has just gone, is always the best, because of all those sizable standing orders, so now we need other supporters to follow in the footsteps of this week's donors and make sure we not only reach that target, but go smashing through that £2,250 barrier!

Please send us a cheque, make a bank transfer or click on the PayPal button - go to www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate for either of those last two. I'm confident we can do it, so please don't disappoint me! ●

Robbie Rix

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to *Weekly Worker*

TUC

Expect more hot air

Claims of defying the government's latest anti-trade union laws and at the same time supporting its war aims in Ukraine are in flat contradiction, writes **Eddie Ford**

Last week's Trade Union Congress conference in Liverpool was both encouraging and discouraging, highlighting the contradictions of the movement. This year Sir Keir Starmer did not address it (although on Monday evening at the gala dinner with union leaders he did give a "relaxed" speech, in which he joked about Ed Miliband "serenading wind farms" with his ukulele).

Rather, he decided it was Angela Rayner's turn to take the limelight - presumably on the basis that the deputy leader would have more appeal, which is doubtlessly true. You can see why Starmer would make such a calculation. Beneath the apparent camaraderie and jokes, deep suspicions remain within the unions about the direction of Starmer's Labour Party, particularly in the wake of his wide-ranging reshuffle that saw him appoint what many see as a gaggle of 'Blairites' into his new shadow cabinet. Perhaps as evidence of this bubbling dissatisfaction, Unite leader Sharon Graham did not attend the gala dinner, and used her speech on September 11 to urge Labour to nationalise the energy sector.

Angela Rayner

So give Rayner a chance to shine and win the hearts of the delegates, especially as she is now the shadow levelling-up secretary. Before her September 12 speech, she was tellingly introduced to the platform as "one of us". Admittedly, she got off to an awkward start, when her opening remark about Liverpool being famous for two things - the Beatles and Paul Nowak, the new TUC general secretary - fell totally flat. But after that she hit her stride: "I may have been born in Stockport," she said. "But I was raised in the trade union movement". In a short speech, which naturally got her a standing ovation, she said that a Labour government would bolster statutory sick pay and ensure that it is paid by employers from the first day off work. Of course, this announcement was part of Labour's wider 'New deal for working people', which includes measures such as extending statutory maternity and paternity leave, banning 'fire and rehire' and - most importantly of all for those at the conference - "reversing" the anti-union legislation from 2016 onwards. Whether Labour's promises mean anything we will soon find out, as the general election can only be a year or so away, with a Starmer victory clearly on the cards.

This brings us to the most positive aspect of this year's conference - the unanimous passing of a resolution on resisting the latest round of Tory anti-trade union laws that seek to enforce "minimum service levels" during industrial action by public service workers, including NHS doctors, train drivers, etc. It will allow employers in such sectors to issue a 'work notice' in advance of industrial action, specifying which staff are necessary to provide a minimum level of service. Unions that do not comply could be open to legal action, and the named employees could ultimately be sacked if they fail to turn up - a truly iniquitous and vicious piece of anti-working class legislation.

Anyhow, the motion says: "We have no choice but to build mass



Matt Wrack and Mick Lynch: brothers should become comrades

opposition to the minimum service levels laws, up to and including a strategy of non-compliance and non-cooperation to make them unworkable, including industrial action." Matt Wrack, Fire Brigades Union general secretary and the newly elected TUC president, described it as a "message of defiance" to the government, signalling that "this government's nasty, authoritarian agenda will be vigorously opposed by the trade union movement".

After the resolution was passed, Paul Nowak stressed that it was not encouraging workers to disobey the law - oh no, that would be going too far. But the motion does call for a "special congress" to be held "to explore options for non-compliance and resistance", therefore it is a question of the correct tactics and strategy. According to one union top, "We're not going to allow ourselves to be fined out of existence" - so there is a distinct danger of a token demonstration and lot of platform hot air followed by compliance and cooperation ... and then the hope that Sir Keir comes to the rescue.

Matt Wrack and Mick Lynch have already more or less given the game away in a joint interview (*Tribune* September 11 2023). This is brother Wrack:

We've got to be very careful of what we do. We haven't said we're going to break the law or anything. What we're saying is the movement as a whole needs to set an agenda to defeat this legislation by whatever means we can. We're not in the 1970s. There were twelve million trade unionists back then. We're about half the size that we used to be. Building union membership is a key aspect of fighting back.

So instead of defeating the legislation by "whatever means are necessary", we get "whatever means we can" ... but not risk the union bank accounts, offices and

salaries. Either way the resolution is positive because it opens the door for a *campaign* to scrap, to make ineffective *all* anti-trade union laws.

This certainly means learning the lessons of the 1970s. It was not so much that the trade union movement had 12 million members. That in no small part was down to the Harold Wilson-Jim Callaghan Labour government. In return for compliance with pay 'restraint', curbing the power of stop stewards and judicialisation of industrial relations, the trade union bureaucracy got measures which made it easy to recruit more members, along with a check-off system whereby employers, not grass roots activists, collected union dues.

No, the lesson from the 1970s that needs to be learnt is the defeat of Tory prime minister Ted Heath and his Industrial Relations Act. Only one big union complied with the legislation by officially registering as a trade union, which was the EETPU electricians' union under the notorious ex-communist-turned-anti-communist, Frank Chapple (sorry, Lord Chapple). More to the point, we had five dockers openly defy the law by refusing to obey a court order to stop picketing a container depot in east London - and getting arrested by the police, becoming famous as the Pentonville Five in the process. And the TUC was *forced* into a position of threatening a one-day general strike unless they were released. But what was going on in the meantime, of course, was that the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions, led by the 'official' CPGB, was actually organising illegal walkouts across the country - hundreds of thousands of workers were already taking directly *political* action against the anti-trade union laws.

Then the Tory government blinked and sent in the Official Solicitor - a person most people had never heard of before - and he announced that the five should be released. They were,

to much cheering and celebration on our side.

Everybody knew that Heath had suffered a major political defeat, which culminated in the second miners' strike and the calling of a general election on the basis of who runs Britain - him or the unions? The electorate decided it was not Ted Heath!

Not that you should have any great faith in the 'official' Communist Party of the early 1970s. Putting it mildly, its politics and leadership were deeply problematic. Nevertheless, it existed and was organised not only geographically, but also industrially - having real influence and social weight in the trade union movement, including at the top (but crucially at the base). Obviously, there is nothing like that at the present. But if brothers Wrack and Lynch were to throw themselves into the fight for a reformed Communist Party and become comrades then there would be a good chance of turning words into deeds.

Imperialism

Showing precisely why we should be sceptical about the likes of Nowak, conference voted by a large margin to basically line up the TUC with British foreign policy (and hence US foreign policy) over the Ukraine war - a big negative. This was a composite motion that originated from the GMB, the third largest union, which was responsible last year for a narrowly won motion calling for *increased* 'defence' spending. So they have form, when it comes to looking for crumbs from the imperialist table.

This year's vote, after a lot of haggling and last-minute changes to the text, says that Congress "unequivocally condemns Russia's illegal, aggressive invasion of Ukraine" and supports "Ukrainian unions' calls for financial and practical aid from the UK to Ukraine". It demands "the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from

all Ukrainian territories occupied since 2014" - ie, Crimea and the eastern Donbas region. Clearly, this is a craven endorsement of the war policies of the US, UK and the EU powers, who have spent *billions* with the hope and expectation that Kyiv will fight to the very last Ukrainian in a conflict designed to force regime change in Moscow and open up the entire region to imperialist carve-up and exploitation. The original version of the text explicitly backed sending arms!

Incredibly, Nato is not even mentioned and the government only appears once in a reference to delay and denial of refuge to Ukrainians. Speaker after speaker claimed they wanted peace, at the same time demanding that Russia withdraws from Crimea before peace talks can commence. This is obviously putting preconditions on talks which mean they will almost certainly never happen - so much so that an embarrassed Paul Nowak issued an 'explanation', making out that the motion was not putting such preconditions. But how else can you read it, Paul?

There was lots of talk about 'workers' rights' being oppressed by imperialism - that is, *Russian* 'imperialism' and nothing about the role of Nato expansion, nor the US struggle to do down its only serious rival, China, and rebooting its global hegemony. We even had Mark Serwotka - the retiring PCS general secretary and in the 1980s a member of the Socialist Organiser Alliance (one of the earlier iterations of today's social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty) - denying that the Ukrainian conflict was a proxy war. But, Mark, you can find US senators and generals saying exactly that - it is not simply a Russian invasion, or a Ukrainian civil war that Russia intervened in.

This pitiful motion got through because it was backed by the big unions - the GMB, Unison and Unite (after some initial hesitation), not to mention Aslef and the NUM. There were some honourable exceptions. The FBU's Jamie Newell spoke well about why his union opposed the motion - the bakers union too took something like a principled position. We also had abstentions from the NEU, the UCU and the RMT.

Predictably, there were 'leftwing' rightwing delegates comparing Ukraine to the 1936-39 Spanish Civil War - which is totally risible. We all remember from our history books how Britain, the US and France ploughed in money, arms and supplies to the republican side ... Of course, you remember no such thing! Rather, there was a policy of hostile 'neutrality' and active involvement on the side of Franco by the armed forces of Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany.

But the past is always a safe space where social-imperialists can make play of their 'leftwing' credentials and pretend that they have not sold out. No, yesterday and today, the main enemy is at home. That, by definition, means opposing the foreign policy of your own government. Foreign policy is a *continuation* of domestic policy - the former flows from and is subordinate to the latter ●

USA

Staggering to next crisis

Joe Biden's growing incapacity, the likelihood of him being replaced mid-term by Kamala Harris if re-elected, and a potential impeachment trial show that the abnormal is becoming the new normal. **Paul Demarty** looks at America

America's slide towards gerontocracy is, it seems, entering an acute phase.

Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell repeatedly freezes up during press conferences, apparently suffering from some kind of seizure. Rumours about his failing health have swirled for years, but still he clings on to his position despite being 81 years old.

On the other side of the Senate aisle, there is the increasingly debilitated condition of California Democrat Dianne Feinstein. She turned 90 this year, and the last third of her life has been spent in the upper house. She struggles to remember the names of her aides and family members, recently launched into a speech in the middle of a formal voting procedure, and has given power of attorney over to her daughter. Not even the most credulous Democrat-sympathising media deny that she is in the grip of dementia any longer. She was absent from the Senate for three months, yet, for some unfathomable reason, she is required to soldier on.

The main problem, however, is Joseph Robinette Biden. A senile senator is, after all, manageable - there are another 99 of them to pick up the slack. But there is only one president of the United States of America. Biden frequently suffers from lapses of memory - or perhaps flights of fancy. In a recent speech, he claimed to have been at Ground Zero on September 12 2001 (he was not); in another, he somehow managed to assert that he witnessed a bridge collapse in Pennsylvania (he did not), that his grandfather had died days before his birth in the same hospital (he had died a year earlier, in another state), and rattled off an anecdote about chatting to a train conductor (the conductor would have been dead at the time the conversation supposedly took place).

That is before we get to the endless trips and falls, the return of his stutter and, rather earlier, his evisceration in presidential debates by a clearly sharper Donald Trump. Liberal media outlets have tended to brush over the problem uncomfortably, reasoning that he is still the only thing between America and the return of Trump. Some are happy to cry 'ageism!' (but can they really believe it?). Yet, if this is so, what a sorry picture is painted. Either US politics is wholly lacking in new blood or it is so corrupt that no opportunities exist for new blood to break through.

Corruption

Ultimately, this is indeed a matter of corruption. The Democratic National Committee and its associated bodies exist to ensure the dominance of the business-friendly and most fanatically imperialist wing of the party over elected representation, and outright monopoly on presidential nominations. It was backroom king-making that ensured Biden's nomination in 2020, the outrageous 'superdelegate' system that gift-wrapped 2016's for Hillary Clinton. The nominations follow the money; and the money has no desire for left-Democrat planks like Medicare for all. With no feasible alternative, the money follows 'Sleepy Joe'. (Biden's relationship, over many years, with health insurers based in Delaware, has occasionally brushed up against the acceptable edges of propriety.)



Biden meets vice-president and members of his cabinet: the very people that could retire him as unfit for the job

There is, of course, a more immediate corruption scandal, although exactly what the 'scandal' is depends rather on your point of view. The Republican majority in the House has launched an impeachment inquiry against the president, on the basis of his son Hunter's dubious business dealings. Hunter, the most prodigal of sons, has proven a persistent source of scandal for his father - addicted to crack cocaine, a cheerily relentless customer to the sex industry, and an obsessive documenter of his various debauches, it was his failure to collect a laptop from a computer repair shop in 2020 that led to the last great controversy before that year's election, when a *New York Post* exposé on the contents of the laptop was suppressed by state authorities and social networks, on the false basis that it was Russian disinformation.

Indeed, oddly, this is not Hunter's first time in a walk-on role in a presidential impeachment. In 2019, the Democrats attempted to impeach Donald Trump when a recording was leaked of him apparently threatening to withhold military aid from Volodymyr Zelensky, then newly elected as Ukrainian president, unless Hunter's dealings in Ukraine were investigated for alleged corruption. Hunter was appointed to the board of Burisma, a natural gas exploration company, in 2014, while Joe was still vice-president under Barack Obama. It is obvious to all with eyes to see that this was not due to the young man's business acumen. This sinecure was designed to get access to his father.

The Republicans allege that Hunter repeated this trick with many different oligarchs and foreign organisations, and that "the Biden family" received up to \$20 million in payments. In spite of their digging, little hard evidence has been found that Biden senior received any of this money; on the most flattering interpretation, it seems to have flowed into Hunter's pockets, and from there into those of his drug dealers. That said, they do claim to have evidence that Biden attended dinners and took conference calls

with Hunter's clients - team Biden claims that nothing untoward was discussed ... so that's all right then.

From our spot in the cheap seats, it seems that Biden acquiesced in his role as his son's killer offering: access to the vice-president of the USA. This is, from the point of view of political morality, corrupt. The American legal system may not see it that way, since it - like its English progenitor - is morally vacuous, and defends the privileges of the exploiters, such privileges including the right (*de facto* if not *de jure*) to suborn officials.

Even that is not relevant to Biden's chances, however. The way the American system works is better known every passing year, it seems: the House of Representatives can vote to raise articles of impeachment (essentially filing charges); and the Senate effectively runs the trial, and decides on a vote whether the president shall actually be removed from office. The House vote is on a simple majority; the Senate requires a two-thirds majority to convict. The votes reliably go down partisan lines (not since the last days of Richard Nixon has this looked like breaking down, hence his resignation to avoid impeachment).

So the process looks pretty predictable at this point: the Republicans have a slim majority in the House, so Biden could well be impeached; but, even so, the Democrats have a majority in the Senate, so Biden will remain in office. House majority leader Kevin McCarthy knows this as much as anyone else, so this is clearly a stunt - as much a stunt as ultra-Trumpite congresswoman Marjorie Taylor-Greene's decision to show her colleagues blown-up reproductions of some of Hunter's, ahem, more intimate self-portraits back in July. There is an opportunity to call the president to testify to these charges, which is an opportunity to fix the stink of corruption on him - or else to give him more opportunities to exhibit his senescence.

It must also be seen as a tit-for-tat counterstrike on the part of Republicans for the flurry of

indictments of Trump this year. And, just as Biden clearly is corrupt - a classic representative of the "swamp" Trump promised to drain - so Trump clearly did attempt to overturn the election result, and even sent a mob of his followers on the most ham-fisted coup attempt in modern political history (you just can't get the staff these days ...). Conviction on any of the charges against him, however, would not necessarily disqualify him from standing; and, if he won, he could perhaps just pardon himself of any crimes.

Morbid symptoms

In other words, we look to be heading next year for a contest between two historically unpopular candidates, with maybe three past impeachments between them (plus who knows how many criminal charges?). Either result will be presumptively illegitimate to the losing side. The Republican diehards have long indulged fantasies about the illegitimacy of Democratic presidents and candidates, from Whitewater to 'birtherism', to Hillary's emails - and now to Hunter's dodgy dealings. The Democratic faithful have now caught the bug, thanks to Trump.

It would seem, then, that we are watching a crisis of legitimacy unfold in the American system (indeed, arguably this has been happening since 2008), which has the potential to grow over into a full-blown constitutional crisis in the near future. The significance of January 6 2021 coup attempt in this process should not be understated, merely because it was altogether comical in execution. A mob would not have to be much larger, and its forces not much more coherent and organised, to have created a standoff - and the standoff would have posed the sitting president against the military of which he is formally commander-in-chief. Elements of the US state core had already repeatedly intervened against him, and will continue to do so in the run-in to 2024.

Arguably this could not have come at a worse time for the US capitalist class and state core. The hegemon is in the midst of two major

pivots, in the domestic and foreign-policy strategic spheres (not to say one urgent matter, the proxy war in Ukraine). It is gearing up for great power confrontation with China in the Pacific, and simultaneously attempting to reshore (or alternatively 'friendshore') various strategically critical industries. Beneath all the froth, there is substantial agreement on the necessity of all this between the reactionary and liberal wings of US power. Yet achieving it requires a certain level of stability and continuity. Industrial policy must continue beyond the biannual congressional election cycle; effective strategic action requires unity - or at least a working relationship - between the military, intelligence and civilian-political apparatuses. Neither can be taken for granted if a prolonged constitutional deadlock were to arise.

As to where this is all going, we have no more than speculation. Biden's victory in 2024, even with the effective support of the deep state and the media, is by no means guaranteed (just ask Hillary ...). If he wins, how long can he really serve, given his state of health? That would mean a handover of power to Kamala Harris, whose tenure as VP has been largely anonymous, and who is not a little ineloquent and gaffe-prone herself (some cruel commentators have suggested she might be as fond of downers as Hunter is of uppers). If Trump should prevail, all bets are off.

Like that other egregiously corrupt chief executive, Warren G Harding, Biden promised a "return to normalcy". Nothing of the sort has been forthcoming - perhaps nothing of the sort is possible. It seems that the decades-long assault on the US working class has achieved such a level of social atomisation that the achievement of hegemony itself is problematic. At times like this, Marxists tend to reach for Gramsci's diagnosis of the "interregnum", in which "the old is dying and the new cannot yet be born".

We need not look hard to find morbid symptoms ●

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NORD STREAM

Investigations drag on and on

We all know who did it ... and it was not Russia. Daniel Lazare looks at how the right is gaining traction from telling an evident truth

With the first anniversary of the Nord Stream bombing just days away, it is increasingly clear that the sabotage operation did not merely blow up an underwater pipeline network: it opened up a growing rift in the Atlantic alliance as well.

Danish, Swedish and German investigators are supposedly hard at work trying to figure out who was behind the September 26 2022 attack. Just last week, German interior minister Nancy Faeser expressed the pious hope that “the federal prosecutor will find enough clues to indict the perpetrators”, because it “strengthens citizens’ confidence in the state of law when it succeeds in clearing up such complex cases”.¹

But, the longer the investigation drags on, the more apparent it becomes that those in charge do not want it to end, because they are afraid of what it will turn up: ie, the US is responsible and that it is therefore guilty of engaging in an act of war against a fellow Nato member. Since this is too awful for centrist politicians to contemplate, the goal is to investigate and investigate in the hope that the public will forget and move on. People like Faeser will continue wishing for an indictment that somehow never comes.

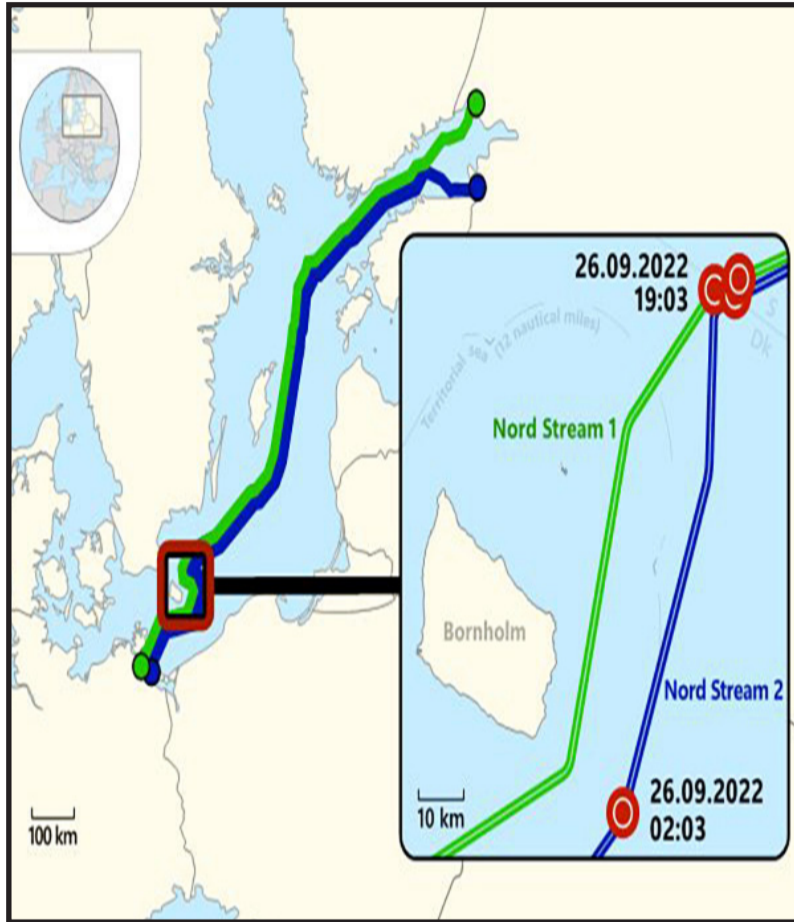
But that is not how it is working out. On the contrary, the more the establishment dithers, the more the advantage shifts to non-establishment forces that are beginning to sense that Nord Stream is the key to victory. This does not mean the tame left, which is no more willing to break with Nato than with the bourgeois state in general. Rather, it means the radical right, which is starting to realise what an enormous gift Joe Biden has handed it.

The process is barely underway in the US, where Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are solidly behind the war and have not acknowledged that a Nord Stream controversy even exists. But the story is beginning to change on the right. When asked in April who blew up the pipeline, Donald Trump replied, “I don’t want to get our country in trouble, so I won’t answer it. But I can tell you who it wasn’t ... Russia.”

Vivek Ramaswamy, the 38-year-old tech entrepreneur who is trying to out-Trump Trump on the presidential campaign trail, was less coy three weeks ago, when he told Fox News flat-out that the Biden administration “wrongfully cut off Russia from the west by bombing the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines”.² No ifs, ands or buts about it - the US was the one. The rightwing commentariat is also waking up. Tucker Carlson, the ex-Fox News star who now has a show on the website formerly known as Twitter, has repeatedly branded the US as the guilty party, while Glenn Beck, the radio talk show host and best-selling author, says he now believes the US “absolutely blew up” Nord Stream.³

Germany

Not unexpectedly, the process is far more advanced in Germany, since it is more or less the scene of the crime. The ‘traffic-light coalition’ - Social Democrats (red), Free Democrats (yellow) and Greens (well, green) - is still an integral part of the war effort and is paying a growing price as a consequence. Support for the government is down to just 36% (an all-time low), while support for the individual components is worse



Nord Stream and sabotage site

- just 16% for the once-mighty SPD, 6% for the Free Democrats and 14% for the Greens.⁴ Lots of factors are at work - immigration, a sinking economy, the war, etc - but the growing Nord Stream scandal is unquestionably one of them.

After all, chancellor Olaf Scholz was at Joe Biden’s side at the famous White House press conference on February 7 2022, in which the US president vowed: “If Russia invades, that means tanks or troops crossing the border of Ukraine again, there will no longer be a Nord Stream 2. We will bring an end to it ... I promise you we will be able to do it.”

Scholz managed to keep a straight face, even though Biden was threatening to destroy German property without so much as asking the chancellor for permission. But worse was still to come. A year later, Scholz flew to Washington for an emergency White House meeting apparently in response to three recent events: a deteriorating military situation in the Ukraine, an anti-war rally that drew an unexpected 50,000 people in Berlin, and a blockbuster exposé by famed investigative reporter Seymour Hersh detailing how a US naval underwater sabotage team planted the explosives in collaboration with the Norwegian military.⁵ The result four days later were a pair of cryptic stories in *The New York Times* and *Die Zeit*, obviously planted by US-German intelligence, stating that the operation was not the work of America and Norway after all, but that of “a proxy force with connections to the Ukrainian government or its security services”.⁶

The story was less than convincing, since no-one could explain how the saboteurs could transport hundreds of kilograms of explosives to multiple blast sites aboard a 50-foot rented sailboat or how they also found room on such a tiny craft for a decompression chamber needed to operate at depths of up to 80 metres.

The result was to weaken Scholz all the more while providing

opportunities for parties on the government’s left and right. Although deeply divided on the war, Die Linke (‘The Left’) - a union of ex-East German communists plus other leftwing parties - allowed Sevim Dagdelen, a member of the Bundestag since 2005, to label Nord Stream as “a terrorist attack ... presumably committed by Nato allies, the United States of America and Norway.”⁷ Die Linke star Sahra Wagenknecht, who is nonetheless at odds with her party over her anti-war stance, declared that, even if Ukraine did it, it is plain that “the USA certainly didn’t want to stop them, but probably even motivated them”.⁸

Some on the left were smart enough to seize on the issue, even though most held back for fear of appearing anti-Nato or pro-Putin. But the Alternative für Deutschland felt no such compunctions and an AfD leader named Hans-Thomas Tillschneider announced in March:

It’s clear to every sane person that it was the United States that blew up Nord Stream. Joe Biden was aware, he openly said, they would end Nord Stream ... Germany should have expelled the US ambassador [and] withdrawn from Nato. Most of the problems in the world are that the United States wants to have world domination and impose its values and its ideas on the rest of the world. And we are saying that we need a multipolar world.⁹

It was an example of the ultra-right using anti-US rhetoric to advance a German nationalist agenda. And Maximilian Krah, the AfD’s leading candidate in the upcoming European parliamentary elections, added at a party gathering in August:

Nord Stream was blown up. That means critical infrastructure, on which the competitiveness of German industry depends, was blown away before our eyes. Now I still have enough contacts in the US that my American friends

can tell me, ‘Of course it was the United States - who else?’¹⁰

Finally, AfD member Markus Frohnmaier told the Bundestag on September 6: “If it is really true that the trail of the Nord Stream terrorists leads to Ukraine, then I and many colleagues will fight to ensure that no more money flows to Kiev.”¹¹ Even if the Ukrainian story is a CIA “false flag”, as Hersh labelled it, it is not going to help the Scholz government get out of its jam.¹²

Evidence

Where is all this heading? For one thing, it is plain that the US role is the elephant in the parlour that is growing harder and harder to ignore, no matter how much pro-war parties might try.

While no smoking gun has been found, the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming. Not only did Biden promise in February 2022 to put an end to Nord Stream, but deputy secretary of state Victoria Nuland said the same thing a month earlier, declaring that “one way or another Nord Stream 2 will not move forward” if Russia invades. This followed years of bellicose statements by a seemingly endless stream of congressmen before an invasion was on anybody’s mind. Among them was a Republican senator from Arkansas named Tom Cotton, whose message to Congress in May 2021 was: “Kill Nord Stream 2 now, and let it rust beneath the waves of the Baltic.”¹³

Then there were all those expressions of glee afterwards: eg, secretary of state Antony Blinken telling a press conference four days after the blast that the explosions were a “tremendous opportunity to once and for all remove the dependence on Russian energy” and “take away from [Putin] the weaponisation of energy as a means of advancing his imperial designs”. Or Nuland informing Texas senator Ted Cruz: “Like you, I am - and I think the administration is - very gratified to know that Nord Stream 2 is now, as you like to say, a hunk of metal at the bottom of the sea.”¹⁴

So top Washington politicians called for the destruction of Nord Stream, promised that they had the means to do it and then expressed satisfaction over a job well done. Add to that the technical skills needed to conduct such an operation in deep international waters - skills that only the US and a few other militaries have, and the verdict seems clear: Sleepy Joe is the Nord Stream bomber.

Whether or not it is enough to satisfy a court of law, it is more than enough to satisfy the court of public opinion. After a year of denial and obfuscation, Nord Stream is now a dangling thread that could cause the entire fabric of US-German relations to unravel - provided someone pulls on it hard enough.

An increasingly radicalised AfD seems more than up to the task. A year ago, it was polling at 14%. Today, it is 21% - four points ahead of the SPD and second only to the Christian Democrats, the leader at 27%.¹⁵ *The Washington Post* recently rounded up the usual suspects in an attempt to explain the surge - the pandemic, the war, a “continued slow economy and high inflation,” and so forth. But it refused to breathe a word about the real issue on the German electorate’s mind.

It noted that the party is heading in an increasingly radical direction. It quoted Krah, a leader of the party’s ethno-nationalist wing, denouncing gay pride as “disgusting” and declaring that the “great replacement theory” is not some kooky idea, but a real description of Germany’s current plight. It faithfully reported his statement that “Germany is a country in a crisis, and it’s not just an economic crisis. It’s also an identity crisis. It’s a crisis where Germans forgot to be proud of their own fathers and grandfathers.”¹⁶

But about Nord Stream - not a word. On that topic, the *Post* has taken a vow of silence that it cannot break without the White House’s say-so. But Krah is not the least bit reluctant to wade in troubled waters. As he tweeted on September 17,

We know who blew up Nord Stream. It wasn’t the Russians, and it wasn’t a private Ukrainian sailing crew either. Our government knows for sure. It probably was informed beforehand. It watches as the lifeline of all German industry and the guarantee of your cheap energy is blown up, because it’s not your government. It’s not about German interests: it’s about pleasing its masters outside of Germany and taking part in the big war against everyone who wants to be different. Now in Ukraine against the Russians. Tomorrow in Taiwan against the Chinese. The main thing is that Germany pays and Germany grows poor, so that these guys have power and money.¹⁷

The AfD knows that such nationalism is winning over a growing number of Germans, which is why it is pushing it more and more. The more the Nord Stream cover-up unravels, the more it drives Germany in the arms of the hard right - and the more it causes Nato to unravel too ●

Notes

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CPB

Elephant in the room

It is Zionism, not anti-Zionism, that is joined to anti-Semitism. Tony Greenstein calls out the CPB's resident Zionist, Mary Davis

At first sight it is strange that the Communist Party of Britain, which claims to support the Palestinians, should carry an article repeating the hoary old Zionist smear that anti-Zionism leads to anti-Semitism.

Mary Davis's 'The contested relationship between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism' (*Communist Review* No 108, summer 2023) is an exercise in obfuscation and dishonesty, not least because it attempts to present Zionism as some kind of national movement of the Jews (or even western Jews) that sought to fight anti-Semitism and racism.

Some inconvenient facts Davis chose to ignore:

■ Zionism formed alliances with and befriended anti-Semites.

■ Zionism was a racial nationalist movement that sought an alliance with imperialism.

■ Zionism was supported by only a small minority of Jews before the holocaust. If any group could be considered a Jewish national movement, it was the Bund, which operated over an identifiable territory: the 'Pale of Settlement' in eastern Europe, with its Yiddish-speaking Jews.

Colonisation

Davis paints, with a broad brush, the history of Zionist colonisation in Palestine, but amazingly fails to mention the Nakba - the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948. We are given a saccharine version of history, whereby the *Yishuv* (the Jewish community) "sometimes, although by no means always, co-existed relatively peacefully with the indigenous Arab population". That is it.

The first *aliyah* (wave of immigration) in 1882 was a traditional form of colonisation, in which Arabs were employed in the colonies, whilst continuing to live on the land. These were the colonies of Barons Edmond de Rothschild and, after his death in 1896, Maurice de Hirsch's Jewish Colonisation Association - then later the Palestinian Jewish Colonisation Association (PICA). They were not Zionists.

The second Labour Zionist *aliyah* (1904-14), was the beginning of Zionist settlement. The policy of Jewish Labour, (Boycott of Arab Labour), was at its heart. David HaCohen, a leader of Mapai (Israeli Labor Party) and a member of the Knesset for many years, explained:

I had to fight my friends on the issue of Jewish socialism, to defend the fact that I would not accept Arabs in my trade union, the Histadrut [General Federation of Jewish Labour]; to defend preaching to housewives that they not buy at Arab stores; to defend the fact that we stood guard at orchards to prevent Arab workers from getting jobs there ... To pour kerosene on Arab tomatoes; to attack Jewish housewives in the markets and smash the Arab eggs they had bought; ... to throw the *fellahin* [peasants] off the land - to buy dozens of dunams from an Arab is permitted, but to sell, god forbid, one Jewish dunam to an Arab is prohibited; to take Rothschild, the incarnation of capitalism, as a socialist and to name him the "benefactor" - to do all that was not easy (*Ha'aretz* November 15 1969).



Siding with Palestinians while harbouring a Zionist

The best analysis of Zionist colonisation was contained in the 1930 report of Sir John Hope-Simpson, in the wake of the 1929 riots:

... the result of the purchase of land in Palestine by the Jewish National Fund [JNF] has been that land has been extraterritorialised. It ceases to be land from which the Arab can gain any advantage either now or at any time in the future. Not only can he never hope to lease or to cultivate it, but, by the stringent provisions of the lease of the JNF, he is deprived forever from employment on that land. ... The land is in mortmain and inalienable. It is for this reason that Arabs discount the professions of friendship and good will on the part of the Zionists in view of the policy which the Zionist Organisation [ZO] deliberately adopted.¹

Davis criticises "the blanket identification of Zionism with racism, apartheid, colonialism and worse", and lectures the reader that "moral judgements ... must not be allowed to obscure an analysis of the Zionist movement". Unfortunately Davis is guilty of the very crime that she ascribes to others.

From its inception at the end of the 19th century, Zionism saw itself as a colonial movement. In January 1902 Theodor Herzl, its founder, described a letter he had written to Cecil Rhodes, the white supremacist leader in southern Africa:

How, then, do I happen to turn to you, since this is an out-of-the-way matter for you? How indeed? Because it is something colonial, and because it presupposes understanding of a development which will take 20 or 30 years ... But you, Mr Rhodes, are a visionary politician or a practical visionary. You have already demonstrated this. And what I want you to do is ... to put the stamp of your authority on the Zionist plan ...²

Today, when colonialism has gone out of fashion, the Zionist movement disavows its colonial roots. However, when it was in fashion, the ZO had a 'Colonisation Department'.³

David Ben Gurion, chair of Mapai and Israel's first prime minister,

regularly referred to the settlements as "colonies". For all her bluster and waffle, Davis cannot deny the fact that the Zionist movement saw itself as a settler-colonial movement. As we can see from the Hope-Simpson report, racism was integral to Zionist colonisation.

Apartheid

Davis is at pains to infer that anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism have much in common and that the former leads to the latter. She tells us that anti-Zionism "*per se* is not anti-Semitic". However, "there is currently a strain of anti-Zionism ... which has normalised hostility to Israel as a Zionist entity founded by Jews". This apparently "can and often does lead to anti-Semitism".

Despite the efforts of the Zionists to redefine anti-Semitism as hostility not to Jews, but to Zionism and Israel, Davis does not once mention the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance misdefinition of anti-Semitism.

Why does she argue that anti-Zionism is anti-Semitic? Firstly, "because it singles out Israel for special treatment"; and, secondly, because "questioning the existence of the state of Israel ignores the motivation for its foundation as a refuge for Jews ...". This argument about 'singling out' Israel for criticism echoes the complaints of supporters of apartheid in South Africa, who were keen to point to the iniquities of surrounding countries, as if that was any kind of justification. Apartheid South Africa was founded as a refuge for the Afrikaners and the USA was a refuge for Christian dissenters. It is irrelevant why a state was founded. What matters is what it does.

Nor was Israel founded in order to save the victims of anti-Semitism from persecution. Chaim Weizmann said in 1919: "Alas, Zionism can't provide a solution for catastrophes." Palestine was closed to thousands of survivors of the Ukrainian pogroms in the early 1920s.⁴ Gur Alroey described how Chaim Weizmann, Israel's first president, "preferred productive immigrants over needy refugees and thought the land of Israel needed strong, healthy immigrants, not refugees weak in body and spirit".⁵

Rabbi Abba Hillel-Silver, president of the Zionist Organisation of America, asked:

Are we again, in moments of desperation, going to confuse Zionism with refugeism, which is likely to defeat Zionism? ... Zionism is not a refugee movement. It is not a product of the Second World War, nor of the first. Were there no displaced Jews in Europe, ... Zionism would still be an imperative necessity.⁶

The Zionist movement opposed the rescue of Jews from the Nazis to any country bar Palestine. After Kristallnacht (the Nazi pogrom in November 1938), Britain agreed to admit 10,000 children (the Kindertransport). The Zionist leadership was furious. Ben Gurion told Mapai's central committee on December 9 1938:

If I knew that it would be possible to save all the children in Germany by bringing them over to England, and only half of them by transporting them to Eretz Yisrael, then I would opt for the second alternative. For we must weigh not only the life of these children, but also the history of the people of Israel.⁷

A week later, on December 17 1938, Ben Gurion wrote a memo to the Zionist Executive expressing his fears that:

If the Jews are faced with a choice between the refugee problem and rescuing Jews from concentration camps, on the one hand, and aid for the national museum in Palestine, on the other, the Jewish sense of pity will prevail and our people's entire strength will be directed at aid for the refugees in the various countries. Zionism will vanish from the agenda and indeed not only world public opinion in England and America, but also from Jewish public opinion. We are risking Zionism's very existence if we allow the refugee problem to be separated from the Palestine problem.⁸

A Jewish state was founded not in order to rescue individual Jews, but in order to perpetuate the Jewish nation/race. That was the basis of the cordial relationship between the Nazis and the Zionists during the 1930s. How else to explain the fact that the German Zionist Federation (Zvfd) pressurised the Gestapo not to allow Jews to emigrate to countries other

than Palestine? The Gestapo "did everything in those days to promote emigration, particularly to Palestine".⁹

When Franklin D Roosevelt called the Evian Conference to discuss Europe's Jewish refugees, the Zionists were appalled. A meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive (JAE) in June 1938 decided to

belittle the [Evian] conference as far as possible and to cause it to decide nothing ... We are particularly worried that it would move Jewish organisations to collect large sums of money for aid to Jewish refugees, and these collections could interfere with our collection efforts.¹⁰

Ben-Gurion at a meeting of the JAE on June 26 1938 explained: "No rationalisations can turn the conference from a harmful to a useful one. What can and should be done is to limit the damage as far as possible."¹¹ Menachem Ussishkin at the same meeting said that

He hoped to hear in Evian that Eretz Israel remains the main venue for Jewish emigration. All other emigration countries do not interest him ... The greatest danger is that attempts will be made to find other territories for Jewish emigration.¹²

The Zionist leaders welcomed the rise of the Nazis to government. It vindicated everything they had said about the impossibility of Jews living amongst non-Jews. Zionist leaders saw the Hitler regime as a golden opportunity to prosper.¹³ Francis Nicosia spoke of the "illusory assumption" that Zionism "must have been well served by a Nazi victory". Hitler's victory "could only bolster Zionist fortunes". Nicosia also spoke of the tendency to "view Zionist interests as distinct from those of the larger Jewish community in the diaspora".¹⁴

So positive was its assessment of the situation that, as early as April 1933, the Zvfd announced its determination to take advantage of the crisis to win over the traditionally assimilationist German Jewry to Zionism.¹⁵

Berl Katznelson, Ben-Gurion's effective deputy, saw the rise of Hitler as "an opportunity to build and flourish like none we have ever had or ever will have".¹⁶ Ben-Gurion was even more optimistic: "The Nazis' victory would become 'a fertile force for Zionism'.¹⁷

Noah Lucas, a critical Zionist historian, wrote:

As the European holocaust erupted, Ben-Gurion saw it as a decisive opportunity for Zionism ... In conditions of peace ... Zionism could not move the masses of world Jewry. The forces unleashed by Hitler in all their horror must be harnessed to the advantage of Zionism ... By the end of 1942 ... the struggle for a Jewish state became the primary concern of the movement.¹⁸

Zionism began as a reaction to anti-Semitism, especially the pogroms that followed the assassination of tsar Alexander II in 1881. Unlike most Jews themselves, Zionism accepted the main premise of the anti-Semites: that Jews did not belong in the countries where they lived. That was why anti-Semites endorsed the

Zionist movement as a way of being rid of their unwanted Jews.

Zionism believed that anti-Semitism could not be fought, because it was inherent in every non-Jew. In the midst of the Dreyfus affair, when over half of France had taken up the struggle for a Jewish officer, Herzl wrote:

In Paris ... I achieved a freer attitude towards anti-Semitism, which I now began to understand historically and to pardon. Above all, I recognise the emptiness and futility of trying to 'combat' anti-Semitism.

The leader of the anti-Dreyfusards was Edouard Drumont. When Drumont favourably reviewed Herzl's pamphlet *The Jewish state*, in an article entitled 'Solution de la question juive' in *La Libre Parole* (January 1897), Herzl expressed his delight in his diary.¹⁹

Most Jews viewed Zionism as a form of *Jewish* anti-Semitism. Davis mentions that the first Zionist Congress was held in Switzerland in 1897. What she does not mention is that it was supposed to have been held in Munich, but the Jewish community there protested against it as condoning anti-Semitism. As Sir Samuel Montagu, a Liberal MP, wrote: "Is it not ... a suspicious fact that those who have no love for the Jews, and those who are pronounced anti-Semites, all seem to welcome the Zionist proposals and aspiration?"²⁰

Zionism was a counter-revolutionary movement. After the Kishinev pogrom in April 1903 Herzl journeyed to see tsarist interior minister Vyacheslav Plehve who had organised the pogroms. Herzl asked Plehve: "Help me to reach land sooner and the revolt will end. And so will the defection to the socialists."²¹ Plehve approved the publication of a Zionist daily, *Der Fraynd* - uniquely Zionism was a legal political movement in Russia. Herzl promised that the revolutionaries would stop their struggle in return for a charter for Palestine in 15 years. The Bund was outraged.²²

Davis makes great play of the 'Marxist'-Zionist Poalei Zion workers' organisation (PZ) omitting to mention that its founder, Ber Borochov, was expelled from the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1901 for Zionism. 'Socialist Zionism' only began because mainstream Zionism, with its belief that anti-Semitism could not be fought, held no attractions for Jewish workers.

In Poland Left PZ effectively abandoned Zionism, while in Palestine PZ moved to the right, as the rhythms of colonisation and conflict with the Arabs took over. Davis argues that PZ "advocated a harmonious relationship between Jew and Arab in Palestine". Either she knows nothing about Zionist colonisation or she is lying. PZ and its successor, Ahdut Ha'avodah, deliberately eschewed unity between Jewish and Arab workers.

Left Zionism?

Davis argues that Zionism "was never a monolithic movement with a settled ideology". Rather it was "fractured from its early days and remains so until the present time".

Although it is true that the Zionist movement was divided into numerous different groups, it is not true that there was no common ideology. All wings agreed that Jews, wherever they lived, formed a nation and there was also unanimity, with the exception of the tiny Brit Shalom, that their goal was the establishment of a Jewish state.

Whereas the Revisionists sought to achieve their maximalist goals at once, Ben Gurion realised that

the Yishuv had to build up its strength numerically before it could realistically achieve statehood. There was an unspoken consensus among all wings that the achievement of a Jewish state would involve the 'transfer' of the Arabs.

The Revisionists wanted to jettison Zionism's imperialist partners, the British, before the Yishuv was ready, whereas Ben Gurion realised that until the Yishuv reached a critical mass, the British presence was indispensable. The differences were not those of principle, but tactics.

Class and nation

The Histadrut, which Golda Meir described as a "great colonising agency", was formed in 1920.²³ The class struggle was seen as weakening the settler enterprise. In April 1924 the Palestine Communist Party adopted an anti-Zionist, anti-imperialist outlook - it was expelled from Histadrut.²⁴

The Labour Zionist slogan was 'From class to nation'. The class struggle was to be waged not against the employers, but the Arabs. It was Labour Zionism which built the state of Israel. The Nakba was carried out primarily by the Labour Zionist militias, Haganah and Palmach, not the Revisionists.

What does a Jewish state mean? Davis ignores this question. Being Jewish in such a state would not be a religious, but a national/racial category. In Israel you can be registered as of no religion, but in terms of nationality you are Jewish.

The Jewish Nation State Law of 2018, which Davis references, states that in Israel only Jews have the right of national self-determination.²⁵ Arabs are guests - there on sufferance. They are not part of the national collective. To this very day, Israel's Palestinian citizens face having their villages demolished in order to make way for Jewish towns. In July 2023 the residents of Ras Jrahah in the Negev were given until March 2024 to destroy their homes and leave their village to make way for the expansion of a nearby Israeli city.²⁶ This was not even in the West Bank. Half of all Israel's Arab villages are 'unrecognised'. They are on state land, which belongs to the Jewish 'nation'. After all the state is a Jewish state. Such villages have no piped water, electricity or even ballot boxes in elections. This is internal colonisation.

As Netanyahu has remarked, "Israel is not a state of all its citizens ... Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people - and only it."²⁷ Ethno-religious states are a throwback to the days of feudalism. It was the bourgeois revolution in France which established in 1799 the idea that a nation includes all the people living within its territory, not just those of a particular religion.

But Davis sees opposition to a *Jewish* state as anti-Semitic. If so then it was surely racist to oppose the apartheid state in South Africa. No, a state based on only part of its population is clearly racist.

It is astounding that someone who calls themselves a communist cannot see how anti-Semitism was weaponised by the right to defeat the Corbyn project. For example, "Jeremy Corbyn has allowed vile anti-Semitism to fester and grow," screamed the *Daily Express*.²⁸ The same paper that campaigned against the admission of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany was to the fore in opposing Labour 'anti-Semitism'.

Similarly today, it opposes immigration: "No-one is swallowing the asylum-seeker lie any more - the game's up," wrote Carole Malone.²⁹ We had *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*, fresh from employing neo-Nazi Katie Hopkins as a columnist, protesting their shock at Labour

"anti-Semitism".³⁰ Is Mary Davis really unable to join the dots?

Tom Watson and the Labour right, who made the demonisation of Muslims and asylum-seekers into a fine art, protested their abhorrence at Labour 'anti-Semitism'. Gordon Brown, whose slogan, 'British jobs for British workers', was coined by fascist groups such as the British National Party and National Front,³¹ fulminated against the "stain" of Labour "anti-Semitism".³²

If there was one thing that destroyed the Corbyn project, it was the inability of the Labour left to fight back against false accusations of anti-Semitism. Yet what conclusion does Davis draw? "It is an undoubted fact that the conflation of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism has been, and still is, a constant theme of left discourse." In fact the equation of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is a *Zionist*, not left theme.³³

Boris Johnson, whose racist utterances are notorious³⁴ and whose 2004 book *72 Virgins* was replete with racist and anti-Semitic stereotypes, was also 'concerned' about Labour 'anti-Semitism'.³⁵ Nor does Davis point out the hypocrisy of Labour MPs who attacked Corbyn's 'anti-Semitism', but supported Theresa May's 'hostile environment' Immigration Act 2014.³⁶

Davis signals that there was no smoke without fire. She uses weasel words, talking about "persistent allegations of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party". Well, Watson and John Mann were certainly persistent, but they were the same people who backed the racist Labour MP, Phil Woolas, in 2010, when the High Court removed him from parliament. Woolas had apparently fought an election campaign based on "making the white folk angry".³⁷

Davis treats the Equality and Human Rights Commission 'investigation' into Labour 'anti-Semitism' as if the EHRC was some well-meaning human rights group rather than an instrument of the British state. This is the same EHRC which has refused to investigate Tory Islamophobia and whose board is stuffed with rightwing appointees. The commissioner who conducted the inquiry, Alisdair Henderson, was later found to have been tweeting in support of fascist philosopher Roger Scruton and making derogatory comments about feminism.³⁸

Davis cannot bring herself to mention the expulsion of Jewish members of the party - the fact that Jews in the Labour Party face a five times greater chance of being expelled than non-Jews.³⁹

She says that "vibrant oppositional forces exist in Israel", but what she does *not* do is explain how today Labour Zionism is an endangered species. Having formed every government from 1949 to 1977, the Israeli Labor Party has not formed a government since 1999. Mapam/Meretz, which was once the second largest party in the Knesset, has no elected members today.

Israel is a rightwing society, where the phrase 'leftist' is a term of abuse, where racism amongst the young is rampant and where a plurality of Jews support the expulsion of Palestinian Israelis. On every count Israeli Palestinians are discriminated against by the state. What remains of the left in Israel is extremely weak.

In the demonstrations over Netanyahu's judicial reforms, the anti-occupation bloc has been regularly attacked by others taking part. The demonstrations are primarily a protest within the Jewish collective, from which Palestinian Israelis are absent. Meanwhile, when it comes to the army's attack on Palestinians in Jenin and elsewhere, there is Zionist unanimity.

Davis mentions the Israeli human

rights organisation, B'tselem, but omits to point out that last year it concluded that Israel was an apartheid state and that a "regime of Jewish supremacy" extends "from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: this is apartheid."⁴⁰

Today we have the phenomenon of the Jewish neo-Nazi Otzma Yehudit being part of the third largest bloc in the Knesset, yet Davis has nothing to say about this or the upsurge in settler attacks and pogroms against the Palestinians. Of course, in the protests some Israeli Jews will become radicalised and begin to understand that you cannot maintain a military dictatorship in the occupied territories and a Jewish democracy in Israel. In South Africa repression of the black population led to democracy for white people being eroded. So too in Israel.

Two states?

Davis harkens back to 1947 and the decision of Stalin to support the establishment of Israel as a 'Jewish state'. This resulted in the weakening of the communist parties in the Arab east and the Nakba - the expulsion of three quarters of a million Palestinians.

If there is one thing that the past half century teaches us, it is that Israel has no intention of creating a Palestinian state in the West Bank. The Oslo Accords replaced the faces of Israeli soldiers with Palestinian faces. Palestinians are now beginning to recognise that the *only* solution is the creation, as in South Africa, of a unitary state which guarantees equal rights for all. Only racists and Zionists like Mary Davis oppose such an outcome.

A two-state solution would leave an apartheid Israeli state in place, together with a repressive Bantustan in the West Bank. The 700,000 settlers are not going anywhere and there is no appetite or desire within Israel to remove them. The Israeli Communist Party is wrong to cling to this 'solution', which would be an invitation to expel Israeli Palestinians into such a state.

Davis began her article by telling us how many times Zion is referred to in the *Bible*, as if this proved anything. Zionism has always been a political, not a religious, movement. Yes, Jews prayed for a return to the 'Holy Land', but, as Bernard Lazare - the original Dreyfusard and an early Zionist - noted, what this prayer was really saying was that they wished to be free.

When 2.5 million Russian Jews emigrated from tsarist Russia between the mid-19th century and 1914, some 99% went to the USA and Britain. A mere trickle of Zionist activists, most of whom did not remain, went to Palestine. Whenever Jews have been given the chance, most have chosen to go anywhere but Palestine.

Mary Davis's article is one long apologia for Zionism. Its mistakes are too many to count. It is tendentious and is based on an imperialist-imposed partition. Ironically Israel today reflects the anti-Semitism that Jews once experienced in Europe. Instead of the chant, 'Death to the Jews', we now have 'Death to the Arabs'. But this is the state that Mary Davis wishes to preserve - her article is the exact opposite of international solidarity.

Davis turns a blind eye to the fact that Zionism has always been supported by anti-Semites, from Donald Trump and Richard Spencer to Tommy Robinson. Israel has excellent relations with anti-Semitic regimes in eastern Europe, from Hungary's Viktor Orbán to Poland's Mateusz Morawiecki. News has just come in of a meeting between Israel's ambassador in Romania, Reuven Azar, with the holocaust-

denying Alliance for the Union of Romanians leader George Simion.⁴¹

This is the reality of Zionism that Mary Davis denies ●

Notes

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ANTI-SEMITISM



Witch-hunt bang to rights

A damning report concludes that in every fully investigated case, charges of anti-Semitism were found to be baseless. **Carla Roberts** is not surprised

Considering that allegations of anti-Semitism continue apace, it is astonishing that a damning report produced by the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies and the European Legal Support Centre (ELSC) should barely be mentioned in the mainstream media.¹ *The Guardian* managed a short article² on this scientifically conducted study, entitled *The adverse impact of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism*, which was published on September 13. It investigated all 40 academic cases where a student, member of staff or a student society was accused of having violated the so-called 'Working definition of anti-Semitism', promoted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.³

We know, of course, why the majority of the media will not bother too much about this report - it entirely repudiates the official narrative that anti-Semitism is a massive threat in and to society. The report also confirms that the IHRA neither has a 'definition' (it is far too vague for that) nor does it deal with 'anti-Semitism' (it mainly deals with criticism of Israel).

The joint study looks at all incidents, occurring between January 2017 and May 2022 in higher education, where "accusations of anti-Semitism were made on the basis of the IHRA definition". In some cases, it was the accused who reached out to the ELSC or the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, "which then referred them to ELSC". But the ELSC also examined cases

highlighted in the press and on social media.

Of these 40 cases, two "have yet to be substantiated" and are ongoing. Out of the other 38 cases, five concerned events that were reported to the authorities for having 'anti-Semitic' titles or speakers. Almost all of them ended up being cancelled - or the speaker withdrew after the university demanded that they confirm beforehand that they would not breach the IHRA definition.

As for the other cases, nine were made against individual students and 24 against staff. While some of the accusations were dismissed straightaway by the university administration, most led to often lengthy investigations: "Of those cases in which investigations or disciplinary hearings occurred, they took several months, resulting in prolonged stress and anxiety." And they all ended up finding that the student or staff member had "no case to answer".

Although the report does not feature the original evidence (presumably for privacy reasons), we get the paraphrased gist of them in the attached appendix: 'Table of evidence'. For example: "Complaint of alleged anti-Semitism for sharing a social media post mentioning that 'the establishment of Israel was a racist endeavour'."⁴

This provocative formulation (taken straight from the IHRA's list of 11 examples) has got many a Labour Party member expelled. However, when a *real* disciplinary process is applied,

Johann Jakob Wick
'Burning of three witches
on November 4 1585
in Baden, Switzerland'

Ken Livingstone thought he
could get justice through
the courts.
He was wrong



the verdict is: "No case to answer". This shows that, even though most universities have adopted the IHRA fake definition, it proves to be entirely inadequate as soon as it is put to the test.

It is also further proof, if any was needed, that the disciplinary process in the Labour Party is not worth the name. Most public higher-education institutions have the burden of proof and cannot simply expel or dismiss the accused. Also, students and particularly employees have access to appeals processes (for example, an employment tribunal). None of that exists in the Labour Party.

Sadly, Jeremy Corbyn made no attempt to repair the system - he actually made it worse by introducing fast-track expulsions and allowing the hounding of some of his most outspoken supporters, like Chris Williamson, Jackie Walker and Marc Wadsworth. His strategy of trying to appease the right allowed the witch-hunt, and particularly the anti-Semitism smear campaign, to go into overdrive.

Still, the best disciplinary process in the world cannot protect you from having your name dragged through the mud in newspapers or online, even if the allegations turn out to be baseless. The report is scathing. All these cases came surrounded in publicity, leaving reputations and careers of numerous students and academics seriously damaged.

Complainants

The authors also note something we have frequently come across

in the Labour Party:

Another common feature across several cases is the occurrence of significant levels of monitoring and surveillance of any publicly expressed analysis or opinion about Israel or Palestine. This includes recording student speeches, staff lectures and other presentations; monitoring student or staff social media posts (including the collection of social media posts several years after they were written); reviewing academic publications; and reviewing course syllabi and reading lists.

The implication is clear: these complaints were - in the vast majority - not made by this or that Jewish student who has been discriminated against, heard something anti-Semitic or experienced something even as vague as 'feeling unsafe'. No, many complaints seem to be part and parcel of a concerted witch-hunt. Certain individuals and organisations have gone out of their way to dig up dirt and find something that could be misconstrued as anti-Semitic. The report gives an example that will sound familiar to many Labour activists:

In December 2020, an academic staff member teaching on the Middle East received a notification from their university management that a recent graduate, whom the academic had never taught, had submitted complaints for anti-

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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Semitism against them and that an investigation had been opened. The complaints concerned more than 20 social media posts, some of which were posted by the academic, whilst others were merely shared or liked, dating from 2016 to 2020. The posts consisted of criticism of Zionism as a political ideology; a media article about the Nakba, and comments about the allegations of anti-Semitism made against members of the Labour Party. The complainant argued that the posts breached the IHRA definition.

The academic was cleared of all allegations, but not before being subjected to a lengthy disciplinary process. This caused a considerable amount of stress and represented a significant burden on the academic, who had to request legal advice. The university referred to the IHRA definition as part of their policies to include in the disciplinary proceedings.

It would have been interesting to see how many of these allegations came from the same source - after all, the 40 complaints were made in only 14 universities. Although these are not quite the same numbers we have seen in the Labour Party, where Margaret Hodge proudly stated that she alone had submitted 200 complaints (no doubt she researched each and everyone of them herself and therefore did not have time to check if they were even Labour members - 90% were not!).⁵

It's Israel, stupid

The scope of the research does not allow the authors to explain the political reasons for this witch-hunt. Some more naive commentators presumed that, with the defeat of Jeremy Corbyn and the destruction of the 'Corbyn movement' (however flaky that was), the witch-hunt around Israel/Palestine would stop.

Perhaps that is why former Tory leadership wannabe Rory Stewart stated in an interview with the liberal Novara Media that he thought it was safe to discuss Corbyn: "I think it's disgusting he was thrown out of the Labour party. I mean, it's mad. Jeremy Corbyn, whatever you think of him, is a major figure who

represents a very significant part of Labour history and heritage. He was the leader of the party."⁶

Of course, all hell broke loose. After the Jewish Leadership Council called his comments "disgusting", Stewart quickly tried to "clarify" - ie, grovellingly retract: "There was horrifying anti-Semitism in Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party, I had friends who witnessed it directly and they expressed to me how disgusting it was. I absolutely believe it and it was a very good reason why people turned against Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party."

Clearly, the campaign against Corbyn was just a smaller side show and an integral part of a much bigger picture. Israel remains a key ally of US imperialism in the Middle East. But, with the rise of the global Palestine solidarity movement and the campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), it has become increasingly difficult to justify the massive ongoing financial, military and political support for a state that so very visibly, systematically and brutally oppresses the Palestinians. Claiming that anti-Semitism is a huge and growing problem globally allows the Zionist state to be painted as a besieged outpost - a bolthole in case of another holocaust.

The IHRA plays an important part of this, which is why it is still being forced through in town halls, political parties, national parliaments - and on campuses too. It allows charges of anti-Semitism (some real, but mostly not) to be instrumentalised and weaponised. As the report puts it,

The spate of allegations of anti-Semitism is damaging academic freedom, curtailing freedom of debate and discussion on campuses, leading to self-censorship among those who research and study Israel-Palestine, and, in some cases, harming personal and professional lives and livelihoods. In addition to these harms, it is likely that the IHRA definition and its use has a much wider chilling effect, causing others to avoid discussing issues related to Palestine, thereby acting as a form of self-censorship.

The authors are right to focus on the

danger of self-censorship, which is a key aim of this campaign - much better to stop people from speaking out in solidarity with Palestine in the first place. The authors' recommendation is clear: the IHRA should "not be adopted, implemented or promoted by any higher education institution. Where it has been adopted, the decision should be rescinded."

But things are still going the other way, unfortunately. In 2017, there were only 18 out of 95 universities that had not yet adopted IHRA. Today, only 12 are still holding out, including SOAS and the University of Greenwich in London. That means that almost 90% of all UK universities have now adopted the IHRA 'definition'.⁷ No doubt, this is down to political pressure - not least from the UK government, which has repeatedly threatened to withhold funding from those higher education bodies that refuse to adopt it. Although we have not heard of this actually being implemented, it will certainly have many university administrations shaking in their boots.

Miller et al

Incidentally, the study *does not* include the case of professor David Miller, who was sacked from his job at Bristol University in October 2021 after a campaign by the Israeli-funded Union of Jewish Students.⁸ Backed by a petition of over 100 parliamentarians, it was alleged that comments by Miller were "threatening the safety" of Jewish students on campus.⁹ However, the official reason for his dismissal is not anti-Semitism or contravening the IHRA, but that he "did not meet the standards of behaviour we expect from our staff". He is taking the university to an employment tribunal and has already raised well over £30,000 towards his £50,000 target.¹⁰

I have many political differences with Miller, among them his dreadful statement that "Jews are overrepresented" in society¹¹ and his ridiculous fondness for Brics countries like Iran and Russia, which he believes represent some kind of positive alternative to US hegemony and should therefore be supported by the left. But clearly Miller should not have been sacked. Neither should he be 'cancelled' or no-platformed, but in the name of free speech, openly criticised and debated with - particularly as so many share his deeply pessimistic, conspiratorial and anti-working class views. We cannot defeat wrong ideas by banning them or driving them underground. They will only fester.

So how to fight the witch-hunt? Ken Livingstone and Pam Bromley have given us a good example of how *not* to - appealing to a bourgeois court. Supported by Chris Williamson's Legal Fund, they had sued the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) for their inclusion in its 2020 report on anti-Semitism in the Labour Party, which stated that they had "contributed" to "unlawful harassment related to Jewish race and religion". A politically motivated piece of fiction if ever there was.

The case has now been dropped, before it could go to trial. Both sides agreed to carry their own legal costs. In other words, Livingstone and Bromley withdrew their challenge, leaving the report unchanged and still publicly available online.¹²

Reading the *Morning Star's* coverage of the case is like reading something straight out of Stalin's playbook. An article about Livingstone and Bromley is given the title, 'Important victory for Palestine campaigners'.¹³ The newspaper quotes from their statement, which

declares rather bizarrely:

We believe that, deep down, the EHRC understands that its investigation was flawed and that it acted unlawfully. That's probably why they were willing to settle the case without recovering a penny of their exorbitant costs.¹⁴

Deep down? Probably? This statement goes beyond wishful thinking.

The *Jewish Chronicle* puts another - diametrically opposed - spin on the story: 'Livingstone withdraws legal challenge,' runs the headline; and the article goes on to quote an EHRC spokesperson, who "welcomes the decision to withdraw this judicial review claim, with disappointment at the valuable time and resources that we have had to expend on defending it". He also reminds us that "the report's findings were accepted in full by the Labour Party". Various Zionists are quoted, who are celebrating because "Livingstone folded" with "a bloody nose". And it is hard to view this case any differently. Having spent over £35,000 in legal fees, it must have eventually dawned on Livingstone, Bromley and Williamson that this was not going to end in a victory - otherwise they would surely not have dropped their challenge.

That does not mean that the EHRC report was correct. Of course it was not. It was produced by underlings serving the wishes of a board appointed directly by the Tory government. It would have been a miracle if they had come up with anything other than their actual 'findings'.

We still have the ongoing campaign by Jewish Voice for Labour crowdfunding for £15,000 to appeal - via their solicitors Blindmans LLP - to the EHRC to stop the Labour Party from unfairly mistreating its leftwing Jewish members - absurd.

It was no less absurd, though, for Livingstone and Bromley to believe that they would get 'justice' from a bourgeois court. Justice is not blind - it serves those with the deepest pockets: the EHRC had spent over £215,000 in legal fees already and could have easily spent three times as much.

Political questions have to be fought politically ●

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weekly worker

**Purity laws
are central
to regime's
ideology**

A year of defiance

Despite countless protest demonstrations and at least 500 deaths the Islamic regime still clings to power. **Yassamine Mather** calls upon the left to think seriously about strategy, mass organisation and a party

The first anniversary of the death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini - she died after being arrested by Iran's 'morality police' - was marked on September 15 by very limited protests, as the government crackdown made itself felt.

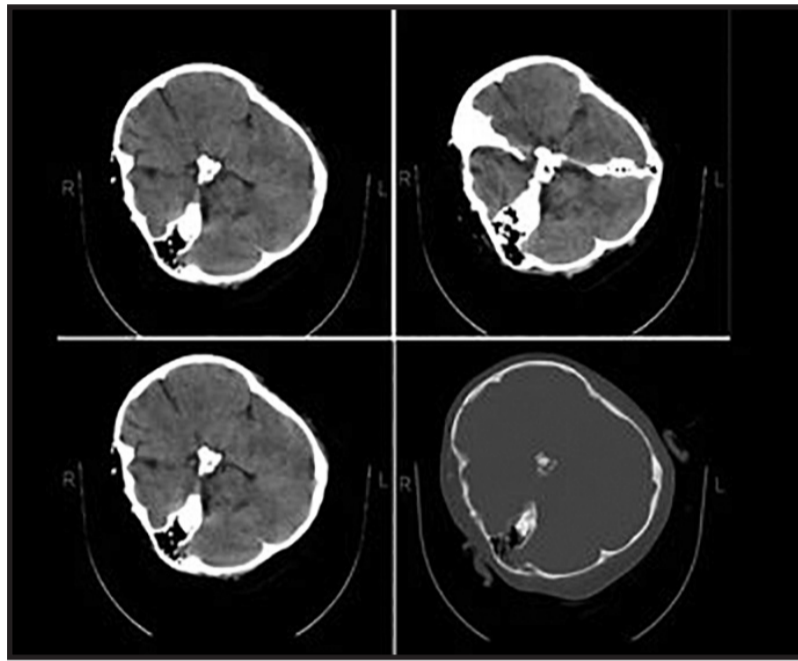
Last week president Ebrahim Raisi's administration warned that it will not permit any commemorations. During a TV appearance, Raisi ominously stated: "Anyone exploiting Mahsa Amini's name to serve foreign agendas and create domestic instability should be aware of the consequences."

The 22-year-old Amini was arrested for allegedly wearing her hijab in an "inappropriate" manner. Naturally, the authorities have been blamed for her death, although the government insists she succumbed to pre-existing medical conditions. A claim that David Miller, an ardent apologist for the Islamic Republic, echoes in a recent tweet: "Mahsa Amini, in fact, was not tortured or killed by the Iranian state. Why can't regime change advocates admit that fact?"

He quoted Seyed Mohammad Marandi, who has been described as "one of the main English-speaking propagandists of the Islamic Republic of Iran, generally presenting viewpoints that are aligned with the Iranian government". According to Marandi, "It's strange how a peer-reviewed medical journal can simply claim Mahsa Amini was tortured, while there's absolutely zero evidence to support such an accusation. Maybe they could add that Iranians threw babies out of incubators too."¹

Of course, Mahsa's family disputes such denials, but what Marandi and Miller fail to grasp is that the problem facing the Islamic Republic is not pro-US 'regime change' advocates abroad. Since September 2022, Iranians have demonstrated in their thousands in every town throughout the country against the forced hijab, the Raisi government and the dictatorship itself. At least 500 demonstrators have died and thousands of young Iranians have been injured by the metal baton rounds used by security forces - some of them have lost an eye or a limb.

No-one in their right mind can deny the strength of feeling against the authorities. By all accounts at least 20% of Iranian women have stopped wearing the hijab (in some urban areas the figure is much higher) and all demands to reverse their decision, all threats and punishments (including forcing women to wash the dead in a morgue, and forcing them to see psychiatrists to be 'educated' about the importance of the hijab) have failed. Although the hijab remains a very important part of the regime's policy, people inside Iran tell me that government attempts to reverse the removal of headscarves



Low-resolution copy of Mahsa Amini's post-arrest CT scan

are getting nowhere. As one woman put it, "That horse has bolted - it's too late now to close the stable door."

Left opposition

In the current absence of major protests inside Iran, we are finally seeing comments regarding the failure of the protest movement to overthrow the Islamic Republic. Here we have a diverse range of opinions. Reformists tell us it is because the movement tried to go too far: it was OK to raise the initial slogan, but a mistake to add slogans against Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei. Writing in the *Middle East Eye*, Shahir Sahidsaaleh blames it all on "the conservatives' triumph in securing control over all three branches of government", adding:

While the protests initially began with the very progressive slogan of 'Woman, life, freedom', which strongly opposed the mandatory hijab, subversive and anti-dictatorship slogans, particularly targeting Khamenei, swiftly became prevalent within the movement.²

As if it was possible to promote a slogan about woman's rights without confronting the supreme leader and his dictatorship.

Finally, however, some on the soft left have woken up to the reality that you cannot overthrow the Islamic Republic without strategic plans, organisation and a programme. But I can assure you, if we witness another set of street protests, such soft lefts will forget their current statements and fall back into the trap of predicting the 'imminent' overthrow of the regime, without the necessary means once again.

Unfortunately none of them seem to address the fundamental issue of the failures of the so-called 'left' - and even those claiming to be on the radical left - to take a principled position both against Iran's Islamic Republic and also imperialism, neo-colonialism and Zionism. In my opinion this is because, despite the 'Life, woman, freedom' movement, there has been a steady drift by sections of the Iranian left towards a pro-west, pro-imperialist position. So we end up in this terrible situation where large sections of the Iranian 'left' are so influenced by western propaganda that the only issue they address is opposition to the Islamic Republic - as far as they are concerned, nothing else matters.

In some ways it is easy to understand the frustration and indeed the anger of the younger generation in Iran, who have heard nothing

but empty anti-west rhetoric from the Islamic Republic, while being fully aware of the hypocrisy of such slogans when they come from a regime that actually wanted to align itself with the west, but was rejected. Today this younger generation, together with the overwhelming majority of the population, is facing a perilous economic situation, as well as constant daily interference in every aspect of their private lives: they can be arrested because they are not wearing the right clothes, because they want to socialise with the opposite sex, because they want to drink alcohol, listen to the wrong music ...

Add to all this the corruption of a state that considers the ban on alcohol - a ban that started in the first months of the Islamic Republic - as a pillar of its existence. Yet as early as the summer of 1979 - a few months after the revolution - sections of the state (border guards, police and Islamic security local committees) were the main distributors of contraband alcohol. We are talking of a country where alcohol addiction has become a major problem, where Alcoholics Anonymous has some of its largest regional branches.

After more than four decades of such corruption and hypocrisy, the Shia state's attempts to win over the majority of the population have not succeeded and to a certain extent the religious authorities have accepted the double lives of so many. They know full well that what people do in private is officially forbidden. Now too it seems it has been forced to tolerate women removing their headscarves in public.

Learn lessons

The demonstrations are clearly linked to the struggle to overthrow the Islamic Republic. However, unless the left can learn from the defeats of the last few decades, think strategically and plan accordingly, we can only expect a repeat of the current failures. Here one of the most important steps is to expose the rightwing opposition: royalists, the Mojahedin and pro-US republicans, as well as breaking from their close relationship with imperialism and even Zionism.

In early September Israeli intelligence minister Gila Gamliel

met up with Iranian exiled journalists and commentators in what was described as preparing for "the day after", when the Iranian regime weakens to the point of collapse. According to *Al Monitor*, "Gamliel participated as a keynote speaker at an online conference entitled 'The path to a democratic Iran', organised by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. In her speech, Gamliel expressed "support for the Iranian people and Iranian demonstrators."³

Of course, the Iranian "journalists and commemorators" that Gamliel recently met in London can be described as her employees, as Israel finances the trashy, Persian-speaking TV stations broadcasting from the UK capital. Previously many such stations were associated with Saudi Arabia, but now the political rapprochement between Tehran and Riyadh has changed things. Much of the funding now comes from Israel.

Ha'aretz has pointed out on a number of occasions, that such TV stations enjoy close relations with Mossad. Yet sections of the Iranian left seem incapable of drawing clear lines between their position and the Zionist state, or indeed imperialism and neo-colonialism. Even when they describe the repression and torture under the shah's regime, they do not refer to the fact that he was a puppet of the imperialist powers.

The problem with this soft, pro-west position is that it is difficult to organise genuine revolutionary solidarity with the current Iranian protest movement, even though the rightwing personalities they promoted last year were largely irrelevant to start with and now have all moved on.

It is, of course, possible that we might witness the collapse or self-destruction of the Islamic Republic, or even its overthrow by western powers. But the left's position must be based on opposition to both the Islamic Republic and imperialism itself ●

Notes

1. www.sotwe.com/UrOrientalist.
2. www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/iran-mahsa-amini-anniversary-protests-movement-failed-why.
3. www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/09/israeli-intelligence-minister-meets-iranian-diaspora-london.

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