

# weekly **worker**



**Suella Braverman: minister for hatred  
bigotry and denial when it comes to  
the pending Gaza genocide**

- Letters and debate
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No 1465 November 2 2023

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

# Zionism ≠ Judaism



## LETTERS



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

## Two Dans

I get the feeling that there are two Dan Lazares – Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

On the one hand, the Dr Jekyll in him writes thoughtful and erudite articles on American politics and its constitution. On the other, Mr Hyde leads him to refrain from supporting the Palestinian struggle because he sees it as tainted by anti-Semitism. The Jewish exceptionalism that is part psychological and part political leads to his blind attack on Hamas without any evidence that he understands anything concerning the context in which Hamas arose and developed.

In his letter of September 14 he criticises Pete Gregson as anti-Semitic. I agree, which is why I organised a statement, 'Why the Palestine solidarity movement should have nothing to do with Peter Gregson', which has been signed so far by over 60 Palestine solidarity activists. It is still open for signatures if you contact me. Likewise his critique of Ian Donovan's bankrupt theory that Jews have a pan-national bourgeoisie is not something I disagree with.

However, his reference to David Miller, sacked by Bristol University as a result of a ruling class campaign against him, as a "disgraced academic" is itself disgraceful. Miller was targeted by the Zionist movement in this country and supported by over 100 reactionary MPs and peers because of his steadfast support for the Palestinians and his research on the connections between Zionism and Islamophobia.

Lazare demonstrates that he understands nothing about racism, not least in the United States. He equates black and white militias. Whilst knowing nothing about the former, I am well aware that the latter are white supremacist threats to anti-racist and radical groups.

I am accused of living in an "ideology-free world, in which lower-class racism is perfectly excusable to the degree it exists at all". I don't excuse any form of racism, but I try to understand that black anti-white racism is a product of their own oppression, whereas white racism flows from colonialism and slavery. It is a product of capitalist exploitation and serves the interests of the ruling class. One is lethal; the other isn't. One serves the ruling class; the other doesn't.

There is no doubt that Jews in eastern Europe had contempt for non-Jews and Christianity, but I also understand that this was a product of anti-Semitic persecution and therefore understandable. Anti-Semitic persecution was not merely a prejudice. It could and often was lethal - a big difference. But, living in the realm of ideology, Lazare is incapable of understanding that one form of racism is reflective, a form of prejudice, while the other flows from the racial division of society and reinforces the rule of capital.

To say that Jews are "overrepresented" in, say, parliament or among billionaires is not, *in itself*, anti-Semitic. Of course, it could be if the aim was to introduce ghetto benches in universities. But it could also be a simple sociological observation. So, when professor Geoffrey Alderman, the historian of British Jewry, observes that 40% of Jews are in social class A and B, compared to 20% amongst the rest of the population, he is being anti-Semitic according to Lazare. Total nonsense.

One reason for pointing out that

there is no economic discrimination against Jews is in order to point out that Jews are not oppressed in British society - unlike Black people, who are *underrepresented*. It is perfectly valid to point to statistics that suggest that Jews are not the victims that the Zionists make them out to be. The only question is what use one makes of it. If Jews claim, as they do, that they are in no different position to Muslims in this society, then it is perfectly valid to point out that they are a privileged white minority.

In his letter of October 12 Lazare takes Moshé Machover to task over Hamas. I was unable to attend Moshé's talk, so I am taking what Lazare says as true. Yes, Hamas are a reactionary group politically, but it is also true that they represent a large chunk of Palestinian society. I am not aware that they supported jihadis in Syria and very much doubt that they supported either Isis or al Qa'eda, neither of whom supported the Palestinian struggle. I do know that they criticised al Qa'eda's attack on Jews in France, when four were killed at the Hypercache supermarket in 2015.

Nor do I accept that Hamas are responsible for attacks on Christian churches in Egypt. Hamas does not operate in Egypt and, although they originated from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, they have obviously progressed since then.

Lazare has previously argued that Hamas are anti-Semitic, which seems somewhat at variance with Yocheved Lifshitz, the freed Israeli hostage, who had nothing but praise for their treatment of her. Hamas are at pains to distinguish between Judaism and Zionism, but unfortunately Lazare is blind to such distinctions.

I don't know whether Machover said that Hamas was a national liberation movement. If he did I disagree - an Islamic movement can't claim to represent a whole people. However, Hamas is clearly a genuine Palestinian resistance movement, as witnessed by the support their attack on Israel on October 7 received.

Lazare says that Marxists do not side with rightwing groups claiming to speak in the people's name. Wrong. In the 1950s we supported Eoka in Cyprus against the British. Likewise we supported the IRA. Lazare fails to understand that the nationalism of the oppressor and oppressed is not the same. It is all very simple. We support the struggle of the oppressed. Lazare is concerned about a reactionary Hamas, but has nothing to say about the growth of openly genocidal forces in Israeli society, such as those who are arguing for extermination of the Palestinians.

The problem is that Lazare is a Jewish exceptionalist. I prefer him as Dr Jekyll, not Mr Hyde.

**Tony Greenstein**  
Brighton

## US and Israel

As we witness daily the barbaric carpet-bombing of Gaza by the Zionist apartheid regime, as the deaths and horrific injuries rise exponentially, it's worth asking who is behind this murderous campaign of genocidal ethnic cleansing.

Obviously it is the Zionist Israeli soldiers who are spearheading the near total destruction of northern Gaza. The continued pulverising of over 25,000 residential homes, the murder of 900 entire families and the ongoing targeting of hospitals, community centres, UN schools now used as shelters for some of the million-plus displaced souls, the deliberate attacks on ambulances and rescue workers - all are in the hands of Netanyahu and his fascist cabal of religious fundamentalists, quoting

biblical threats to destroy all men, women and children as enemies of Israel and to show no mercy.

But who are the other players in this macabre dance of death? America has for decades tried to portray itself as an honest broker in an intractable conflict between Muslims and Jews, between Arabs and Israelis. With American naval battle groups now in the region, with credible reports that the American administration is not only rearming the Zionist regime in support of their efforts to ethnically cleanse Gaza of its Palestinian population, it now appears American planes are on bombing sorties over Gaza, and have 'special forces' boots on the ground. \$14.6 billion of war aid has been promised to Israel by the American administration, while the EU has suspended aid to the besieged Palestinian enclave.

America not only gives Israel political cover in the United Nations: it is also continuing to supply weapons of mass destruction to the Zionist entity which is destroying Gaza from the land, sea and air. America, along with the British and the French, appears to be playing a more active role in the conflict. As Nato has already lost its proxy war against Russia in Donbas and the Crimea, they are determined not to lose in Gaza. This war of terror on the innocent is in my opinion now being directed by America - and by extension other Nato members.

It is to regain its place as the world's only superpower that they are encouraging the Israelis to continue their war on Gaza - as an extension of American hegemonic foreign policy and as a veiled threat to any nation that considers joining the new fledgling, multipolar world order. They want to expel Gazans into the Sinai in Egypt and West Bankers into Jordan to complete the Zionist dream of conquering all of Palestine by expelling its inhabitants.

But beware: Israel will not stop there - the illegal occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights and Lebanese Sheba Farms is testament to the greater Israel project that covets lands much larger than that which they have stolen so far. But Palestinians will not go meekly. They will die before they allow another Nakba to take place.

Britain created the problem with the secret Balfour Declaration of 1917, allowing for a Jewish state to be created in Palestine, combined with the Sykes Picot agreement of 1916 that carved up the Ottoman Empire after World War I to give imperialist colonial giants France and Britain the opportunity to exploit and militarily occupy west Asia.

Every death today in the region is at the hands of the British and French foreign policy to divide and conquer the region - a tactic subsequently employed by America in the last 40 years. A younger Joe Biden stated: "If Israel did not exist, America would have to create it."

It is not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends that the Gazans may remember after the deluge - well, those that are lucky enough to survive!

**Fra Hughes**  
Belfast

## Terrorist?

Perhaps a moot point, but, given the 'culture wars' being conducted against the BBC over its editorial decision to not refer to Hamas as a "terrorist organisation", I thought it was worth raising.

During the most recent Online Communist Forum I was surprised to hear Jack Conrad say, "I have no problem myself describing Hamas as a terrorist organisation", and then go on to explain the use of terror by

military organisations, both state and non-state. Quite correctly he outlined the Israeli Defence Forces campaign against the people of Gaza as terrorism, but I don't think the IDF is a 'terrorist organisation', despite it using terror as a military tactic.

In his exposition he does touch on the difference between terror as a tactic and a strategy. I have always considered that it was organisations that elevates terror to the level of strategy that are 'terrorist'. These groups are typically isolated with no popular base: hence, the Narodnik groups in the 19th century, or Baader Meinhof or the Red Brigades in the 20th, are correctly regarded as 'terrorist organisations', whereas the IRA, Tamil Tigers and other national liberation movements were not, despite them using terrorism as a tactic in their struggles.

Hamas is clearly not a working class organisation fighting for human liberation. And, while indeed the Hamas incursions beyond the Gaza prison were designed to strike terror into the Israeli population, I'm not so sure it has elevated terror to the overall level of its strategy. It also clearly has mass support within Gaza, which the IDF are using to justify their collective punishment terror campaign.

**Martin Greenfield**  
Australia

## Missing aspects

As stimulating and sophisticated as the *Weekly Worker's* coverage was last week of Gaza and Palestine as a whole, surely it failed to recognise several hugely significant aspects.

Aspect 1: How Hamas's official announcement stated in clearest possible terms that the primary objective was to effect the release of a thousand-plus prisoners held by the state forces of Israel; ie, by exchanging them for the captured Israelis (aka 'kidnapped hostages') it had managed to take.

Aspect 2: How the Flood operation has immediately and completely scuppered the US-initiated strategy of Arab states cuddling up far more closely to Israel, and with it the 'normalisation' of regional relationships (although to a certain extent that comes as a result of Israel's sheer barbarity in its response).

Aspect 3: How Hamas's bursting out on behalf of the Gazan population from their vicious, unending open-air imprisonment has completely shattered an entirely phony status quo; they'd finally had enough of being neglected and betrayed by all global forces involved, including Arab regimes.

At least to that extent, surely these are entirely acceptable areas for 'support' of Hamas's actions and certain specific policies. Needless to say, we should do so without compromising an overall critical stance of its underpinning reactionary nature. Incidentally, the same norms are relevant and so equally applicable to Russia's (USA-provoked) military actions in Ukraine.

So surely the situation in respect of both Gaza and Ukraine exposes a more generalised flaw on the part of the *Weekly Worker/CPGB* to draw up lines of thinking that encompass subtly mixed objectives, allowing a slightly looser but still strict stance. That would possibly lead to a far more effective organisation - one that would be far more appealing, and with a distinctly less isolated image.

In addition to 'minimum-maximum' demands, alongside sensibly implemented rules for a fully connected membership, there needs to be democratic-centralist, open debate, allied not to mere cyclical reinforcement of long-held tenets,

but rather to dynamism: to learning, growth, evolutionary adaptation - indeed, to a psychic/spiritual expansion.

**Bruno Kretzschmar**  
Email

## Humble bragging

Caitriona Rylance likes to parade her humility (Letters October 26). Apart from that she has little or nothing to say. Empty phrases aplenty about communist unity, true, but nothing worthwhile.

She does, though, accuse me of not wanting to "engage". Well let's leave aside my numerous articles on communist unity dating back to the first issue of *The Leninist* in 1981, over the last few weeks I have written one article 'Getting in touch' and two letters on the subject.

It would seem therefore that I am more than willing to engage, it's just that I don't engage in the way she wants.

**Jack Conrad**  
London

## Polemic or fact

In his report of the CPGB aggregate of October 22, James Harvey accuses me of "opportunism on the organisation question" ('Opportunism in matters of organisation', October 26). Apparently my straightforward proposal for clarity on the manner in which party dues operate was an attempt to "excuse those who want an excuse for those not wanting to commit themselves". I am also reported as having "denounced the intolerant and political style of some leading members. Jack Conrad in particular was singled out." The report then suggests that I argued for all barriers to membership to be removed.

I listened back to the recording of the meeting, which was useful in confirming what was actually said, rather than the words Harvey put in my mouth in his efforts to accuse me of trying to liquidate organisational principle and discipline.

Firstly I explained that my proposal for clarity was made because of confusion as to how the 10% dues requirement of membership actually operates. This was grist to the mill of some who wanted to undermine comrades joining. Then Jack Conrad wrote to Gerry Downing on two occasions to assure him that dues for unemployed and student members were nominal. I did not know this fact, and I can say with conviction that some other members did not know either. So I sought clarification from the PCC. A basic democratic request, I would have thought.

I did not denounce the style of some leading members. I accused Jack Conrad of being overly defensive in his dealings with ex-members who regurgitate our politics in broad-front groups. I said that I thought we should rein these comrades politically, and he should be more patient with them. I have been a member or associate member of this organisation for more than 30 years. Conrad is fully aware of my respect for his political leadership, but not always his style. This does not amount to me trying to create some kind of cosy consensus. It is me saying what I think, and being a bit sharp.

Finally I did not say we should drop all barriers to membership. I said all *unnecessary* barriers. I know - I checked. I was not the only one who argued that we need to make a greater effort to recruit. I did say that all communists should be in the CPGB. I said that, because I want the organisation to grow and become a pivotal pole of attraction.

**Anne McShane**  
Cork

# FREE SPEECH

## Declaring moral bankruptcy

Our leaders cannot justify Israel's war on the Palestinians, writes Paul Demarty, so they slander protestors and try to suppress dissent in their own ranks

There are many grim features of Israel's assault - not just in Palestine, but in this country, around Europe and in the United States. There is just the one positive feature, however, which is that the effort to drag politics into support for Israel does not seem to be working.

In Britain, we have had the absurd spectacle of Suella Braverman upping the ante week by week. She threatened to ban the display of Palestinian flags as "glorifying terrorism", but they have been everywhere in the nation's cities. She declared the boilerplate slogan, "From the river to the sea, Palestine shall be free", to be incipiently genocidal, and promised to send in the police on anyone heard chanting it. That went as well as could be expected, given that cops were outnumbered by maybe a thousand to one on the October 28 demonstration in London, and only a trivial handful of arrests were made. On many occasions, police snatch squads were faced down by groups of demonstrators, and retreated.

Now Braverman has reached the last refuge of the damned cabinet minister - convening an emergency meeting of Cobra, the government's crisis response body. What, in god's name, is the emergency? What is the crisis? Diane Abbott has pointed out that more people were arrested at the average football match than on Saturday's march. Braverman complains that there is an "elevated" terror threat, which *may* mean that MI5 has gotten wind of a 7/7-style bombing campaign, or may merely reflect the reality that the British government has seen fit to redefine many ordinary, non-violent protest actions - from 'nuisance' blockades of the Extinction Rebellion sort to (as noted) merely coming out with the same chant your movement has used for half a century as 'terrorism'. There is an 'elevated terror threat' all right - the 'elevated' threat of being designated a terrorist by a deranged, blood-crazed home secretary.

### Floundering

We suppose these are cheques she and her floundering government are looking to cash at election time next year: the usual Tory trick of winding up rural, petty bourgeois *enragés*, of exploiting the paedophobic tendencies of provincial pensioners by saturation-bombing them with images of militant youth on 'pro-terrorist' demonstrations. (In the spirit of the season, I remember one Halloween - after an unusually high level of house-eggings in the area - the local paper designated my sleepy suburb "the Beirut of Plymouth".)

Perhaps, in due course, it will even work. In the meantime, its effect has not been to smother the flames, but to throw petrol on them. Some have suffered, it is true: individuals have been disgracefully sacked from their jobs, reported under the tyrannical 'Prevent' strategy for "deradicalisation", and so on. But there is not yet much evidence of a "chilling effect": if anything, the opposite. The pattern is also visible in other countries. Germany and France have straightforwardly outlawed Palestine demonstrations, but they have been defied repeatedly. The inability of any serious US ally (except Israel itself, naturally enough) to oppose (rather than abstain on) the UN general assembly ceasefire resolution testifies to a kind of moral paralysis, resulting from the *failure* to manufacture consensus at this critical time.



Cops move in to snatch

Why this should have been the case is an interesting question, perhaps not answerable in the thick of things now. It is clear, in retrospect, that the state core was divided over the wisdom of invading Iraq, and this allowed a free hand for elements of the bourgeois media and even the Liberal Democrats to oppose it. A million people attended the February 15 2003 demonstration in London, following the route on a pull-out sheet from the *Daily Mirror*. Labour MPs spoke from the podium (and not just the usual suspects).

But there is scant evidence of such a division today, because the media was (at least initially) wholly united in its support for an Israeli attack "on Hamas" and labelling dissent as support for terrorism. So were the leaderships of all major parties (unless you count the Scottish Nationalist Party).

One important element is surely the international situation, and the fact that the relative decline of US power is now two (clearly disastrous) decades further along. Hamas's offensive seems, at this point, to have been aimed at destroying or delaying the Saudi-Israeli rapprochement painstakingly brokered by the US, which wants to leave the region in the capable hands of its lieutenants and pivot to confrontation with China.

The trouble with disengagement is that you *really do* have to give up control; which means in turn that the *regional* media cannot be so easily kept on a leash. Anthony Blinken, Joe Biden's reptilian secretary of state, recently urged the Qatari authorities to "tone down" *Al-Jazeera's* coverage of the Israeli onslaught, but at a glance that seems not to have happened. So people in the west can easily distribute its output on social media, and through institutions like mosques. It is not, altogether, very hard to puncture the pro-Israel narrative at the moment - one need merely point a camera vaguely in the direction of Gaza. (It is, however, quite a brave thing to do, given Israel's policy of deliberately targeting journalists and their families.)

The western media itself, furthermore, is less able than it once was to maintain a firewall against 'irresponsible' ideas. As we have argued often recently, the monopoly over advertising enjoyed by modern

web platforms presents irreducibly harder problems for censorship. Readers may remember how, in the days after the January 6 coup attempt, tech giants conspired to crush a small far-right Twitter clone, Parler. Among the many demerits of this action was the plain fact that Parler had had basically *nothing* to do with January 6, which was organised largely on Facebook. Facebook has been happy to censor all kinds of material, including Trumpite conspiracy theories; but it could not stop the Trumpites from cooking up an insurrection on its turf.

### Courage

With no viable way to stop perfectly accurate reports of atrocities from spreading, and with the hundreds of thousands defying government bullying and police snatch squads on the streets, the consensus begins to crack - just at the edges.

But courage is infectious. Labour MP Andy McDonald had the whip suspended for daring to utter the words, "from the river to the sea" - even though he actually said: "We won't rest until we have justice. Until all people, *Israelis and Palestinians*, between the river and the sea can live in peaceful liberty" (emphasis added). Meanwhile, the Tory parliamentary private secretary, Paul Bristow, was sacked from the front bench for calling for a ceasefire. Both, we assume, knew that this was a risk, but finally saw it as a risk worth taking.

'Message discipline' in Starmer's front bench more generally is breaking down; Starmer's insistence on timidity means he is always a step behind events and liable to be wrong-footed. And some in legacy media have given up trying to hold the line, pleasingly. A *Financial Times* editorial on October 30 called for a "humanitarian ceasefire", as did *The Guardian* last week (though you really had to read closely to see it - perhaps they were hoping that Jonathan Freedland would not notice).

I have been on the 'free speech' beat at this paper for a long time now, and I am accustomed to writing from a position of weakness. The left is frequently too weak to legitimise itself *against* the slanders of bourgeois society; and in any case frequently acts in counterproductive ways, demanding censorship of its enemies. Our prescription is ever the same - building up the institutional strength of the workers' movement, creating oppositional media, strengthening the labour movement, so that outrages like the sacking of pro-Palestinian individuals would be impossible; and also spreading a culture of free speech in the left, fighting *against* the censorship of white supremacists, anti-vax cranks, and so on.

All these things are still necessary. It is difficult to see how those sacked will be reinstated, and the respect of wider society will not pay the rent. The attempts by some academic union branches to somehow argue that pro-Palestinian sentiment is a matter of academic freedom, while gender-critical feminism or imperialist revisionism is not, testify to the ideological confusion on this vital point.

Yet that is not the main lesson of the attempts to censor the movement these last few weeks: instead, we learn that the bourgeois ideological machinery is weak and rickety. It *is* possible to fight back, always and necessarily so: because our enemies *have* to lie, and liars sooner or later trip up ●

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# ACTION

### Ceasefire now!

**Saturday November 4, 9.30am to 3.30pm:** Nationwide day of action. As the horrific attacks on Palestinians in Gaza intensify, this Saturday coordinated local protests are being held around the country. Solidarity with Palestine. Condemn the government's support for Israeli genocide. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events/day-of-action-for-palestine](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events/day-of-action-for-palestine).

### Acknowledging Israel's apartheid

**Saturday November 4, 9.30am to 3.30pm:** Conference, Temple of Peace, Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff CF10. Examining the origins and intentions of the Israeli state and how to bring freedom and justice to Palestinians. Speakers include Beth Winter MP and Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi (Jewish Voice for Labour). Registration £20 (£5). Organised by Amnesty International and Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.acknowledgingisraelsapartheid.com](http://www.acknowledgingisraelsapartheid.com).

### Stop Braverman, stop the hate

**Saturday November 4, 12 noon:** Protest outside Home Office, Marsham Street, London SW1. Challenge the divisive rhetoric coming from Suella Braverman and the Home Office - refugees welcome. Organised by Peace and Justice Project: [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=702421131922954](http://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=702421131922954).

### London radical bookfair

**Saturday November 4, 12 noon to 6pm:** Bookfair, The Richard Hoggart Building, Goldsmiths University, 8 Lewisham Way, London SE14. Radical booksellers, authors, publishers, stalls, campaign groups, workshops and talks. Free entry. Organised by Alliance of Radical Booksellers: [londonradicalbookfair.wordpress.com](http://londonradicalbookfair.wordpress.com).

### What it means to be human

**Tuesday November 7, 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: 'Egalitarianism is hierarchy; autonomy is mutuality'. Speakers: Natalia Buitron and Hans Steinmuller. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.facebook.com/events/272594545587082](http://www.facebook.com/events/272594545587082).

### Revolution festival

**Friday November 10 to Sunday November 12:** School of communist ideas, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1. Training the revolutionary leadership required for the struggle ahead. Tickets from £15 to £40. Organised by Socialist Appeal: [revolutionfestival.co.uk](http://revolutionfestival.co.uk).

### Revolutionary ideas: the working class is back!

**Saturday November 11, 11am to 6pm:** Socialist festival, Adelphi Hotel, Ranelagh Street, Liverpool L3. Discuss and debate how revolutionary ideas can change the world. Entrance £20 (£10). Organised by Socialist Alternative: [www.facebook.com/events/793705639001069](http://www.facebook.com/events/793705639001069).

### Councils in crisis

**Wednesday November 15, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, The Maybury Centre, Board School Road, Woking GU21. Councils face huge debts: fight back against the cuts and defend public services. Organised by Save Our Services in Surrey: [www.facebook.com/events/1297472904468479](http://www.facebook.com/events/1297472904468479).

### Peace and Justice international conference

**Saturday November 18, 10am to 5.30pm:** Conference, ITF House, 49-60 Borough Road, London SE1. Politicians, union leaders, academics and activists discuss solutions to global injustice, inequality and conflict. Tickets £27.80. Organised by Peace and Justice Project: [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=709145511250516](http://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=709145511250516).

### Resisting the rise of racism and fascism

**Sunday November 19, 11am:** Conference, central London location and online. Discuss how to mobilise against racism from the government and a resurgent far right. Registration £5. Organised by Stand Up To Racism: [www.facebook.com/events/1335514390724342](http://www.facebook.com/events/1335514390724342).

### Engels and revolution

**Thursday November 23, 6.30pm:** Lecture, Working Class Movement Library, 51 The Crescent, Salford M5 and online. The determining factors in Friedrich Engels' thought and practice were the necessity and possibility of working class revolution and human liberation. Speaker: Dr Katherine Connelly. Registration free. Organised by Working Class Movement Library: [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=711810560987489](http://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=711810560987489).

### Transform founding conference

**Saturday November 25, 10.30am to 5pm:** Launching conference, Friends Meeting House, 25 Clarendon Street, Nottingham NG1 and online. Debating and approving the constitution, policy discussions and workshops - building an alternative to the broken political system. Tickets £10 (£5 or free). Organised by Transform Politics: [www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100093107503934](http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100093107503934).

### Return of US nuclear weapons to the UK

**Wednesday November 29, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Crawley Museum, The Tree, 103 High Street, Crawley RH10. Speaker: Sara Medi Jones, campaigns director, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Organised by Crawley CND: [cnduk.org/events](http://cnduk.org/events).

### 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.

## USA

# A Jewish crisis

Zionism ≠ Judaism. Daniel Lazare looks at the effect that Israel's oppression of Palestine is having on American Jews - as more and more of them join protests against the threat of genocide in Gaza

On October 19, police arrested more than 300 Jewish peace activists and their supporters, as they took part in a sit-down protest in Washington DC against US support for Israel. Eight days later, after a thousand or more protestors mobbed New York City's Grand Central Terminal with signs saying "Ceasefire now" and "Never again for anyone", they arrested some 200 more.

One of the groups that organised the protests was Jewish Voice for Peace, which Noam Chomsky and the playwright Tony Kushner (*Angels in America*) helped form in 1996 and whose leadership now includes Naomi Klein, Wallace Shawn and the gender theorist, Judith Butler. A handwritten sign featured on the JVP website seems to say it all: 'Zionism ≠ Judaism'.<sup>1</sup>

The other group involved is IfNotNow, named for the first-century rabbinic sage, Hillel the Elder, who famously asked: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And being for myself, what am 'I'? And if not now, when?" In Washington, protestors blew shofars - the ram's horn used in traditional Jewish ceremonies - to sound the alarm against the Israeli assault on Gaza. In New York, one rabbi said of the Friday evening protest:

While Shabbat is typically a day of rest, we cannot afford to rest while genocide is unfolding in our names. The lives of Palestinians and Israelis are intertwined, and safety can only come from justice, equality and freedom for all.<sup>2</sup>

To which socialists who call for a united workers' democracy in Israel and Palestine can only reply, 'Hear, hear!'

The protests, which have alarmed and infuriated Jewish conservatives, are a sign of many things - that the US Jewish community is split; that growing numbers are dismayed by the seemingly endless cycles of violence in the Middle East; that kneejerk support for the Jewish state is a thing of the past; and so on. The protests are an indication that the bloody October 7 eruption has not only thrown US imperialism, Zionism and the Palestinian national movement into crisis, but diaspora Jews as well.

In the US - home to the world's second-largest Jewish community after Israel - the relationship between the diaspora and the Jewish state once seemed easy and natural. American Jews looked on Israel the same way that Irish Americans looked on the Irish republic: ie, as an ancestral homeland to cheer and support and maybe visit on summer vacation. Politics did not get in the way as long as American Jews could persuade themselves that Israel mainly consisted of the sunburnt *sabra* labouring in a socialist kibbutz, amid conditions that the press described as free and egalitarian.

Then reality dawned. First there was the privatisation and economic polarisation that put an end to the kibbutz movement and the 'socialist' ethos that went with it. (With a Gini coefficient of 38.6, the so-called 'start-up nation' is now the second most unequal country in the advanced industrial world after the US.) Next came the assassination of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 and the rise in Israel of an apocalyptic ultra-



New York Jews increasingly reject Zionism

right. Then there was 9/11, the war on terror and a US rampage in the Middle East that overlapped and intersected with Israeli wars against Hezbollah in 2006 and Hamas in 2008, 2012 and 2014. Finally, there was the formation of an ultra-right government under Benjamin Netanyahu in late 2022 that unleashed a wave of anti-Palestinian pogroms in the West Bank. This left many American Jews shaken and fearful, since the attacks could not help but summon up memories of the anti-Semitic pogroms that had sent their own grandparents and great-grandparents fleeing to the New World.

## Growing gap

A gap is thus growing between two Jewish communities: one liberal, assimilated and devoted to the virtues of racial diversity and multiculturalism (70% of US Jews vote Democratic); and the other hunkered down in a racial-supremacist state swept by far-right forces.

The result by the 1990s was that pro-Israel lobbyists in Washington were spending more time cultivating rightwing Christian evangelicals, whom most American Jews regard as implicitly anti-Semitic, than Jews themselves. By the 2010s, Benjamin Netanyahu was telling his cabinet, according to a high-ranking US official, "that Americans Jews were not so important, that they were not going to remain Jewish in another generation or two, and that there was more to be gained by cultivating a relationship with evangelicals".<sup>3</sup> By 2021, 54% of American Jews were giving Netanyahu only a 'fair' or 'poor' rating, while the percentage who thought Israel was sincerely trying to achieve peace with the Palestinians fell to just 33%.<sup>4</sup>

It was a sea change from the days of 'Our Israel right or wrong'. And it was all before the Hamas attack and the massive Zionist counteroffensive sent tensions rising even more. Jewish conservatives lamented "a politically polarized Jewish community in which the overwhelming majority are members of a party [the Democrats] where support for Israel is on the wane".<sup>5</sup>

But protestors were unabashed in placing the blame squarely where it belongs. Said IfNotNow:

We absolutely condemn the killing of innocent civilians and mourn the loss of Palestinian and Israeli

life, with numbers rising by the minute. Their blood is on the hands of the Israel government, the US government which funds and excuses their recklessness, and every international leader who continues to turn a blind eye to decades of Palestinian oppression...<sup>6</sup>

Although US Jews are horrified by Hamas terrorism and no doubt feel a gut-level affinity for their Israeli co-religionists, there is also no doubt that anti-Zionism is growing - and that it will continue to grow, as the Gaza assault intensifies and the Mideast crisis spreads.

This is contrary to all predictions. According to Zionism, the diaspora is nothing more than an anteroom for Jews, as they prepare to emigrate - to make *aliyah*, as Zionist terminology has it - to their biblical homeland. Anti-Semitism is supposedly ineradicable, while a racially exclusive state is the only way out. This is what the founding Zionist, Theodor Herzl, argued in his 1905 pamphlet, *The Jewish state*. Yet it has all turned out to be wrong.

The symmetry is remarkable. The Jews who are now isolated and besieged are mainly in the Jewish state, where the conflict with Hamas presents them with a Hobson's choice: either become victims of violence themselves or perpetrate even worse violence against others. In America, by contrast, they are free to make their way in a country in which anti-Jewish prejudice has fallen to historic lows. More than just tolerated, Jews are downright popular in the US - more so according to a recent survey than any other religious group, Protestants, Catholics, and Christian Evangelicals included.<sup>7</sup> With an intermarriage rate now at 61%, American Jews do indeed face an existential crisis. But it is all the fault of a society that is almost too open and welcoming rather than hostile and closed.<sup>8</sup>

Not that the US is overflowing with peace, love and tranquillity. On the contrary, racism is surging, as the economy deteriorates and the political crisis grows more acute. But anti-racism is also on the upswing, and American Jews, for certain historical reasons, are in the forefront. It is anti-racism that is propelling younger Jews in particular in an increasingly anti-Zionist direction.

While Zionism is often seen as the antithesis of anti-Semitism,

its attitude toward anti-Jewish hatred has historically been at best ambivalent. Herzl regarded it as a force of nature that was better to harness than combat. He said at one point:

I do not consider the anti-Semitic movement entirely harmful. It will break the arrogance of the ostentatious rich, the unscrupulousness and cynicism of Jewish financial wire-pullers, and contribute much to the education of the Jews.

He told a friend that Jews are "a people debased through oppression, emasculated, distracted by money, tamed in numerous corrals", and was convinced that people would be so happy once he succeeded in prying them loose from the diaspora that: "They will pray for me in the synagogues, and in the churches as well." Not only would Jews liberate themselves by moving to Palestine, he said, but they would be liberating Christians too - "liberating them from us".<sup>9</sup>

Anti-Semitism was thus useful to the degree that it encouraged Jews to transfer to the Holy Land. As David Ben-Gurion would later put it, "The harsher the affliction, the greater the strength of Zionism." The upshot was an authoritarian bourgeois movement - Herzl was an enemy of parliamentary democracy, who inclined towards an "aristocratic republic"<sup>10</sup> - in which racism would not be fought, but internalised, coopted and turned against others.

This is the only part of Zionism that has proved true after all these years, as Israel shifts ever farther to the right and prepares for a final showdown with Hamas. Its alliance with Joe Biden's neocons and the Christian Zionists who control the US Republican Party means that it is now a full partner with Washington, as it moves toward a similar confrontation with Iran. Since this is the last thing America's liberal Jewish community wants, growing numbers are trying to get off the Zionist juggernaut before it hurtles over a cliff. History gives them little choice.

It may seem inappropriate to dwell on the problems of an affluent community in far-off America at a time when the death toll in Gaza due to the US-Israeli war machine now tops the 8,000 mark. Nonetheless, American Jews are politically important, because

they represent the contradictions of Zionism and imperialism raised to the highest pitch. While conditions are peaceful for the moment, they know that they could change all too easily, as war grows and the dark forces unleashed by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict spread far afield. In France, Germany and Italy, where Muslims account for anywhere from 3.6% to 6.5% of the population, the upshot will almost certainly be renewed xenophobia that plays straight into the hands of Marine Le Pen, Éric Zemmour, Giorgia Meloni and the Alternative für Deutschland.

## Muslim

In America, the Muslim presence is much less - just one percent according to one estimate<sup>11</sup> - but the same forces will nonetheless benefit: ie, Christian Zionists, hawks, ultra-rightists buying for Palestinian blood, etc. The rhetoric on the ultra-right so far has been nothing short of hair-raising. "Anyone that is pro-Palestinian is pro-Hamas," tweeted Marjorie Taylor Greene, the Georgia Republican. Republican senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina described the conflict as a "religious war" and called on the Israelis to "level the place", adding: "Gaza is going to look like Tokyo and Berlin at the end of World War II when this is over. And if it doesn't look that way, Israel made a mistake." Tom Cotton, a far-right senator from Arkansas, said: "As far as I'm concerned, Israel can bounce the rubble in Gaza. Anything that happens in Gaza is the responsibility of Hamas."

Florida governor Ron DeSantis, a Republican presidential contender who is doing his best to out-Trump the last Republican president, told a campaign rally that all Palestinians are responsible for Hamas's crimes: "If you look at how they behave, not all of them are Hamas, but they are all anti-Semitic."<sup>12</sup>

This is the sort of unbridled racism that is now running rampant in America and which Jews fear will be turned against *them* - which it undoubtedly will be. Since Zionist racism can only compound the problem, Jews have little choice but to oppose nationalism and fight for equal rights for all - for Palestinians, Muslims in general, blacks, and so on.

All are in the line of fire, which is why racism - the Zionist variety first and foremost - must be fought across the board ●

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LABOUR

# Doubling down on genocide

Sir Keir's Chatham House speech shows exactly where he stands. But, asks Kevin Bean, where will the official Labour left go, given the massive popular movement against Israel's war on Gaza? An uncertain tincture of courage combines with continued fear for careers and expense accounts

If anyone had any doubts over where Sir Keir Starmer stands in relation to Israel's war on Gaza, then his Chatham House speech would certainly have removed them: he lines up with US imperialism and the rest of the western imperialist powers in solidly backing the Zionist state's genocidal assault on the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip. He does not support a ceasefire - that would leave Hamas intact and still a potential threat to Israel - but he is sympathetic to a "humanitarian pause" and relief efforts by the "international community".<sup>1</sup>

It was, of course, a carefully crafted speech in which there were the obligatory hypocritical references to the humanitarian crisis unfolding before our eyes, combined with cautionary reminders that states should always follow 'international law', when launching attacks on civilian populations! Sir Keir is a lawyer, you understand, and he knows all about these things. He also knows about bourgeois politics and, as the leader of British capitalism's second eleven and widely expected next prime minister, he chose his words judiciously. After all, he has been setting out his stall in this way since becoming Labour leader, demonstrating that his new order really does represent a clear break with the old Corbyn regime.

Sir Keir could do nothing else because he was addressing several different audiences, with the most important being in Washington DC. However, Starmer also wanted to reassure the British capitalist class and the political establishment at home that he could continue to channel his inner Tony Blair by standing firm behind Israel and holding the line, irrespective of internal party criticism or successive mass demonstrations in London against Israel's war. A little further down the list is the electorate and the various media that frame the limits of acceptable political debate so as to shape 'public opinion'. In this respect the speech was no different from countless others he had made since 2020, in which he carefully triangulated with the Tories and showed he was a safe pair of hands who could be relied upon to uphold the Atlantic alliance, the capitalist system and the constitutional order.

The speech certainly did its job with the ruling class at home and abroad, receiving positive approval and editorial support where it matters.<sup>2</sup> Noisy protests by anti-war activists simply served to reinforce the message. Labour wants to be the next government, Labour wants to be trusted by the USA no matter who is in the White House.

So in that sense Sir Keir managed to steady the ship, but a lot of questions still remain about how the crisis in Gaza will impact on the Labour leadership and the party as a whole. Let us go back to the Labour conference in early October. The leadership was clearly in control and, apart from some purely symbolic votes on rail and utility nationalisation, the pro-capitalist Labour right swept the board. Nowhere was this more clearly illustrated than in Starmer's conference speech, in which he unequivocally backed Israel ... and, of course, condemned anti-Semitism. The staged standing ovations and staged applause served to highlight the contrast with previous conferences - was it really only four years ago when delegates waved Palestinian flags and enthusiastically grabbed



Just saying those words is enough to get suspended

copies of *Labour Party Marxists* because of Moshé Machover's lead article denouncing Israel as a racist endeavour?

Throughout the witch-hunt against the Labour left and the smear campaign to equate anti-Zionism and opposition to Israel's repression of the Palestinian people with anti-Semitism, the Palestinian cause acquired a huge political significance. The Labour leadership used loyalty to Israel to demonstrate its unswerving fealty to imperialism and the US hegemon, and to draw a clear symbolic boundary between itself and the Labour left, which has been totally cowed for the last four years, having surrendered to the leadership all along the line. Nowhere has this abject cowardice been more openly on display than on the key questions of war and peace in foreign policy - remember the way members of the Socialist Campaign Group withdrew their support from a mildly critical Stop the War statement on Ukraine following the merest hint of Sir Keir's displeasure?

Initially the same was true about the Labour left's response to the war on Gaza, with only the most circumspect comments during PMQs in the Commons on the civilian casualties and 'the humanitarian crisis' caused by Israeli attacks.<sup>3</sup> So confident was the party leadership and apparatus that the official Labour left was servile, quiescent and effectively online. The HQ bureaucracy further clamped down on internal debate on Gaza in Constituency Labour Parties and even banned councillors and MPs from participating in protests against the war.<sup>4</sup> But the huge turnout on local and regional demonstrations, especially the huge numbers in London, the last one being 500,000-strong, that seems to have breathed some little courage into the official Labour left.

## New challenge?

The size and character of the demonstrations, drawing in new layers of young people and mobilising the widest sections of the Muslim population, has surely had an impact on the previously quiescent and largely silent Labour left in parliament and beyond. Members of the SCG such as John McDonnell and Andy McDonald have spoken alongside Jeremy Corbyn and Diane Abbott, and left trade union leaders Mick Lynch and Mick Whelan on the last two national demonstrations. Other signs of opposition to the leadership's line have been letters and statements of protest from CLPs and significantly Labour groups in local government. There have also been a large number of resignations from Labour councillors and individual party members, which have had a significant local impact; in Oxford resignations of councillors have cost Labour its majority and

control of the local authority.<sup>5</sup>

Starmer's unequivocal support for Israel's siege of Gaza and his support in a radio interview on October 11 for cutting water and fuel supplies to the Palestinian population acted a catalyst for much of the criticism, which began to extend beyond the 'usual suspects' of the Labour left to include London mayor Sadiq Khan, Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham and Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar.<sup>6</sup>

## Frontbenchers

Perhaps the most serious challenges in parliament to Starmer's line on Gaza was the early-day motion signed by 39 Labour MPs calling for the lifting of the siege, along with a number of other individual statements by Labour frontbenchers calling for a ceasefire.<sup>7</sup> Closer examination of the texts and the nature of the 'support' shown, such as retweeting Labour for Palestine statements, shows definite equivocation by shadow cabinet 'rebels', but, given the disciplinary measures taken previously against MPs for merely sharing such statements, this growing body of opposition to Starmer does have some real significance.

It seems that the Labour leadership was wrong-footed and initially drew back from confronting the opposition head on - after all it extended far beyond the official left and some in the party's apparatus feared that the usually reliable 'Muslim vote' might greatly diminish, with this section of the electorate refusing to back a party so clearly committed to supporting a genocidal attack on the Palestinian people. Some might be tempted, as in 2006, to look elsewhere. Thus, in an attempt to smooth things over, Starmer loyalists spoke publicly about understanding the 'concerns' of the critics and hoped that a 'clarification' of the leadership's position could head off the growing criticism.<sup>8</sup> In media briefings before the Chatham House speech Wes Streeting and Chris Bryant prepared the ground by talking about 'engaging' with the critics on Gaza and addressing their specific issues.<sup>9</sup>

While there were some nods to the concerns of his critics, combined with the usual platitudes about a "humanitarian pause" and "international law", Sir Keir's Chatham House speech was in truth just a restatement of his pro-Israeli stance. Furthermore, in subsequent comments and interviews he doubled down by opposing any talk of a ceasefire and emphasising that his main aim was to support Israel without reservation in its Gaza war and its objective of crushing Hamas, whatever the cost to the civilian population. Just to show that he meant business and that the olive branches

he had offered before Chatham House were merely a holding operation, the party bureaucracy followed it up by suspending SCG MP Andy McDonald for a speech he made at the national demonstration on October 28.

McDonald's crime was to use an amended form of the widely used slogan, 'Palestine will be free, from the river to the sea': this slogan, identified by Suella Braverman and other supporters of Israel as 'an anti-Semitic chant', was changed by McDonald to read: "We will not rest until we have justice. Until all people, Israelis and Palestinians, between the river and the sea, can live in peaceful liberty."<sup>10</sup> In this modified form it can be variously interpreted as supporting a one- or two-state solution, or merely a pacifist call for an end to violence, but what it most definitely is not is anti-Semitic! However, in drawing on a slogan so dishonestly identified by the leadership as anti-Semitic, McDonald was putting it up to Sir Keir and testing the limits of Starmer's patience with critics.

We know the political agenda that the pro-capitalist leadership of the Labour Party works to; in terms of Israel's war in Gaza that has been very clearly set out in the House of Commons, as well as in the Chatham House speech. We also know how the Labour right and their media friends continue to use the big lie equating opposition to Israel's occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people with anti-Semitism. Starmer will not row back on his pro-imperialist strategy of lining up with the US and 'the west': that is one of the cornerstones of his politics and will remain so.

No, the more important question is how the official Labour left will respond to his continued defence of Israel's war and his attempts to crush opposition to it within the Labour

movement. Having discovered the merest hint of a backbone in making the mildest of mild criticisms of the Starmer line, will the SCG and the other remnants of the official left now go further and really open up an attack on his policy? The suspension of Andy McDonald is a real challenge to the Labour left: after three, four years of laying low, of apologising, of grovelling, of advising quietness, will they risk really aligning themselves with the truly massive movement that has sprung into existence against Israel's genocidal war in Gaza?

All they have to lose are their parliamentary careers, their expense accounts and their not inconsiderable salaries. But there is a world to win ●

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## Fighting fund

# Through barrier

More good news, comrades. Thanks to a very welcome £574 donated to the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund in the last six days of the month, we got past our £2,250 target for October to reach £2,331.

It does have to be said though that the main reason for this is the absolutely fantastic contribution of no less than £300 from comrade AS. A long-time *Weekly Worker* supporter and former CPGB member, he thought it was about time he chipped in and so made a bank transfer for that amount without even contacting us to let us know. There's modesty for you!

But, of course, AS wasn't the only one. Other bank transfers/standing orders came from LM (£80), GT (£35), JT (£25), OG (£16), VP and MD (£10 each), DD (£8) and AR (£5) - AR also paid the same amount by PayPal, as he does each month. Other PayPal donations came from DB (£50) and JC (£10), while comrade Hassan contributed a handy £20 note.

So we not only exceeded our target by £81, but, as previously reported, that amount was equalled by comrade BK, as he

had promised, once we let him know we had broken through the barrier. In other words, the final total for October shot up to £2,412 - an excess that has helped eat into the deficit that had built up earlier in the year.

Can we keep it up in November? Well the first day of the month saw £126 come our way in the shape of 11 standing orders - thanks to BK (yes, the same comrade - £20), BG and MT (£15), TM (£13), MM (£11), CP, YM, DI and AN (a tenner) and finally DC and JS (£6 each). So now we have another 29 days to break through that £2,250 barrier once more - and earn us another top-up from comrade BK!

That's how to ensure the *Weekly Worker* continues its essential role of working continually for the principled Marxist party that we need so much. Please help us out if you can ●

Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are name: Weekly Worker sort code: 30-99-64 account number: 00744310 To make a donation or set up a regular payment visit weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate

# COMMUNIST UNITY



Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo 'The Fourth Estate' c1901

## Unity based on solid principles

Mike Macnair replies to criticism of the CPGB on partyism and explains why we uphold the use of sharp open polemics and reject the soggy methods of diplomacy

This article is in response to Lawrence Parker's letter of October 12 and his undated blog entry, 'Recruit and integrate redux'; to Caitriona Rylance's letters of October 12 and October 26; and to part of Andrew Northall's October 26 letter.

Both comrade Parker's arguments about Labour Party Marxists and comrade Rylance's more general arguments seem to me to involve implicit misunderstandings of what we are trying to do, and why we have produced a *Draft programme*, publish the *Weekly Worker* and other publications, and so on. It is these misunderstandings that make it worthwhile to reply at article length, in order to reassert the ABCs, rather than merely add another letter to the exchange.

### Chimera

I begin with Andrew Northall's argument, because in certain respects the problem is posed more explicitly there. Comrade Northall argues against Nick Wrack and Will McMahon (I think probably on inaccurate assumptions about their proposals), and for comrade Parker against Paul B Smith, that a call for *Trotskyist* unity - or for "Marxist" unity that in effect requires Trotskyism - is "pursuing a chimera". This is correct. But his reasons are unsound: he claims that

'Trotskyist unity' is a complete oxymoron, if ever there was one. The 557 varieties of Trotskyism are all able to quote from their god from a very large selection (Trotsky was nothing if not flowery and verbose) to support their individual lines and separate existences, primarily because their god was so chaotic, eclectic and contradictory. He was literally the factionalist and splitter in chief.

The fissile nature of Trotskyist groups gives this argument a certain superficial plausibility. But, in reality, Maoist groups are as fissile as Trotskyist groups, and anarchist

groups even more so. The method of 'citation grazing', treating works as sacred texts, can produce as many contradictory statements in the *Collected Works* of Marx and Engels, of Lenin or of Stalin, as in Trotsky's writings. The *Morning Star*-Communist Party of Britain's 'official communism' is in Britain smaller than the Socialist Workers Party and in roughly the same size range as the Socialist Party in England and Wales and Socialist Appeal; it has not even been able to unify with Socialist Action, which broke decisively with its Trotskyist past in favour of 'official communism'. Comrade Northall is right that unity for Trotskyists only is a chimera; but unity that *excludes* Trotskyists is also a chimera.

Comrade Northall asks, as Eurocommunists and 'official communists' have repeatedly asked,<sup>1</sup>

Are people in their "new layers" and "new generations" really that bothered about historical and doctrinal differences over individuals and events which are often over 100 years old? I suspect not, except insofar as these might affect current revolutionary strategy and tactics.

In the first place, as to the question of the USSR itself, *almost every schoolchild* is taught at GCSE level the 'age of the dictators': ie, the equation of Stalin and Hitler. This narrative has not only persisted - just as the narrative of republicanism inevitably leading to tyranny and the consequent necessity of monarchy persisted for centuries between the perceived failure of Italian city republicanism in the 1400s and the English revolution of 1688 and its consequences offering a perceptible alternative future.<sup>2</sup> The media's use of the narrative has recently *intensified* as political cover for the USA's policy of aggressive encirclement of China, like the UK's policy of aggressive encirclement of Germany in 1898-1914.

And in this context I need to

repeat against comrade Northall a point that I made against Tony Clark and others in 2008: they

argue that the Soviet-style bureaucratic regimes were in transition towards socialism; that this inevitably "has both positive and negative features to begin with", but that the transition was turned into its opposite by the seizure of power by the bourgeoisie "gain[ing] control of communist parties and socialist states under the banner of anti-Stalinism".

If we momentarily accept this analysis for the sake of argument, the question it poses is: why have the true revolutionaries, the Stalinists, been so utterly incapable of organising an effective resistance to this takeover, given that 'socialism' in their sense covered a large part of the globe and organised a large part of its population? This is exactly the same problem as the Trotskyists' 'political revolution' strategy, only with a different substantive line. The weakness of Stalinist opposition to the pro-capitalist evolution of the leaderships in Moscow, Beijing, and so on, reveals the same problem as that facing the advocates of 'political revolution'. There were neither institutional means in the regimes through which the "non-revisionists" could resist revisionism, nor any objective tendency in the regimes towards ongoing mass working class self-organisation on which opponents of revisionism could base themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Defenders of 'mainstream communism' need to account for this problem. The fact that a tiny *section* of the youth (born more than 10 years after 1991) are now willing to self-identify as 'communists' is excellent. But as yet, this is merely an identification *pour épater la bourgeoisie* (to shock the respectable middle classes), and it needs to be

much more. And, as soon as it tries to be much more, it will come up against this issue.

Secondly, a substantial part of the issues debated *do* "affect current revolutionary strategy and tactics". OK, 'permanent revolution' versus 'stages' is now a dead-and-gone issue, since it addressed the tasks of the workers' movement in states with extensive pre-capitalist social relations in the countryside and pre-capitalist state formations; and the peasantry in the 'global south' has been massively dispossessed, while the state formations are almost universally capitalist.

But 'people's front' versus 'united front' was already a replay of the debates in the Second International around 1900 about whether to participate as a minority in capitalist liberal or nationalist coalition governments - and we have recent bad experience with left participation in coalition governments (Rifondazione Comunista in Italy, Syriza in Greece ...).

The pro-imperialist line of Eduard Bernstein's arguments for 'humanitarian intervention' against Turkey in the 1890s, the defence of 'socialist colonial policy' by Henri van Kol and others in the mid-1900s, the pro-war wings of the Second International in 1914-18 - and the opposition to these - can be shown to concern issues that are still live. See the call of a part of the former left to 'arm, arm, arm Ukraine' (leave aside the smaller minority that continues to claim to be 'left', while supporting 'Israel's right to self-defence').

And 'democratic centralism', as we have shown in this paper, began with the pre-1914 Social Democratic Party of Germany tackling issues about parliamentary representation, central and local publication, and so on, which are live today. On the other hand, the '1921' version, in which the party is characterised by military centralism outside limited pre-congress discussions, *necessarily entails* the fissile quality of the far left - unless a party has a peasant base to support its Bonapartist role,

or a state to back it. As I pointed out above, it is not just the Trotskyists who are fissile; this is part of why.

There are other 'live' issues that unavoidably involve talking about the past ... I do not propose that their existence of differences about revolutionary strategy means that communists should not unite. It means, rather, that we will only be able to unite on the basis that we will *continue to carry on open debate* and with *factional rights* to enable people to organise to promote their ideas.

### Halfway

The core of comrade Northall's objections to Nick Wrack's and Will McMahon's call for unity is a little earlier in his letter. He asks: "what standing or status do either of them have within the real labour movement? If little or none, then this by definition will not go very far." And he goes on:

You have to meet the class at least halfway - without, of course, sacrificing, underplaying or hiding your principles. Where its most advanced elements have organised themselves within more significant parties and groups, you have to treat them, as well as those parties and groups, with respect and on the basis of equality.

This is a slightly coded version of the standard argument for broad-frontism: that is, that there can be no unity of the communists without unity with some 'broader forces' with 'standing or status within the real labour movement' - which means, decoded, 'official lefts' like Labour MPs or trade union general secretaries.

If we start with the explicit arguments, the first is that "You have to meet the class at least halfway." This is true *some* of the time and *to some extent*. 'Some of the time', because, for a single type of example, it was right for the left to stand out as a minority against the pro-war enthusiasm that swept the European workers' movement

in 1914, and it is again right to stand out as a minority against the pro-war enthusiasm that has affected the workers' movement in this country over Ukraine. 'To some extent', because it is certainly right to participate in mass movements, like the 2002-05 anti-war movement round Iraq, the Corbyn movement or the recent strike wave. But it is not right to do so *uncritically*. And hence it is not right to self-censor for the sake of unity.

Secondly, "respect" is a weasel word, which too frequently expresses a demand for deference.<sup>4</sup> Acting on the basis of equality with others, including those with whom we disagree, is entirely correct. But that means *making clear where we agree and where we disagree*. To defer is not to act on the basis of equality, but to assert subordination (and to promote damaging groupthink). To make diplomatic agreements behind the back of the class is not to act on the basis of equality, but to treat the people outside the group that made the agreements as subordinate to that group.

Let us move on now to the form encoded by the arguments that there can be no unity of the communists without its being unity with some 'broader forces', having "standing ... in the real labour movement". In essence, the fate of the Corbyn movement in the Labour Party demonstrates in practice the falsity of this idea. The bulk of the far left inside and outside Labour clung to Corbyn, McDonnell and co, given their very clear "standing ... in the real labour movement". Corbyn, McDonnell and co clung to unity with the Labour right, in the hope of forming a *government*. The result was the victory of the right and the utter demoralisation of the left. The point had, of course, already been demonstrated in the defeats of the left in Syriza, before that in Rifondazione Comunista, and before that in the Brazilian Partido dos Trabalhadores. Only the *form* of the defeat was different; the underlying dynamic - the pursuit of governmental office without winning a majority for the minimum programme - was the same.

What lies behind this is the way in which the capitalist class is able to exercise day-to-day rule through universal suffrage as an "instrument of deception" (as Marx put it in the 1880 *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier*<sup>5</sup>). There are, of course, constitutional *back-up* mechanisms (like the monarchy, the House of Lords and so on). But in *day-to-day* governance what is involved is institutions of corruption.

In its political aspect, this has two sides. First, the duopoly of corrupt professional politicians. They seek public office, for career reasons or in the hope of 'doing good' in a small way; but they cannot *obtain* office against the opposition of the media. Second, the advertising-funded media, which by virtue of its funding by advertisers, works like a public address system brought to a meeting or court to drown out rival voices, and thus by its own corruption *forces* corruption on professional politicians.

These mechanisms work to silence or drown out voices which attempt to break the regime of corruption. A *workers' political party*, which seeks to overthrow the constitution and bring in socialism, but which contests elections and which promotes the publication of *workers' media* independent of the advertising industry, can partially overcome the silencing and drowning-out effects of this regime, and hence both "[transform] universal suffrage ... from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation"

(*Programme of the Parti Ouvrier*), and also provide political support against the capitalists' use of their state and their judges against strikes and unions, or to expropriate or incorporate cooperatives, mutuals and so on.

Labour is a bourgeois workers' party. In the present context, the significance of this expression is that, while its voting base is primarily the working class, the parliamentary party is one half of the duopoly of corrupt professional politicians, animated by careerism to seek public office. This is most obvious when Labour is in government.<sup>6</sup> The interest of Labour MPs as professional politicians, and potential ministers, is an interest in upholding the capitalist regime of corruption; and this is most transparent in the Labour right.

But then the consequence of this is that the Labour *left* by its nature clings to the idea of a Labour *government* as the way forward, as opposed to a workers' *political voice* or a workers' *opposition*. And the aim of a Labour *government* requires seeking the agreement of the pure corrupt careerists of the Labour right, and seeking the support or at least neutrality of the advertising-funded media. The Labour left cannot, as communists can, openly describe the constitutional regime as one of institutionalised corruption and lies.

The effect of broad-frontist diplomatic approaches, then, is to silence or 'turn down the volume' of the communists for the sake of the alliance with the 'official lefts'; the 'official lefts' then silence themselves or 'turn down the volume' for the sake of the alliance with the Labour right, and trying to avoid open conflict with the advertising-funded media; the Labour right and the advertising-funded media express the interests of their capitalist paymasters.

Broad-frontism is thus not merely a tactical error: it actively serves the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

## Our critics

Comrade Parker's arguments appear to a considerable extent to be animated merely by personal animus against comrade Jack Conrad, rather than serious politics. This is in particular apparent in the claims in his letter that "Removing Jack Conrad from the membership 'hotline' would most probably be a positive move" and similar points repeated in his blog post. Replying to there is a mere matter of political hygiene. What is being claimed - that Conrad routinely gives membership applicants the brush-off - is just false.

It is, I suppose *remotely possible* that someone hostile to CPGB has hijacked our email address (most but not all of the time) and is sending brush-off responses; but this fantasy would probably overstate the willingness of our political opponents to spend resources on us. The whole Provisional Central Committee sees our electronic correspondence. On the basis of that, comrade Conrad's characterisation of it is clearly correct: there are not many people who contact us by this means, and most of those do not respond at all to a first reply pointing them to the *Draft programme* as identifying the shape of our politics and inviting them to an Online Communist Forum. Comrade Parker perhaps believes the contrary, but if he wants us to believe him he needs to prove it by producing what he calls "gnomic and unintentionally hilarious replies" and identifying the dates and recipients.

The more political issue is in his letter, the contrast between the supposedly good Communist Platform in Left Unity, and the supposedly bad Labour Party Marxists. Communist Platform in

Left Unity differentiated itself from Nick Wrack and his associates' Socialist Platform over democratic functioning, in the shape of comrade Wrack and co's refusal to allow votes on amendments to the platform - on totally spurious arguments that its launch meeting was unrepresentative and, *as far as we could see*, with a view to preserving an alliance with the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Communist Platform never organised much beyond the CPGB and its immediate periphery, though we did succeed in *winning votes* in Left Unity on several occasions (and getting four members elected to its leadership).

Labour Party Marxists was, as comrade Parker says, founded well before the Corbyn movement happened: after Labour lost office in 2010, we expected that there *would be* some sort of left shift in Labour and we wanted to prepare for such a development. The name was chosen to avoid immediate witch-hunting.

It does, however, have a disadvantage. This is that, while advocates of broad-frontism are not terribly likely to call themselves 'communists' (unless they are actual CPB supporters), they are quite likely to call themselves 'Marxists'. We encountered this in the Campaign for a Marxist Party in 2006-08, in which a significant proportion (of the small overall number) of participants sought a broad-front formation. In the Labour Party, *Labour Briefing* was the relic of just such a 'Marxist' broad-frontism, derived out of the Mandelites advocates of broad-frontism in the later 1960s, and continuing with the diplomatic/broad-frontist approach both in its own publication choices (also on view in Red Line TV) and through a series of 'broader' initiatives, down to and including John McDonnell's Labour Representation Committee.

LPM, as comrade Parker says, never organised more than the CPGB's immediate periphery in the Labour Party. The relationship of forces was far too adverse for us to have much likelihood of winning votes, as we could in non-Labour left formations. LPM *did*, however, have significant public impact at Labour conferences in 2017-19 with *Labour Party Marxist*, the A3 publication, and the daily *Red Pages*.<sup>7</sup> And, as a result of this, the issue was posed either of opening up LPM to be a broader formation - which we rejected - or of attempting to create a broader formation in which LPM would play a role. This was Labour Against the Witchhunt which was a relatively successful single-issue campaign, but alongside that there came the Labour Left Alliance. The LLA in substance *adopted* a broad-front approach (and in the process, regrettably, produced a definite vacillation in our ranks).

In this situation, the reality was that for us to 'open up' LPM, or to engage more 'creatively' and supportively in the LLA, would unavoidably *not* have been to permit LPM or the CPGB to recruit new forces to a *partyist* project, but, on the contrary, to submerge ourselves in among a variety of competing Labour left *broad-frontist* projects. Instead we chose to stand alone. We constituted our members on LLA's leadership as an *opposition* fraction. If we hadn't done that we would have joined *ourselves* to the infernal dynamic in which the left clung to the Corbyn project, Corbyn and his associates clung to the Labour right, and the Labour right did the work of the capitalists and their state. Comrade Parker's contrast thus has no purchase on reality.

Comrade Rylance's argument in both her letters is essentially that because CPGB has very small forces and devotes most of them to the regular production of this paper,

and is not currently growing rapidly, we should infer that our approach to the issue of partyism is wrong, and in particular should move away from ideological polemic:

A more active orientation towards the left in a real day-to-day way is part of what is needed (eg, attending events and discussing widely with others, engaging in joint activities like strike fundraising, etc). At the very least this would provide a richer knowledge from which to make developed analysis of the left. Further it would allow estimation of the particular pressure points to push at in particular contexts to advance the development of the left as a whole, and further still, it is precisely to be a living, breathing part of the left in this way which gives polemic traction and meaning ...

... we are surely served best not by "banging away" with the same approach in the same form with no ready example of its meaningful success, but instead by an approach and process of questioning, humility, reflection, creativity and experimentation (October 12).

The same argument is presented in her October 26 letter on the basis that "a very open process, involving the free exchange of perspectives, analysis, information-sharing, criticism, etc, might be fundamental to map a way forward" and that "Defensive responses, such as those displayed in Jack's article, encourage the opposite of free exchange - they encourage in practice the closing down of discussion, criticism, questioning, etc" (which is the sort of stuff that advocates of Left Unity's 'safe spaces' policy offered us ten years ago, and which Mandelites have been arguing for since the 1960s at the latest).

What comrade Rylance is asking us for here is, in fact, the method of diplomacy under a different name. We are to turn our resources *towards* the common activities of the rest of the left, and in doing so - inevitably - *away from* the effort of publishing.

But that would, in fact, be to abandon partyism in favour of the common concept of the far left, which conceives the party not as a political voice for independent working class interests, both through party media and through electoral intervention, but as a coordinator of the day-to-day class struggles: in reality, though the lineage is rarely openly admitted, Mikhail Bakunin's 'invisible dictatorship'.<sup>8</sup>

For myself, I have never suggested that far-left groups of the 'invisible dictatorship' type cannot recruit and grow - even up to sizes a lot larger than the British far left, as in Lotta Continua in 1960s-70s Italy, the Chilean Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria in the same period, or the Iranian Fedayeen during the revolution of 1979-80. It therefore does not surprise me that - for example - the Socialist Workers Party has largely succeeded in 'electing a new membership' from the freshers' fairs and putting the 'Delta case' behind it. Nor that the Young Communist League or Socialist Appeal can appeal to the *épater la bourgeoisie* mood to self-identify as 'communist' among a section of the youth.

What such groups cannot do is perform the political function of a workers' disloyalist *political party* that enables the workers' movement to grow as a 'state within a state' and the question of workers' power to be posed - as it was, temporarily successfully, by the Bolsheviks and with less success by the other parties of the Second International towards

the end of World War I.

Moreover, growth within this framework cannot produce the sort of 'snowball effect' that can be produced by unity of the existing organised left, as in the Gotha unification in Germany and other examples in the Second International, and as in the (ultimately failed) more recent examples of Rifondazione Comunista, Syriza and on a smaller scale the Scottish Socialist Party in 1998-2003.

The sort of unification we seek, as is obvious, does not require agreement to the CPGB's *Draft programme*. We put this forward precisely as a *draft*. But it does require openness to permanent factions and public reporting of political differences and polemics within the unified organisation. It does so for the reason that I gave against comrade Northall: the differences that divide the left groups one from another are not *all* still live strategic issues, but quite a lot of them are. An agreement to avoid polemics on these issues would, therefore, inevitably shipwreck the unity project as soon as it came face to face with one of them. (In this context I am disappointed that Talking about Socialism, which appears built on the diplomatic method like the Socialist Platform 10 years ago, seems as yet to be unable to offer a *political line* about the Gaza prison break and the Israeli response of 'collective punishment' shading closely into genocide.)

So we defend the right to polemical exchanges *not only* for our own sake, on the basis that we offer a different conception of the nature and role of the workers' political party, but *also* because without the right to open and sharp polemics, any unification of the left will at best be short-lived (more probably, will not happen at all).

I am, therefore, completely unconcerned with the question whether, as comrade Parker puts it, "the CPGB-PCC faction can be the only organisational sieve or funnel for a future Communist Party". Other organisations would be in a much stronger position to take the sort of initiatives that would lead to a future communist party - if they would only break with their *political* conceptions of the 'invisible dictatorship' version of the party, and of broad-frontism.

We are not concerned with the *amour propre* of leading CPGB comrades, or with CPGB as an organisational form, except in so far as it is necessary to our political tasks. Comrades Parker's and Rylance's arguments show that they fail to grasp those political tasks ●

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## Notes

1. I commented on one example in 'Broad parties: theories of deception' *Weekly Worker* June 20 2013: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/967/broad-parties-theories-of-deception](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/967/broad-parties-theories-of-deception).
2. M Macnair, 'Historical blind alleys: Arian kingdoms, signorie, Stalinism' *Critique* Vol 39, 2011.
3. *Revolutionary strategy* November 2008, pp11-12.
4. 'Left unity: Safe spaces are not liberating' *Weekly Worker* May 29 2014: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1012/left-unity-safe-spaces-are-not-liberating](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1012/left-unity-safe-spaces-are-not-liberating); "Speaking bitterness" and Left Unity' June 19 2014: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1015/speaking-bitterness-and-left-unity](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1015/speaking-bitterness-and-left-unity).
5. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm).
6. M Macnair, 'Sleaze is back' *Weekly Worker* July 20 2006: [www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/634/sleaze-is-back](http://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/634/sleaze-is-back).
7. [labourpartymarxists.org.uk/category/labour-party-marxists/red-pages](http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/category/labour-party-marxists/red-pages).
8. There is a friendly account by Iain McKay at [theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anarcho-bakunin-and-the-invisible-legions-revisited](http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anarcho-bakunin-and-the-invisible-legions-revisited). Nonetheless, it displays the commonality between Bakunin's idea and the anti-parliamentarist far-left concept of the role of the party.

## POLEMIC

# Transition to nowhere

The so-called transitional method relies on economism and spontaneity. Jack Conrad makes the case for the minimum-maximum programme and the struggle to win the battle for democracy

A few weeks ago Jack Barnard retold the hoary old tale of the inadequacies of the minimum-maximum programmes of classical Marxism and the wonders that can be performed, once we are equipped with the so-called “transitional method”.<sup>1</sup> Amongst such wonders was the establishment of the Welsh parliament (*Senedd Cymru*) in May 1999, supposedly brought about almost single-handedly by his “old friend and comrade”, Ceri Evans.<sup>2</sup>

Actually if there was any one individual who was responsible for this minor add-on to the British constitution, that ‘honour’ lies squarely with Sir Anthony Charles Lynton Blair. He used not the “transitional method”, of course - rather the sort of parliamentary reform legislation pursued by William Gladstone in the late 19th century over Irish home rule.

Dressing up tinkering constitutional changes, tailing virtually every passingly popular movement, bigging up ephemeral strikes and demonstrations as somehow being a route, a prelude, a step in the direction of socialist revolution is, however, now standard fare for the modern-day followers of Leon Trotsky and his 1938 *Transitional programme* (otherwise known as ‘The death agony of capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International’).<sup>3</sup> Eg, the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales, Socialist Alternative, Socialist Appeal, Anticapitalist Resistance, Workers Power and so on and so fourth. What is true in Britain is true elsewhere.

It ought to be admitted that, when it came to replying to comrade Barnard, I drew the short straw. Someone had to do it and it fell to me. But I suppose it is just about worth doing, not least because his overall approach is so widely shared. That said, before outlining our critique of the *Transitional programme* and the so-called transitional method, we must firmly establish what the minimum-maximum programmes of classical Marxism were and what they were not.

Comrade Barnard typically calls them the “classical programmes of social democracy” - fair enough. But methinks he is out to deceive. The fact of the matter is that Karl Marx himself not only considered arranging the programme into two distinct sections, unproblematic, he was entirely responsible for the (maximum) preamble of 1880 programme of the Workers’ Party of France (*Parti Ouvrier Français*). Marx undoubtedly also jointly authored its (minimum) political and economic demands.<sup>4</sup> This minimum-maximum paradigm was standard in the Second International, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and its main, Bolshevik and Menshevik, factions included.

The minimum, or immediate, section of the programme outlines the demands that the party fights for under existing conditions, which, taken together, constitute the bottom line when it comes to forming a government. In Russia the Bolsheviks concerned themselves with the basic needs of the working class, naturally, but crucially there was high politics. They fought for the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy by a people’s revolution and following that forming a workers’ and peasants’ government: the “revolutionary democratic [majority] dictatorship [decisive rule] of the proletariat and peasantry”, which would, perhaps

even by conducting an international revolutionary war, help trigger the European socialist revolution.

As can be seen from any *mainstream* Second International party, the minimum section of the programme is, in fact, far from minimal (though the Labour Party in Britain was very big and therefore very important for the Second International, it was very much an outlier in programmatic terms). Anyway, the minimum programmes of the *mainstream* parties of the Second International were not about minor constitutional reforms, following the latest fad or choosing the lesser evil when it comes to voting. In fact, the minimum programme was *maximal*, in the sense that it takes what is technically achievable under capitalism to its outer limits and finally breaks through the carapace of capitalist constitutional structures and social relationships.

Eg, the minimum programme demands a democratic republic, the popular militia, unfettered trade unions, substantially reduced working hours, unrestricted freedom of speech and assembly, proportional representation, establishing substantive equality between men and women, the abolition of the standing army, upper chambers, the election of judges, etc. In other words, fulfilling the minimum programme takes us to the threshold of the maximum programme, which is about the post-capitalist rule of the working class, international socialist revolution and the transition to a stateless, moneyless, classless communism.

## Bog-standard

For their own peculiar reasons, the Trotskyist and Trotskyoid critics tell us that the minimum-maximum programme inevitably led to that fateful vote for war credits by the Social Democratic Party’s Reichstag fraction in August 1914. The same minimum-maximum structure is blamed for a host of other sell-outs, including the supposed accommodation shown towards Russia’s provisional government and the ‘defencists’ by Lev Kamenev and Joseph Stalin when they took over editing *Pravda* in the spring of 1917. This is Trotsky’s factionally motivated and highly jaundiced version of events as told in his *Lessons of October* (1924).

Actually, Kamenev and Stalin fought against the leftist demand for the immediate overthrow of the provisional government and used *critical* support offers as a tactic “in order to expose its counterrevolutionary nature” in the eyes of their soviet constituency.<sup>5</sup> Eg, we will support you - that is, the provisional government - if you publish the secret treaties, if you organise free elections, if you redistribute land to the peasants, if you declare for peace, etc. They saw the necessity of the Bolsheviks winning a majority in the soviets.

Nonetheless, predictably, Tony Cliff has Lenin returning from Swiss exile and demanding a “complete break” with the old programme.<sup>6</sup> Alan Woods too. He pictures Lenin junking the idea of the “dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” and instead adopting a perspective of “winning over the masses to the programme of socialist revolution”.<sup>7</sup> Nonsense on stilts. In fact, Lenin remained fully committed to forging a strategic alliance with the peasantry and only talked tentatively about “taking steps” in the direction of socialism. Indeed he



Trotsky with Lenin and Kamenev in 1919

explicitly rejected the charge that he was advocating a socialist revolution:

I not only do not ‘depend’ on the ‘immediate transformation’ of our revolution into a socialist one, but I actually warn against it, since in number eight of my [April] theses I state: “It is not our immediate task to ‘introduce’ socialism ...”<sup>8</sup>

Comrade Barnard is from the same mould as Cliff and Woods. He writes of the Bolsheviks “jettisoning the classical minimum-maximum programme approach”. So a bog-standard narrative which takes no notice whatsoever of what we have published. There are, for example, the many excellent articles written on this exact subject by Lars T Lih and my own albeit more modest efforts.<sup>9</sup> Given that comrade Barnard is a *Weekly Worker* reader and he submitted his ‘Placing demands on Labour’ for publication in this paper, this failure to engage reveals a profound lack of seriousness. Endlessly repeating what one learnt in one’s youth is not giving us the wisdom of old age: it amounts to being a human tape recorder. Sad, tedious and boring.

All one needs to do is read the relevant volumes of Lenin’s *Collected Works*, from the summer of 1905 onwards, to appreciate that the Bolsheviks were programmatically consistent till the February 1917 revolution and then all the way through to the October 1917 revolution and beyond. Where necessary, of course, the Bolsheviks adjusted their minimum programme. The fall of the tsar in February 1917 and the emergence of a dual-power situation - a bourgeois provisional government, alongside which stood the workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’ soviets - caused Lenin to adjust and augment - not, as is contended, carry out a “complete break” with or “jettison” - the minimum programme. Eg, the 1905 call for the rule of workers and peasants found in Lenin’s *Two tactics* was concretised in 1917 with the slogan, “All power to the workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’ soviets”.

Of course, there was more to it than a slogan. The April 1917 conference of the RSDLP agreed to revise the programme in eight particular areas: (1) Evaluating imperialism. (2) Amending the clause on the state: ie, a demand for a “proletarian-peasant republic”, which does away with the standing army, the police and the bureaucracy. (3 and 4) Amending what was out of date in the political programme. (5) Completely changing parts of the economic programme. (6) Revising the agrarian programme. (7) Inserting a demand for the nationalisation of certain syndicates. (8) Adding an analysis of the main trends in modern socialism.<sup>10</sup>

The programme was put on the agenda for the planned October 1917 congress. Various Bolshevik leaders produced drafts, counter-drafts, pamphlets and/or articles. Naturally all were openly published. For our purposes, the most informative is Lenin’s ‘Revision of the party programme’ carried in the journal *Prosveshcheniye* Nos 1-2. Here he writes opposing the “very radical”, but “really very groundless”, proposal of Nicolai Bukharin and Vladimir Smirnov to “discard the minimum programme in toto”.<sup>11</sup>

These comrades claimed that the division of the programme into minimum and maximum sections was outdated, because Russia was now about to begin the transition to socialism. The minimum programme was therefore redundant. Lenin strongly objected:

[W]e must not discard the minimum programme, for this would be an empty boast: we do not wish to ‘demand anything from the bourgeoisie’; we wish to realise everything ourselves; we do not wish to work on petty details within the framework of bourgeoisie society.

This would be an empty boast, because first of all we must win power, which has not yet been done. We must first carry out measures of transition to socialism, we must continue our revolution until the world socialist revolution is victorious, and only then, ‘returning from battle’, may we discard the minimum programme as of no further use.<sup>12</sup>

And there was always the possibility of defeat, of having to conduct an organised retreat. Discarding the minimum programme would be “equivalent to declaring, to announcing (to bragging in simple language) that we have already won”.<sup>13</sup>

Even after the October revolution Lenin repeated the same essential argument. Against those who wanted to write a programme purely based on soviet power and making the transition to socialism, he warned that it is “a utopia to think that we shall not be thrown back”.<sup>14</sup> Hence the continued relevance of the minimum programme and the possibility of having to use “bourgeois parliamentarianism”, etc.

Clearly, Lenin did not treat the minimum section of the programme casually, let alone as an impediment, a milestone to be cast aside at the first opportunity. On the contrary, he said:

[T]he minimum programme ... is indispensable while we still live within the framework of bourgeois society, while we have not yet destroyed that framework, not yet realised the basic prerequisites for a transition to socialism, not yet smashed the enemy (the bourgeoisie), and even if we have smashed them we have not yet annihilated them.<sup>15</sup>

Anyway, so far we have established two sure facts: (1) Lenin neither broke with nor discarded the minimum-maximum programme; (2) it was the Left Communists, Nicolai Bukharin and Vladimir Smirnov, who wanted to do that.

## Democracy

Of course, after the October revolution things became incredibly difficult politically (we leave aside

civil war, imperialist blockade, widespread disease and starvation). First of all the Bolsheviks and their Left Socialist Revolutionary allies lost the November 1917 elections to the Constituent Assembly - clearly an unexpected outcome, given their overwhelming majority in the soviets.

Comrade Barnard explains the subsequent decision to disperse the Constituent Assembly, using the argument that it was a “bourgeois-democratic institution”. Frankly, this does not work. In content, yes - ie, given the Right Socialist Revolutionary majority, the Constituent Assembly might well be called a “bourgeois-democratic institution”. But not in form. A Constituent Assembly with the Bolshevik-Left Socialist majority would have been an entirely different matter. What exactly it would have decided to do in constitutional terms I do not know and it is not really relevant to this article.

Note, however, that Marx envisaged winning a working class majority in the House of Commons in Britain. What would follow was not the abolition of the lower chamber - that would be stupid: rather a “slave owners” revolt fronted by the monarch, House of Lords, the chiefs of staff, the judiciary, etc. Workers would be mobilised to defend *their* democracy. In other words there is no inherent reason why a suitably modified House of Commons, or any other similar representative institution, cannot become a national equivalent of the 1871 Paris Commune.

With better information, a touch of cunning and a little patience, the Bolshevik-Left Socialist Revolutionary government could, surely, have secured a Constituent Assembly majority. The Bolsheviks won the vast bulk of the working class vote. Not the Left SRs with their peasant constituency, however. Why not? Candidates were chosen in a blatantly factional manner, which therefore failed to reflect the true balance after left-right schism. Almost all candidates came from the Right SR. And, as already alluded, after the schism the Left SRs went on to secure a commanding majority in the peasant soviets. Insisting on time to register that salient fact would surely have produced a Bolshevik-Left SR majority.

With good reasons, the Bolsheviks counterposed the *unrepresentative* Constituent Assembly to the power, authority and popular mandate of the soviets. However, while the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly caused barely a ripple, the same cannot be said of the attempt to negotiate a separate peace with the Central Powers. The Bolsheviks were split three ways. Bukharin and Radek favoured fighting a defensive revolutionary war from depth and hoped that military exhaustion would spark revolution in Germany. Almost certainly Petrograd would fall to the German army, however, and result in general slaughter. A defeated Soviet regime could then offer nothing by way of aid to the German working class, that is for sure.

Lenin eventually secured a Central Committee vote and the temporary respite needed to save the “world revolution”. His motion got six for, while three were against and four, including Trotsky, abstained. The Brest-Litovsk treaty was finally signed on March 3 1918. However, this not only cost Soviet Russia huge tracts of land, cities, industries, etc: it saw the



Left SRs career off into opposition and crazy terrorist actions in the name of a 'third revolution'. Understandably they joined the growing list of banned parties.

Thereby, however, the Bolsheviks lost their social majority. Even in their working class constituency things got extraordinarily tough. Soviet elections were fixed and in the fight to win the civil war the party was forced to militarise itself. Factions were "temporarily" banned. Appointment from above became the norm. Instead of championing democracy, Bolshevik leaders increasingly made a virtue out of necessity. They counterposed (proletarian) dictatorship to (bourgeois) democracy ... and often treated democracy and socialism as opposites. Less so with Lenin, true, but more so with Trotsky - his dreadful *Terrorism and communism* (1920) being a praise song to rule by a revolutionary minority.

The situation in Soviet Russia, where the peasants' majority went unrepresented, where the Bolsheviks ruled in the name of declassed workers, where debates on the Central Committee and top-down commands substituted for rank-and-file control and initiative, was more and more upheld as the model of the dictatorship of the proletariat which other countries should seek to emulate.

Certainly, sneering references to democracy were a gift to bourgeois politicians in the core imperialist countries, who, having had something approaching universal suffrage forced upon them by the militant working class, proceeded to master the dark arts of deception and build a mass electorate based on an appeal to country, family and religion (not least by using the advertising-funded press). With the utmost cynicism the likes of Winston Churchill reinvented themselves as champions of democracy.<sup>16</sup>

The formation of the Third (Communist) International did not resolve the problem. In fact that problem was compounded. Communists were everywhere a minority. Often even in the working class. True, when it came to congresses, they might have won the delegate vote; eg, Germany, Italy and France. But not in society at large. Despite that many wanted to discard the minimum programme and the struggle for democracy, Rosa Luxemburg amongst them: "For us there is no minimal and no maximal programme; socialism is one and the same thing; this is the minimum we have to realise today" (December 1918).<sup>17</sup> There were too minoritarian bids for power. The most notable, the most tragic, being Germany in January 1919. Instead of holding back the impulsive, the impatient, the inexperienced till they had won a majority, like the Bolsheviks in the September-October 1917 soviet elections, the KPD fell in behind the bright idea of proclaiming the Free Socialist Republic and from that rhetorical salient trying to win the majority. However, predictably, they were defeated. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered by rightwing paramilitary thugs.

No less importantly, official social democracy continued to command majority support in the working class and could demonise the communists as putschists, dangerous foes of democracy. True, official social democracy wretchedly, comprehensively, betrayed the minimum programme by doing a shameful deal with the army high command and forming a coalition government with the liberal German Democratic Party and the Christian-democratic Centre Party.

Under SPD president Friedrich Ebert, the "replacement kaiser", Germany continued with a worryingly autonomous standing army, the same reactionary civil service apparatus and guaranteed property rights. According

to the provisions of the August 1919 constitution, referendums and popular initiatives could overrule the wishes of the Reichstag. In an emergency situation the president could do likewise (article 48). In 1933 the newly appointed chancellor Adolf Hitler, now using 84-year old president Paul von Hindenburg as his puppet, got his Enabling Act that allowed him to rule by decree. Hitler also used the constitutional provision for referendums to full effect: 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936 and 1938.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, in the early 1920s the German (Weimar) constitution, which stayed in place till the fall of the Nazi regime, was hailed by its admirers as the "very model of modern constitutionalism".

It is against this background that we should consider the 4th Congress of Comintern over November 5-December 5 1922 and its debate on the programme question. By this time communists were no longer convinced that state power lay within their immediate reach. Hence, while there were still those who favoured dropping the minimum programme as a Second International relic, most recognised the need for a *system* of partial demands - demands centred on the basic *economic* needs of the masses. Given a divided Russian delegation - its representatives were Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Radek and Bukharin - the congress ended with a fudge and an agreement in principle that the programmes of national sections should include a "theoretical framework for all transitional and immediate demands".<sup>19</sup>

The idea of a programme which contains partial demands and partial struggles had already made its appearance at the 3rd Congress and seems to have originated with KPD leader Paul Levi before the disastrous failure of the 1921 March Action. What is noticeable, however, is the almost complete absence of democratic demands. A self-inflicted lobotomy. While the revolution had unexpectedly been delayed, it was still imagined as being round the corner. Immediate demands around *economic* issues would quickly rally the working class and take them to the frontiers of the maximum programme. Such was the delusion.

## Productive forces

We come, therefore, at last, to the 1938 *Transitional programme*, whose origins clearly lie in the defeats, retreats, pretences and adaptations of the early 1920s.<sup>20</sup> Trotsky convinced himself that capitalism was more than just in crisis: it faced imminent extinction. As a system, it could no longer develop the productive forces - a concept he took, obviously, from Marx's well known preface to *A contribution to the critique of political economy* (1859):

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or - this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms - with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins the period of social revolution.<sup>21</sup>

Marx's preface might appear to run against the grain of much of what he wrote elsewhere - it can, after all, be read in the sense that it is the means of production, not the class struggle, which constitute the locomotive of history. Still, such an assessment, coming from Trotsky, that capitalism had turned into an absolute fetter was perfectly understandable - given the Wall Street crash, the great slump, soaring unemployment, the coming to power of Nazi gangsters and the fragmentation of the world economy

into rival, antagonistic zones.

Rudolf Hilferding and Lenin had already made famous studies of finance capital, imperialism and the "last stage of capitalism". Rosa Luxemburg had argued that, with the complete division of the world and the absence of an 'external' market, capital accumulation becomes impossible. Eugen Varga linked the underconsumption of the masses with capitalist collapse. Henryk Grossmann developed a 'declining rate of profit' crisis theory. In Britain John Strachey gave the theory a 'wages push' spin. Suffice to say, Marxists and semi-Marxists alike believed in an impending *Zusammenbruch* (a collapse, breakdown, ruination).

Bourgeois pessimism ran correspondingly rife too following World War I. Eg, Oswald Spengler - a German nationalist, Nietzschean and anti-democrat - authored the hugely influential *The decline of the west* (1918-22). He argued that western civilisation had entered its winter. Its soul was dead and the age of Caesarism had begun.

For Trotsky, capitalism was disintegrating. Spain, Abyssinia, China were for him but heralds of a general conflagration. Nor did the large-scale introduction of new consumer goods, means of transport and technologies, such as vacuum cleaners, telephones, cars, aeroplanes and electronics, change his assessment: "Mankind's productive forces stagnate".<sup>22</sup> All that got Germany, the US, Japan, Britain, Italy and France - the main capitalist powers - moving economically in the late 1930s was preparation for the slaughter of another world war. Fifty million were to die.

Conditions for socialism, said Trotsky, were not only ripe, but overripe. Without a global socialist revolution all the gains of civilisation stood in danger. The main problem being not so much the consciousness of the masses: rather the opportunism, the cowardice, the treachery of the 'official communists' and social democrats: "The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership."<sup>23</sup> But, whereas the parties of 'official communism' and social democracy each counted their ranks in the tens and hundreds of thousands, even the millions, Trotsky's forces were in comparative terms isolated, untrained and microscopic (perhaps a couple of thousand worldwide). A problem Trotsky solved, at least in his own mind, by falling back on what Marxists call the 'theory of spontaneity'.

The class struggle is pictured as following its own elemental course. Beginning with narrow, trade union-type economics, moving without grand plan or design, strikers are propelled, through their own interests, their own experience, their own creativity, to the most revolutionary conclusions. Central committees, editorial boards, elected representatives, national congresses, agreed programmes - all that crap can be bypassed: that is, if the masses are roused and kept in motion through clear slogans and easy-to-grasp demands.

By 'spontaneous' we mean not a mass action that comes without an initiator, without thought, as if from nowhere. That is simply impossible. No, we mean a politically unaware mass action, a mass action not guided by the Communist Party and its programme. Of course, no Marxist would decry a spontaneous strike wave over economic terms and conditions. But the historic task of the party is to *overcome* spontaneity, to raise what begins as a purely economic struggle between employees and employers into a conscious political struggle - the argument of Lenin's *Where to begin?* (1901) and *What is to be done?* (1902).

## Consciousness

What the Trotsky of 1938 lacked in terms of organised forces in the real

world he made up for with a reliance on the elementary movement. Hence this formula: the nature of the epoch "permits" revolutionaries to carry out economic struggles in a way that is "indissolubly" linked with the "actual tasks of the revolution".<sup>24</sup> Catastrophism is combined with economism.

The "existing consciousness" of workers is not only the point of departure; it is now to all intents and purposes regarded as unproblematic. Though in 'normal times' most are not subjectively revolutionary - ie, educated in Marxism - workers are objectively revolutionary simply because of capitalist collapse. In the 'end times' no longer was it necessary through the patient work of education, symbolic mobilisations and building an ever more powerful organisation to win the masses to see the need to "change forthwith the old conditions". The fight over wages and hours, putting in place safeguards against the corrosive effects of inflation, and state-funded job creation, were painted in revolutionary colours.

Trotsky reasoned that, in general, there can be no systematic social reforms or raising of the masses' living standards. Objective circumstances therefore propelled them - or so he reasoned - to overthrow capitalism, simply because, every time the system made one concession, it was forced to take back two. It was in an advanced state of decay. Therefore, he concluded, the simple defence of existing economic conditions, through demanding a "sliding scale" of wages, hours, etc, would provide the means needed to launch a final, apocalyptic battle against capitalism.

Trotsky's sympathetic biographer, Isaac Deutscher, characterises the *Transitional programme* as "not so much a statement of principles as an instruction on tactics, designed for a party up to its ears in trade union struggles and day-to-day politics and striving to gain practical leadership immediately".<sup>25</sup> But, no, this is wrong, the *Transitional programme* is more than that: the militant trade unionism of the American SWP is presented as eschatology.

Trotsky insisted that, if the defensive movement of the working class was energetically promoted, freed from bureaucratic constraints and after that nudged in the direction of forming picket-line defence guards, then, pushed towards demanding nationalisation of key industries, it would, one step following another, take at least a minority of the class towards forming soviets and then, finally, to the conquest of state power. Or, as Trotsky put it, playing with both religion and Marx (on the Paris Commune), they would "storm not only heaven, but earth".

Organising the working class into a political party and patiently winning over the majority was dismissed as the gradualism that belonged to a previous, long-dead age: competitive capitalism. Now, with the final collapse of capitalism imminent, the meagre, inexperienced, squabbling forces of Trotskyism would lead the masses, almost by stealth, in their elemental movement, through a system of transitional demands, which, taken together, form an ascending stairway.

After four or five years, maybe 10, they might flock to join the Fourth International in their millions. Winning state power and ending capitalism internationally will, though, be something they, the masses, become aware of only on the highest of high transitional steps - not quite, but almost, socialism by conspiracy. In essence, Trotsky, from a position of extreme organisational weakness, reinvented Mikhail Bakunin's general strike 'road to socialism'. This time, though, it is

the Trotskyite cadre who secretly control this - that or the other front operation; who use protest campaigns, demonstrations and strikes to achieve the (hidden) aims of the Fourth International.

Except that nowadays, as readers know, the Fourth International comes in a bewildering variety of splits and splinters: International Committee of the Fourth International, International Marxist Tendency, Committee for a Workers' International, International Socialist Alternative, International Socialist Tendency, League for a Fifth International, International Revolutionary Left, International Workers' League, International Bolshevik Tendency, Fourth International Posadist ... and there are countless more. Oil-slick internationals every one, consisting of a thousand here, a hundred there, all the ways down to the micro national sections of ones, twos and threes. But nowhere is there a trace, a hint of a genuine class party.

No matter how we excuse Trotsky in terms of how things appeared on the eve of World War II, there is no escaping from the fact that he was wrong in both method and periodisation. Trade union struggles are not hegemonic. Without communist leadership they tend towards sectionalism: they do not lead, in and of themselves, to socialist consciousness. Nor was the 1930s economic downturn final, terminal. As Lenin repeatedly stressed, unless the working class consciously acts to take power, capitalism will always find a way out ●

## Notes

1. J Bernard, 'Placing demands on Labour' *Weekly Worker* October 19 2023: www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1463/placing-demands-on-labour.
2. Ceri Evans (1965-2002) joined the International Marxist Group in 1981, was active in the miners' Great Strike and the anti-poll tax movement, but eventually ended up in Plaid Cymru.
3. W Reiser (ed) *Documents of the Fourth International: the formative years (1933-40)* New York NY 1973, pp180-220.
4. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm.
5. LT Lih, 'A curious case' *Weekly Worker* December 17 2020: www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1328/a-curious-case.
6. T Cliff *Lenin* Vol 2, London 1976. p124.
7. A Woods *Bolshevism: the road to revolution* London 1999: www.marxist.com/bolshevism-the-road-to-revolution-the-birth-of-russian-marxism-7.htm#sigil\_toc\_id\_281.
8. VI Lenin *CW* Moscow 1977, p52.
9. See J Conrad, 'Marxism versus holy script' *Weekly Worker* January 10 2019 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1233/marxism-versus-holy-script) for a more detailed rejoinder to the standard, Trotskyoid and academic, version of Bolshevik history.
10. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, pp280-81.
11. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 26, Moscow 1977, p169.
12. *Ibid* p171.
13. *Ibid* p171.
14. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 27, Moscow 1977, p136.
15. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 26, Moscow 1977, p171-72.
16. Winston Churchill is reputed to have once said: "The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter." It should also be added that throughout the 1920s and into the 30s he had a definite admiration for the "Roman genius" Benito Mussolini and the fascist regime in Italy (quoted in T Ali *Winston Churchill: his times, his crimes* London 2023, p184).
17. R Luxemburg, 'Our programme and the political situation': www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/12/31.htm.
18. See MJ Rocha, 'From Schleswig to Anschluss: the plebiscites and referendums of interwar Germany': digitalcommons.colby.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2436&context=honorstheses.
19. J Riddell (ed) *Towards the united front: proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922* Chicago 2012, p632.
20. For a useful Trotskyist account, see D Gaido, 'The origins of the Transitional Programme' *Historical Materialism* Vol 26, No4, 2018.
21. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 29, London 1987, p262.
22. L Trotsky *The transitional programme* New York NY 1997, p111.
23. *Ibid* p112.
24. *Ibid* p114.
25. I Deutscher *The prophet outcast* Oxford 1979, pp425-26.

## MIDDLE EAST

# A potent cause

Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza creates complex problems for the dictatorial regimes in the region.

**Yassamine Mather** examines the different responses both from above and below

As Moshé Machover has consistently noted over the past month, October 7 marked a devastating day for Palestinians. The Hamas attack was an act of desperation - a revolt born of hopelessness and despair. The ghastly consequences include the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in north Gaza, persistent attacks in the West Bank, and a predictable, yet glaring, absence of support from Arab states and Iran's Islamic Republic in defending the Palestinians.

In these challenging times for the Middle East, a single glimmer of hope emerges from the huge protests in nearly every Arab country. They express solidarity with the Palestinians, of course, but also challenge the existing rulers, whether they be kings, emirs or presidents. Contrary to the predictions made by various media pundits, the Arab street has risen up with courage and determination.

Let us look at the most important examples.

## Jordan

Over half of Jordan's population is of Palestinian descent. Israeli actions against the Gaza Strip have certainly reignited the Palestinian spirit. Tens of thousands rallied in solidarity with their brothers and sisters in Gaza. Last week the streets of Amman were thrumming with unity and both Palestinians and Jordanians marched toward the Al Hussein Mosque, chanting: "Open the borders"; "We walk to free Palestine, dead or alive"; and "We are one nation, not two". Some even passionately declared: "We are heading to Jerusalem as millions of martyrs!"

Protests have become a daily fixture throughout Jordan since the conflict began. The country is a monarchy and effectively is run by the king and his cronies. Abdullah II determines the composition of the upper house of parliament, and while the lower house is elected, the system is skewed in favour of the countryside. Most MPs appear to be 'non-political'. The media, trade unions and societal groups face considerable restrictions and governmental interference. Nor is the judiciary in any way impartial. The king appoints and can dismiss judges. In 2022, amidst anti-government sentiments, many were arrested under oppressive laws. By the end of the year, transportation workers in southern Jordan were striking against rising fuel prices, with the government's strong-arm tactics in full display.

There are many leftwing parties and groups but only the Ba'athists and the Communist Party have MPs (one each). The Islamic Action Front, Islamic Democracy and the Islamic Centre Party are better represented but only marginally. The opposition, both leftist and Islamic, is far bigger on the Arab street than in Abdullah's parliament and is bound to grow further with the current surge of demonstrations - something the king dreads.

## Lebanon

This week, pro-Palestinian demonstrators in Lebanon expressed their frustration at the west's backing for Israel. On October 31 they rallied outside the French embassy, condemning Macron's support for Israel's continuous attacks on Gaza. A



Protests reflect domestic politics

larger protest occurred on October 29 in central Beirut, where thousands of Palestinian and Lebanese proudly waved the Palestinian flag.

Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, much like his counterparts in Iran, has remained relatively silent amidst the recent hostilities. Contrary to some international leftwing perceptions, it is important to understand that today's Hezbollah is not the same sort of organisation it was in the 2006 war. It is now deeply integrated into Lebanon's politics, state and capitalist economy. High-ranking Hezbollah leaders and clerics have financially benefited from the ongoing privatisation policies of consecutive Lebanese governments, which have often included Hezbollah. Personal and political interests have shifted away from defending the poor and the Palestinians. In the intricate realm of Lebanese politics - a legacy of colonial times characterised by sectarian divisions of executive power - Hezbollah is more focused on its own interests. Yet the anger of ordinary Lebanese citizens and the near 200,000 Palestinian refugees poses a serious challenge for Hezbollah and its leadership.

## Egypt

Pro-Palestinian protests have surged in Cairo and other Egyptian cities. However, president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's endeavours to leverage the current situation for his benefit have thus far been unsuccessful. A major demonstration on October 24 attracted a reported 1.5 million people. Arab Spring slogans prominently featured, leading to numerous arrests, although some detainees have since been released.

Sisi's rule has been autocratic from the start, with limited room for political opposition or civil liberties. Having come to power through a coup against the Muslim Brotherhood government in 2013, Sisi has only managed to hold onto his position through fixing elections. The 2020 elections were particularly controversial, marked by arrests and

a low turnout.

Political parties face numerous obstacles. The regime's critics are often met with severe repercussions, from arrests to savage beatings. While there was a prisoner release in 2022, thousands continue to endure harsh prison conditions. However, it is important to recognise that the opposition is not solely made up by the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, Egypt boasts over 100 legally registered political parties ranging from Salafi Islamism, to Nassarism, to the secular left. Most, however, have little substance to them. But things could rapidly change.

As the country gears up for presidential elections in early 2024, there has been a noticeable tightening of the regime's grip. The political landscape remains uncertain, especially in the upcoming months. To navigate the rising tide of protests, Sisi may consider postponing the elections - although such a move could potentially ignite further civil unrest and dissent.

## Syria

In Damascus, protestors, including Palestinians from the Yarmouk refugee camp established after the 1948 Nakba, gathered in solidarity last weekend. Doubtless this accords, at least in part, with the pan-Arabic self-image of Bashar al-Assad's Ba'ath regime, which issued an official statement on Gaza celebrating the "inroads" made by the Palestinian resistance towards achieving their rights.

Syria has well known ties with Iran and Hezbollah ... and Hamas has recently moved to re-establish relations with Damascus. Much to the fury of the opposition. And, of course, Syria remains a fragmented country.

Turkey has its buffer zone along its southern border, the Kurds, in the form of the Syrian Democratic Forces, still hold parts of the north and east, while groups such as Al-Qaeda and Al-Nusra dominate Idlib and its environs. Some pro-Palestine protests have therefore happened under the

auspices of various Islamic opposition groups and have, inevitably, featured anti-Assad banners and slogans: eg, "God bless the steadfast people of Idlib and Gaza." In general, though, the response has been muted. Statements by the opposition usually omit Hamas.

Meanwhile, both Israel and the United States, have carried out aerial attacks and not only against Iranian proxies. In response the Assad regime cancelled military leave and put the armed forces on high alert - probably as much for internal reasons as over fear that the conflict in Gaza could spill over the borders and engulf the whole region.

## Saudi Arabia

According to *The New York Times*, "This week, as the rulers tried to embrace business as usual, hosting an investment forum, concerts and even fashion shows, grief, fear and outrage over Israel's bombardment of Gaza simmer just below the surface".<sup>1</sup>

*Foreign Policy* draws an even bleaker picture of life under the Saudi royals:

On October 23, at around the same time the world was learning that the Qatari and Egyptian governments had won the release of two Israeli women who had been held hostage by Hamas, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was featured on Cristiano Ronaldo's Instagram. The Portuguese soccer star met the crown prince at a panel discussion on the future of esports [ie, 'electronic sports' or competitive video gaming] ... where the Saudis announced they would host the first-ever Esports World Cup. Important stuff.

The jarring juxtaposition of Qatar and Egypt's efforts to free hostages in Gaza and the brief Ronaldo-Mohammed bin Salman tête-à-tête in Riyadh suggested that, however much the Saudi leadership has told anyone who will listen that the kingdom is the most important and influential country in the Middle East, it still has a long way to go.

Of course, we all knew about the proposed Israeli-Saudi rapprochement, but now all that is forgotten. On October 12, bin Salman spent 45 minutes on a call with Iran's president, Ebrahim Raisi. Israeli-Saudi rapprochement is in tatters and last week Saudi rulers - aware of the strong pro-Palestinian sentiments within their own country - warned the US that an Israeli invasion of Gaza could be catastrophic. Although I have not seen reports of demonstrations in Saudi Arabia, neighbouring Kuwait has witnessed very large protests and the Saudi rulers are certainly very much aware of the historic opposition to their rule.

Here we are dealing with another hereditary dictatorship. The 150 members of the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council) are directly appointed by the king and serve advisory roles, with no legislative powers. The last appointment was made by bin Salman in October 2020.

Though Saudi Arabia introduced restricted, non-partisan elections for advisory councils at the local level in 2005, the 2019 elections were indefinitely postponed without a detailed rationale. Political parties

are strictly prohibited, and any form of political dissent is ruled illegal. Notable political activists and rights champions face incarceration. Some, like Abdullah al-Hamid, have met their end while held in custody.

In 2020, the National Assembly party was formed by Saudi exiles overseas. According to *Middle East Eye*, its inaugural statement

... laid out a vision for Saudi Arabia, where all citizens are equal under the law without discrimination, stressing that the resources of the kingdom belong to all of its citizens and areas equally. We believe that authority stems from the people, and this means that every adult has the right to run and choose who represents him in a fully elected parliament that has legislative and oversight powers over the state's executive institutions.<sup>2</sup>

But not even this liberal, pro-monarchist proto-party is allowed by the regime.

## Iraq

Two decades after the invasion of Iraq, the nation still grapples with the profound aftermath of that bloody event and the subsequent turmoil. The current sectarian Shia leadership faces growing dissent, especially from young people. The current solidarity with Palestine is not just an expression of empathy, but also a manifestation of hostility towards the US and its allies.

In Baghdad's Tahrir Square - renowned as the focal point for protests - vast throngs have been gathering. One participant was quoted as saying: "Given our experiences post the 2003 US invasion, we deeply resonate with the Palestinians. As we've watched our kin confront occupiers, so too have Palestinian households. Their fight is our fight."

The newspaper *National News* quoted another protestor:

Palestine is in the heart of all Muslims around the world ... We are ready to march to Gaza and break the siege ... We are capable of fighting shoulder to shoulder with Palestinian resistance factions and smashing the Zionist occupiers.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the Palestinian issue is deeply interwoven with broader regional struggles against authoritarian regimes. Many of these dictators recognise that their grip on power is tenuous, and they understand the symbolic importance of Palestine as a unifying cause. Their stance on Palestine often serves both as a reflection of their geopolitical alliances and an attempt to garner domestic and regional legitimacy.

The resonance of the Palestinian cause across the Middle East demonstrates its potent role in the political dynamics and popular sentiments of the region ●

## Notes

1. [www.nytimes.com/2023/10/26/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-israel-hamas-gaza-war.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/26/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-israel-hamas-gaza-war.html).
2. [www.middleeasteye.net/news/saudi-dissidents-launch-new-party-calling-democracy](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/saudi-dissidents-launch-new-party-calling-democracy).
3. [www.thenationalnews.com/mena/palestine-israel/2023/10/13/protesters-across-middle-east-vent-anger-over-israels-attack-on-gaza](https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/palestine-israel/2023/10/13/protesters-across-middle-east-vent-anger-over-israels-attack-on-gaza).

# IRELAND

## What happened to solidarity?

Anne McShane celebrates the fellow feeling with the Palestinians and notes the drift of Sinn Féin into the mainstream pro-Israel consensus

It is no surprise that the Irish government was one of those which voted for the Jordanian ceasefire proposal at the United Nations general assembly last week.

Identification with the Palestinian struggle runs deep here. Palestinian flags and murals can be seen on buildings in republican areas in Northern Ireland, while many in the 26 counties unite the national flags of Ireland and Palestine as a symbol of resistance. Certainly the green, white and orange tricolour could be seen alongside the red, black, white and green Palestinian flag at marches all over the country over the last three weeks.

This sense of identification exists even within the governing classes. Successive Irish governments have opposed the systematic annexation of Palestinian land and the oppression of its people. Ireland was the first member of the European Union to recognise the Palestinian Liberation Organisation in 1980. Yasser Arafat visited Ireland on several occasions in the 1990s, holding talks with government officials on the hopeless efforts to pressurise Israel into doing something real when it comes to the so-called two-states solution. In 1999 the then taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, visited Gaza, where he held talks with the PLO before returning directly to Ireland without stopping off in Tel Aviv.

In 2014 a government motion was voted through to formally recognise Palestine and establish diplomatic relations. In 2018 the Dáil passed the Occupied Territories Bill, which banned the import of all goods and services originating in illegal settlements in the West Bank. All those in breach would receive a heavy fine or imprisonment. In May 2021 a Sinn Féin motion condemning Israel's "de facto annexation" of Palestinian land in the occupied territories was passed with the support of all parties. The next day the tricolour was raised over Ramallah City Hall in the West Bank. Then in May this year the



Richard Boyd Barrett: wannabe minister in SF government

government announced it supported the "principle" of a Sinn Féin bill seeking to compel state investment funds to sell off their holdings in companies listed on a UN database of firms operating in occupied Palestinian territories.

### Recognised

But these legislative moves against Israeli settlements and for Palestinian national rights have remained on paper. The decision to formally recognise Palestine has never been implemented. The Occupied Territories Act was shelved by the present coalition government, when it came to office in 2020. And the most recent proposal to force the sale of state-funded shares in Israeli firms has also been kicked into the long grass, with the government claiming concern that it will face legal action. The Irish government has been engaging in a form of virtue signalling. It looks like it has a principled stand on Palestine, but is pursuing *Realpolitik* in practice.

Successive foreign ministers have sought to win over their counterparts in Europe to facilitate a negotiated settlement. The aim has been threefold - a two-state solution, building Palestine institutions and providing humanitarian aid.

Evidently that approach has not

worked. Besides having the full backing of the US government, Israel has huge support in the EU. The German government has been absolutely adamant in its favour. Greek prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has described Benjamin Netanyahu as not only a political ally, but a "true friend". Throughout Europe pro-Palestinian protestors face bans and police crackdowns.

The EU parliament's motion of October 19 is a good illustration. Hamas was condemned for its "despicable terrorist acts", while Israel's right to 'defend itself' was underscored with the call for a "humanitarian pause" rather than a ceasefire. The latter would interfere with the Israeli prerogative to conduct war. There were 500 votes in favour, with 24 abstentions and 21 against. The majority of Irish MEPs were included in the 500. The four who refused to do so were Chris MacManus (SF), left independent Clare Daly, along with another member of 'Independents 4 Change', Mick Wallace, plus Luke Ming Flanagan (independent), with Daly condemning the parliament for "aiding and abetting war crimes".

### Sinn Féin

But, while Irish government politicians had no problem condemning Hamas as a terrorist organisation, that stuck in the throats of some SFers. In response to EU commission president Ursula von der Layen's one-sided condemnation of Hamas on October 7, Chris Andrews, SF TD for Dublin Bay South, tweeted: "It seems that according to the EU and Ireland only Palestine has no right to defend itself against murder, torture and apartheid." Then Paul Donnelly, another SF Dublin TD, wrote:

The Israelis have been systematically destroying any chance of peace in the region. They are an apartheid regime. The EU/US aided and colluded with this apartheid regime. If the EU is to have any credibility today, it needs to stand up for peace and that means standing up to Israel.

Not so SF leader Mary Lou McDonald, who made it clear that she would not be departing from the official condemnations of Hamas, describing its attack as "truly horrific" and condemning outright the targeting of civilians and the taking of hostages.

Her attitude and the subsequent apparent backsliding of SF on some of its previous demands has been criticised by People before Profit in recent articles. In particular, there was condemnation of SF's support for a government motion in a Dáil debate on October 18. McDonald had proposed amendments, including one to add

a condemnation of "Israel's brutal assault on the civilian population of Gaza, which has resulted in more than 3,000 deaths, including over 1,000 children to date in breach of international law". This was voted down, along with her other proposed amendments. The final motion issued its only condemnation - of "the brutal attack by Hamas in Israel" on October 7, "indiscriminately and systematically targeting civilians, and resulting in over 1,400 deaths". It vaguely called on Israel to act with "humanitarianism" and stated that "Israel's right to defend itself from attack must be in line with international law".

PBP had put forward a countermotion, calling for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador, the resignation of von der Layen, the referral of Israel and Netanyahu to the International Criminal Court, the ending of the siege, occupation and the dismantling of all illegal settlements, support for boycott, divestment and sanctions, and the dismantling of Israeli apartheid. But "shamefully, Sinn Féin did not support the ... motion and our motion fell". This was despite SF's previous calls for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador and its support for BDS. PBP called for SF members to rebel:

This is a cause that is of deep and long-standing importance to Sinn Féin rank-and-file members, but Sinn Féin's leadership is failing Palestinians. It is time for ordinary Sinn Féin members to act, to challenge Sinn Féin leaders and support the Palestinian people now when they need it most.

Another PBP piece on October 27 expressed disappointment at "the silence of Sinn Féin":

Sinn Féin members across Ireland pride themselves on support for Palestinian liberation. Yet their leadership is wining and dining with representatives of US imperialism, and not a peep uttered about the blood on Biden's hands.

It demanded that "elected politicians in Ireland must call out the US. Stop cosyng up to their representatives. And back the call to expel the Israeli ambassador." On October 26 a motion put forward by PBP councillor Shaun Harkin to Derry and Strabane Council was successful, despite the opposition of SF. The motion read: "Council will write to the Irish and British governments to support the call for an immediate cessation of the bombardment and genocidal siege of Gaza; and for the immediate expulsion of Israeli ambassadors."

SF is now *de facto* part of the consensus on Palestine. McDonald wants to criticise from the sidelines, but at the same time show that she will be a safe pair of hands if it comes to her entering government. While SF members continue to express their strong solidarity, their leadership is compromising solidarity in practice. There is no doubt that rebels will be brought into line or find themselves out in the wilderness.

This is yet another warning of what SF will be like in government. It will be business as usual. This shows that PBP's call for McDonald to form a so-called 'left government' is itself an act of opportunism against which PBP members ought to rebel ●

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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### Online Communist Forum



Sunday November 5 5pm

A week in politics - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

Use this link to join meeting: [communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register](https://communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register)

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

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

# Digging to resist

The Gaza metro of underground tunnels presents a formidable challenge for the Israeli killing machine. In this case, writes **Eddie Ford**, the weak might just overcome the strong

**R**ight from the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war, there has been a lot of talk about the tunnels underneath Gaza - not least in Gaza City itself. We had an insight recently into the scale of the tunnel system from Yocheved Lifshitz, an 85-year-old woman taken hostage by Hamas during its deadly, but militarily stunning, October 7 raid into Israel.

When she was released after 16 days in captivity, she told journalists that - in an obviously deliberate attempt to disorientate her - she had been bundled onto a motorbike, held in a couple of different locations, marched around for a bit, until "eventually we went underground and walked for kilometres in wet tunnels, for two or three hours, in a spider's web of tunnels". She went on to say that "we went through the tunnels until we reached a large hall" and "they separated us according to which kibbutz we were from". Interestingly, she noted that guards fed the prisoners the same type of food they ate and a doctor visited daily to provide medication and treatment, as "they were very concerned with hygiene and were worried about an outbreak of something".

Lifshitz's description gives us a small glimpse of the formidable and possibly deadly challenge facing the Israeli military - a vast warren of tunnels, dubbed the "Gaza metro" by military commentators, that might run for at least 300 miles under the Strip - a territory that is only 25 miles long and six miles wide. As an indication of the potential scale of the network, just over a decade ago Israel uncovered a tunnel from Gaza into Israel that was 1.5 miles long and 66 feet underground, which required 800 tonnes of concrete to secure. Then, following an outburst of hostilities, the Israeli Defence Forces said it had destroyed more than 62 miles of tunnels in air strikes. In response, Hamas put out a statement saying its tunnels stretched for 311 miles and that only 5% were hit. Putting those figures into some sort of perspective, the London Underground is 250 miles long and mostly above ground.

What needs to be immediately understood is that we are not dealing with the sort of tunnels that were originally built in order to subvert the blockade of the Strip and bypass the Rafah Border Crossing - and smuggle in goods from Egypt (fuel, medicines, concrete, etc). After the Egypt-Israel peace treaty of 1979, a 100-metre-wide buffer zone between Gaza and Egypt known as the Philadelphi Route was established. The town of Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, was split by this buffer zone. One part is located in the southern part of Gaza, and the smaller part of the town is in Egypt. After Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, the Philadelphi Route was placed under the control of the Palestine Authority until 2007, when



**Al-Quassam fighters have the advantage in deep underground tunnels**

Hamas seized control and Egypt and Israel closed borders with the Gaza Strip - with Egypt in 2009 beginning the construction of an underground barrier to block existing tunnels and supposedly make new ones harder to dig. Anyway, the tunnels used to start from the basements of houses in Rafah on the one side of the border and end in houses in the same town on the other side. But these tunnels were of a very basic construction and had a tendency to collapse due to their shallowness.

### Building materials

Since then, Hamas has been digging and digging, reinforcing and reinforcing. A lot of the concrete that has gone into Gaza (to rebuild it after repeated Israeli airstrikes and incursions) has actually gone into the reinforcing of various types of underground defences. After the discovery of numerous tunnels during the 2014 Gaza war, a complex monitoring process was set up post-conflict aimed at preventing Hamas from diverting building materials to tunnel construction. But, despite the huge numbers of cameras on building sites and warehouses, and a labyrinthine approval and verification process, a thriving hidden economy for building materials sprung up - with some being brazenly sold on the street outside the controlled warehouses. Recycled, war-damaged concrete and metal were also used. Indeed, in 2021 the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* complained that inadequate supervision of the system

meant Israel was in effect supplying Hamas with concrete for its tunnel construction!

Showing the sheer scale of the operation, a 2015 report by the UN Conference on Trade and Development noted that the size of the tunnel trade was even greater than the volume of trade through official channels. In fact, the tunnels had been absolutely essential to recover from the wholesale destructions during the 2008-09 Gaza War. If the Gazans had only used the materials allowed in by Israel, it would have taken a minimum of 80 years to rebuild the 6,000 housing units destroyed during the military operation. Thanks to the illegal system, it only took five years. Gaza's sole power plant ran on diesel from Egypt brought through the tunnels in the range of one million litres per day before June 2013.

Now it is thought that these 300 miles of tunnels have been reinforced with concrete side and top. Presumably there are many entrances - which will have internal barriers, obstructions, different layers, and so on. It also appears that some of these tunnels go down something like 150 feet - though in 2020 Israel found a Hamas tunnel that descended 230 feet below the surface, the deepest found up to that point. The nature of Hamas's main communication tunnels allows the leadership to shelter, while remaining connected by a phone system isolated from normal networks. And the combat-tunnel part of the system, sensibly enough, has been designed to allow fighters to emerge from hidden

entrances in buildings and farmland - something that any conventional army must dread.

Perhaps we are getting a bit more speculative now, but Hamas must be doing everything it can to protect its fighting units - not only from artillery shells, missiles and bombs. But surely, if possible, it must be planning to do more in its ambitions for its war against Israel: that is, digging sufficiently deep so that even bunker busters would not penetrate. Nowadays, though as a special type of munition they have a history going back to World War II, bunker busters are essentially designed to put out of action facilities like Iran's nuclear sites - which are basically dug down and then covered with layer after layer of steel and concrete. But if you dig deep enough, then theoretically you can protect yourself from such weapons - though whether Hamas will ever be able to do this is obviously impossible to say. But one thing you can guarantee is that Hamas will have been busily researching the capabilities of what America has developed and doing their level best to ensure that enough of their people survive to keep fighting and give the IDF a bloody nose.

### Nightmare

When it comes to the challenges and problems of 'underground warfare', it is worthwhile reading a recent article posted on the Modern War Institute website at West Point. Written by John Spencer, its chair of urban warfare studies, it is called 'Underground nightmare: Hamas tunnels and the

wicked problem facing the IDF'.<sup>1</sup>

He points out that entering tunnels "presents unique tactical challenges", many of which cannot be addressed without specialised equipment - like oxygen tanks. Sometimes it can also be near impossible simply to see, Spencer writes, as most military night-vision goggles - unlike what we often see in the movies or video games - rely on some ambient light and cannot function when that is entirely absent. Hamas no doubt has the ability to escape down tunnels into total darkness as and when it suits them. Then there is the fact that any military navigation and communication equipment that relies on satellite or line-of-sight signals will not work underground. Furthermore, any weapon fired in the compact spaces of tunnels, even a rifle, can produce a concussive effect that can physically harm the firer - not to mention the fact that "a single defender can hold a narrow tunnel against a much superior force".

Of course, as Spencer reminds us, tunnel warfare is not new. In his *Histories*, the Greek historian, Polybius, gives a graphic account of mining and counter-mining at the Roman siege of Ambracia - including the first known use of poison gas against the Romans' siege tunnels. Or, in the Middle Ages, the siege of Carcassonne as part of the Albigensian Crusade, where defenders worked to prevent sapping by dumping anything they had down on attackers who tried to dig under the wall. Then there is the US military's experience with tunnels during the Civil War sieges of Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1863 and Petersburg, Virginia in 1864 - and the subterranean component of the World War I battles of the Somme, Vimy Ridge, and Messine.

The most famous modern use of tunnels, it almost goes without saying, is in Vietnam - where Ho Chi Minh's commanders used miles of tunnels to protect their men, supplies and strongholds in places like Cù Chi. This became a huge problem for US generals. When repeated poundings by B52 bombers failed they were compelled to develop new tactics, such as sending 'tunnel rats' underground armed with only a pistol and flashlight - most of whom never came back.

Some military commentators suggest that the depth and scale of Hamas tunnels could exceed Israel's capabilities to deal with them. Just as IDF forces above ground will have to fight inch by inch, so will those underground - a grim prospect, which explains why, in this case, the weak might just overcome the strong ●

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### Notes

1. mwi.westpoint.edu/underground-nightmare-hamas-tunnels-and-the-wicked-problem-facing-the-idf.