

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly
worker



**Alan Woods and the welcome shift
of Socialist Appeal from clause four
socialism to self-declared communism**

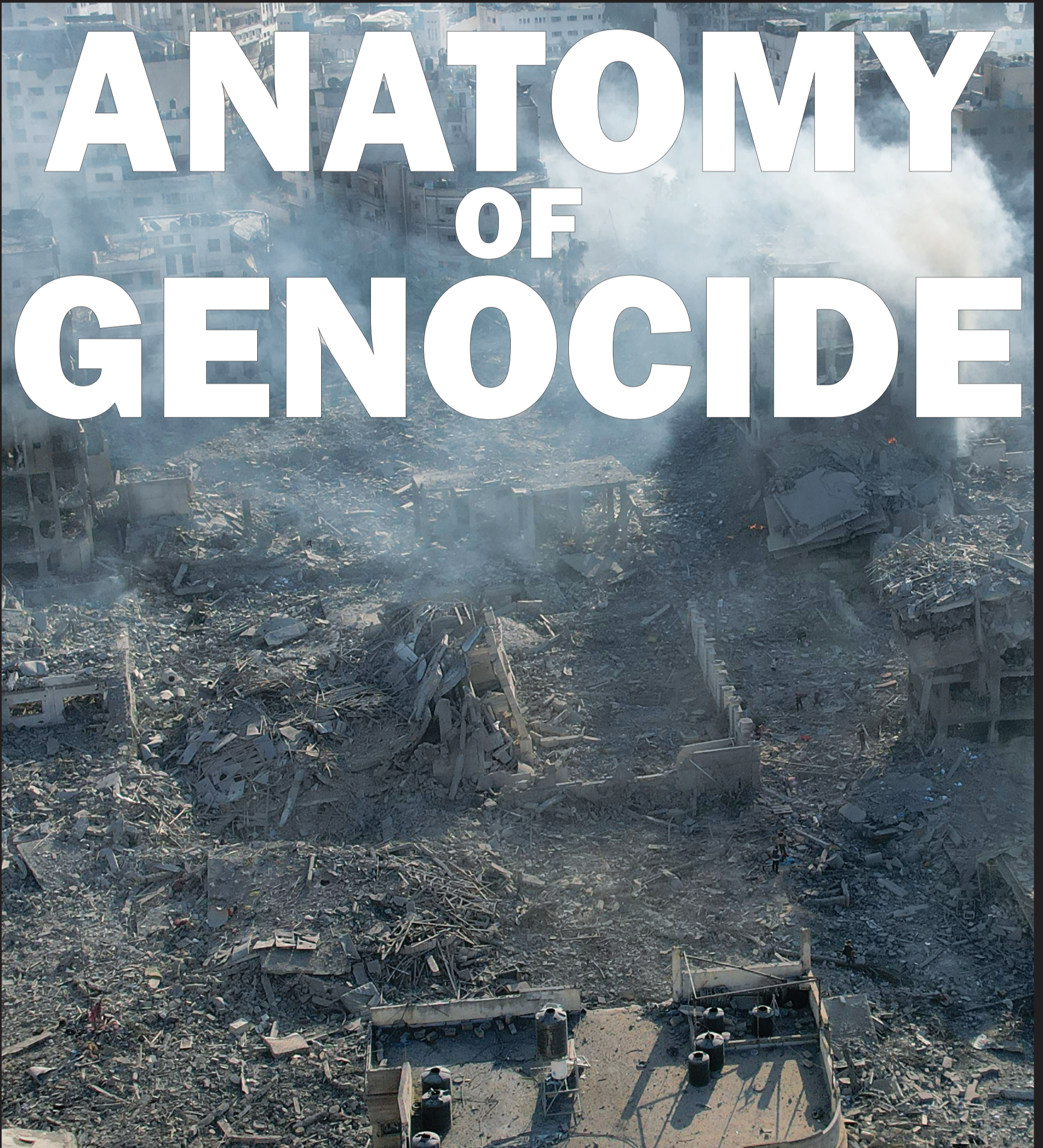
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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ANATOMY OF GENOCIDE



LETTERS



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

Principled unity

In a letter in last week's *Weekly Worker* Anne McShane takes issue with my report of the last CPGB members' aggregate ('Opportunism in matters of organisation', October 26).

She focuses on a number of points of accuracy and my interpretation of the political tendencies implicit in some of the contributions made during the discussion on dues and communist unity. After both consulting my notes and listening to the recording of the meeting, I still believe that my report was an accurate reflection of what comrades said during the discussion.

As for the interpretation, that too stands, but the issues that have been raised in both Anne's letter and at the meeting require further discussion and clarification, because they really do go far beyond issues of personal style or how we implement our draft rules on dues. For me the key issue here is about how we understand our central project of campaigning for, and building, a mass Communist Party with a revolutionary programme. It also means being clear on how we understand the nature of that partyist project and the concept of Marxist unity that underpins it.

This is all the more important at a time when all sorts of 'communist unity' and 'left unity' projects are being advanced, along with any number of new 'parties' and networks. Given the defeat of Corbynism and the rout of the official Labour left, these developments are perhaps inevitable. Moreover, many of the initiatives do seem to bear more than a passing resemblance to previous left unity projects, in that they take a broad-front form, in which 'Marxists' operate as a revolutionary minority, watering down their programme into the lowest common denominator of left Labourism to maintain 'unity' with wider layers of ex (continuing?) Corbynites. We've been here before and we know that doesn't work: it certainly hasn't succeeded in building a principled Marxist party.

All of this should be both common ground and common experience for the members and supporters of the CPGB. But for many of our wider periphery these are new experiences and so we need to go over old ground to explain to them how our partyist project differs even from those comrades who ostensibly support communist unity. The same is also true of former members and supporters of the CPGB who left us - often to become involved in such broad-front initiatives.

This is why the issue of barriers and boundaries is so crucial for building a serious campaign for a Communist Party. Our conception of a party is one based on full democracy and accountability, with freedom of discussion and criticism. It's also one grounded in the members of the party accepting the party programme as a basis for common actions and political campaigns. Although this project is committed to the unity of all Marxists, with the basis of agreement being the revolutionary programme, by definition this commitment will be a real barrier to joining such a party for advocates of broad-front-style initiatives.

Our model for such a party is that of Bolshevism, as it developed before 1917 and as outlined in texts such as *What is to be done?* and *One step forward, two steps back*. Again this should be common ground, but all these bases of our politics need to be emphasised, because they shape how we orientate to broad left campaigns,

such as the Labour Left Alliance or, as has occurred more recently, when we consider communist unity in more than just an abstract way by discussing the issue with comrades from Talking About Socialism or other groups.

This current experience brings us back to key points in our recent history, such as our intervention in the Corbyn movement, as well as our earlier participation in, for example, the Socialist Alliance, Respect and Left Unity. In those movements and initiatives we maintained the perspective of building a mass Communist Party and defended the partyist project without compromise or concessions to broad frontism. That is still the position, I believe, we should continue to take.

James Harvey
email

Remarkably wrong

Tony Greenstein gets a remarkable number of things wrong in his letter of November 2. He says I "refrain from supporting the Palestinian struggle", because I see it "as tainted by anti-Semitism". He says I suffer from "Jewish exceptionalism" and adds that I know nothing "concerning the context in which Hamas arose and developed". He says my criticism of David Miller - the academic sacked by Bristol University for declaring that Jews are "overrepresented" in the top rungs of British society - is "disgraceful", because I fail to recognise that Miller was merely stating a simple sociological fact.

This is all nonsense. My letter of October 12, which he cites, clearly states that "Marxists side with oppressed people and support without qualification their right of resistance and revolt." This is a straightforward call to support the Palestinian struggle against Zionist oppression. The charge of Jewish exceptionalism is incorrect, since I have always argued that Israel should be seen in a broader Middle East context, in which Zionist oppression is less *sui generis* than Palestinian nationalism would like to admit. (The parallels with regard to Syria, a country dominated by a religious minority that also can't afford to let go, are particularly striking.)

With regard to Miller, comrade Greenstein seems to have a problem with basic English. Merriam-Webster, Collins, and Dictionary.com all define "overrepresentation" as *excessive* representation. If Miller was merely saying that a lot of Jews are in the top rungs, his statement would not be controversial. But saying that there are too many is. Large numbers of Asians can be found in STEM studies (ie, science, technology, engineering and maths) on US campuses. This is undeniable. But saying there are too many and their numbers should therefore be reduced is utterly reactionary.

Greenstein agrees that Hamas is reactionary, but says they "represent a large chunk of Palestinian society" regardless. But so what? Mussolini represented a large chunk of Italian society, but that didn't make him any less destructive. Greenstein says he is "not aware that they [Hamas] supported jihadis in Syria and very much doubt that they supported either Isis or al Qaeda". But they did support the rebels and in fact dispatched a small number of militants to fight alongside them. This not only put them on the same side as al Qaeda, but the US and Israel too, which also backed the rebels in an effort to topple the Ba'athist government.

His statement that Hamas is "at pains to distinguish between Judaism and Zionism" is absurd. All he has to do is look up Hamas's 1988 charter on the internet to see that it incorporates the language of classic anti-Semitism,

complete with references to the notorious tsarist forgery known as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and charges that the Jews caused the French and Russian revolutions and were also responsible for World Wars I and II. Hamas sees Zionism and the Jews as one and the same. So does Netanyahu.

In arguing that Marxists sided with rightwing groups like EOKA in Cyprus in the 1950s (the National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters, founded by an ultra-rightist named Georgios Grivas), he ignored the most important part of my letter, which was an extended quote from Lenin concerning the necessity of maintaining political distance from bourgeois anti-colonial forces. "The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries," Lenin wrote in 1920, "but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form ..." As I noted on October 12, "This does not mean merely organisational independence, but political and ideological independence as well." In other words, Marxists should support the colonial masses, but not rightwing groups claiming to speak in their name, since they can only betray, weaken and undermine the popular struggle - something that Marxists should point out at every opportunity.

Greenstein is a textbook example of how to get this wrong. Within hours of the October 7 Hamas assault, he was using his blog to compare the offensive with the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in April 1943. "The Palestinian Resistance has undoubtedly killed many Israeli civilians," he wrote, "but we have to remember that most Israelis are not only reserve soldiers, but they have given overwhelming support to the slaughter of Palestinians." According to his pro-Hamas apologetics, children, the elderly, and teenage concert-goers must all pay the price for the Israeli government's crimes.

If Greenstein had been halfway honest, he would have pointed out an all-important difference with the 1943 Warsaw uprising, which is that the ghetto fighters had no intention whatsoever of slaughtering innocent civilians. On the contrary, their goal was to enlist them in the anti-fascist struggle. As the militants' leftwing leadership put it in June 1942, when the war was at its darkest:

"... from the fjords of Norway to the suburbs of Paris, from the mountains of Serbia to the factories of Czechoslovakia, the liberation army is consolidating and growing. Within the limited possibilities of the ghettos we must prepare the ground for a revolutionary Jewish deed. From Jewish pain and sufferings there must grow up the strength that, together with all the revolutionary forces in Europe and the backing of the Red Army, will rise to fight against Nazi slavery ..." (Reuben Ainsztein *The Warsaw Ghetto revolt*, New York, 1979, pp28-29).

This is the language of liberation, not of bloody ethno-religious reprisals. So, while we should support Palestinian resistance, we should not support Hamas. The distinction may be too subtle for Greenstein to understand. But it is absolutely essential.

Daniel Lazare
New York

Real terrorists

I was hugely saddened to see that you published Tony Greenstein's attack on me, "Why the Palestine solidarity movement should have nothing to do with Peter Gregson" (Letters, November 2).

I am also deeply saddened that you have refused to publish the Consistent Democrats defence of me, though you have been asked to by Ian Donovan. Readers can find it at consistent-democrats.org - and they will see that 27 pro-Palestine activists have signed that.

But what really takes the biscuit is that, whilst Tony is telling others to boycott me, he himself is doing exactly the opposite. For he was the 17th to sign my open letter to the home secretary calling for Hamas to be removed from the proscribed list of terrorist bodies. So far 853 have signed and Tony has even given me permission to use his name to promote the open letter! So why is he telling others to boycott me, when he himself does not? Anyway, thankfully nobody is listening to Tony any more.

I am taking the petition to 10 Downing Street on December 5 at 10am, and notifying the media - if any *Weekly Worker* readers want to join me, that would be excellent news. I do not expect Suella Braverman to change government policy because a thousand people have proposed it, but I do want to start a debate about whether Hamas are terrorists or freedom fighters.

There has been a huge misinformation campaign around the numbers killed by Hamas on October 7; fighters on motorbikes with Kalashnikovs just do not have the resources to firebomb cars and demolish houses - for that you need Apache helicopters with Hellfire missiles and Merkava tanks. At least 50% of those who died were killed by Israel, using the 'Hannibal' directive-killing Israelis to get at a Palestinian fighter. There are numerous reports from Israelis confirming this.

If we can get the mainstream media to reflect that maybe Hamas are not the terrorists, then Israel's carpet bombing can be seen for what it is - an attempt to wipe out a resistance movement; and probably occupy Gaza itself so that it can seize its gas reserves. We need to expose who the real terrorists are: the Israeli state, terrorising Palestinians for 75 years.

So please ignore Tony and join me in Whitehall on December 5.

Pete Gregson
One Democratic Palestine

Ceasefire

Labour Party members across Britain are dismayed by Keir Starmer's refusal to call for an end to the brutal collective punishment being inflicted upon the people of the Gaza Strip by the State of Israel.

In a radio interview on October 11 Starmer stated that "Israel has that right" - to cut off power and water to the Gaza Strip. In a television interview on October 12 shadow attorney general Emily Thornberry refused to condemn the cutting off of food, water and electricity. It is an outrage that the leadership of a party that describes itself as democratic socialist apparently endorses violations of the Geneva conventions.

The United Kingdom is capable of playing a major role in ending the current Palestine-Israel war. The UK is a permanent member of the United Nations security council. It is a key ally of the state of Israel, which it supplies with armaments, and with which it has signed an agreement on military cooperation. An Israeli arms manufacturer, Elbit, has a number of factories in Britain.

Keir Starmer ought to condemn the government's support for the slaughter in the Gaza Strip and push for the UK to use all the levers at its disposal to secure an immediate ceasefire agreement. Leading members of the Labour Party, including frontbench MPs, the Labour leader in Scotland,

the Labour mayors of London and Greater Manchester, and Labour groups on at least 20 councils, have issued statements calling for an immediate ceasefire. I hope that all Labour MPs and councillors will follow this example and call on Keir Starmer to demand a ceasefire and the immediate restoration of supplies of water, food, medicine, electricity and other necessities to the people of the Gaza Strip.

Labour Party councillors and ordinary members are resigning from the party in protest at Starmer's position on this war, and such resignations led to the loss of the Labour majority on Oxford council. Many Labour voters have expressed visceral disgust at Starmer's position on this issue, and have said that they will withhold their vote at the next election.

As a Labour Party member, I must say that I will not support the re-election of any Labour councillor or MP who will not condemn the killing of unarmed civilians and the denial of water, food and medicine to a civilian population in a war. Anyone who supports the violation of the international law laid out in the Geneva Conventions should not be a member of the Labour Party.

John Wake
Harlow

Semitic union

There was another good session at last Sunday's Online Communist Forum, where we did, of course, discuss the bombardment of Gaza. This included some talk of a future that we might advocate.

It was based on the work of Moshé Machover, who has proposed that both 'two-state' and 'one-state' solutions simply reproduce the national divisions engineered by the empires after World War I. Rather, we should seek a union across the area - a federation that would at least embrace the working class of Palestine, Israel and Jordan or even be extended to Syria, Lebanon and the Sinai Peninsula. This could be described as the *pan-Semitic* union, as the Semitic languages include Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, etc, and it need not be defined by religion.

Achieving this would by no means be easy, but it would be anti-imperialist and anti-exclusive. It should necessarily involve democratic structures of self-management and devolution, to offer all the peoples a chance to govern together. If we socialists cannot achieve this diverse unity tomorrow, we might at least persuade people that it's an alternative to the current tragic antagonism.

Mike Belbin
London

Right Jews

I find myself conflicted by the front page of last week's *Weekly Worker* (November 2). On the one hand, I understand that having orthodox rabbis on the front page, holding signs saying "Authentic rabbis always opposed Zionism and the state of Israel", etc, makes a good picture. On the other hand, one of the other rabbis' signs gives the game away: "Torah true Jews ...", it says at the top - and thereby somewhat offends me.

Communist Jews (like me) who consider themselves cultural rather than religious Jews, understand that these rabbis' antipathy to Israel is not based on politics, but on deeply held religious beliefs - that Israel should not exist because the messiah has not appeared yet. (I'm assuming here that people will remember that religious Jews do not consider Jesus to have been the messiah. Religious Jews are still waiting...)

Using these men as poster boys for resistance against Israeli oppression

rather pushes into the background the many non-religious Jewish groups, who have been demonstrating, speaking out and writing against the Israeli onslaught for months and sometimes years. It seems to me that using 'the wrong sort of Jew' to prove a point about Jewish political opposition to the Zionist state in some ways actually shows the opposite - and would confuse those who do not understand the differences within the Jewish community.

I speak of them as the 'wrong sort of Jew' because I abhor the way women and girls are treated in their communities, the inadequate schooling both boys and girls receive in religious schools, the fact that even in Israel itself those in the orthodox communities who might be opposed to Israel's oppression in Gaza would still support the most rightwing of Netanyahu's allies.

Our enemy's enemy is not, as we all know, necessarily our friend. And I believe that should be borne in mind for future photo ops.

Gaby Rubin
London

Absolute contempt

Jack Barnard's article in defence of the transitional method is excellent in its details ('Placing demands on Labour', October 19). But in his response Jack Conrad reduces the article to the stuff in Wales, so he does not need to reply to the rest in any detail ('Transition to nowhere', November 2). And where he does tackle Jack Barnard's dichotomy between maximum and minimum demands he references Lenin's observations in his *Collected works* that it is "a utopia to think that we shall not be thrown back".

But you will find a lot more that he 'inadvertently' seems to have missed. Immediately before that quote, embarrassingly for Jack, we find: "And here we come to the question of whether we should abolish the difference between the maximum and minimum programmes. Yes and no. I do not fear this abolition, because the viewpoint we held in summer should no longer exist. I said then, when we still had not taken power, that it was 'too soon', but now that we have taken power and tested it, it is not too soon. In place of the old programme we must now write a new programme of soviet power and not in any way reject the use of bourgeois parliamentarism" (my emphasis).

Paul Levi correctly identified that the reason was in the lack of transitional demands, a failure to recognise the fact that the class-consciousness of the working class was not yet receptive

to a revolutionary insurrection, as the Bolsheviks recognised in July 1917 - despite demands from some ultra-lefts in the party for an insurrection then. Who can deny that it was the sophisticated application of the united front with Kerensky against Kornilov and Denikin that saved the revolution?

And Lenin follows the short quote Jack has given with: "It cannot be denied historically that Russia has created a soviet republic. We say that if ever we are thrown back, while not rejecting the use of bourgeois parliamentarism - if hostile class forces drive us to that old position - we shall aim at what has been gained by experience: at soviet power, at the soviet type of state, at the Paris Commune type of state. That must be expressed in the programme. In place of the minimum programme, we shall introduce the programme of soviet power. A definition of the new type of state must occupy an important place in our programme."

Many of the minimum demands put forward by Jack are really transitional demands, as he is partially forced to acknowledge himself here: "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." But those words - "threshold" and "transition" - are Tr... Tr... Trotskyite stuff, Jack.

This second quote makes it clear that the reason for the dissolution of the Constituency Assembly was not just its Socialist Revolutionary domination with its peasant majority. Jack laments the might-have-been situation that the Left SRs could have won, had the selection process been fair, to take account of the latest sharp shift to the left of the peasantry. And then we could have had a 'Russian road to socialism' like Stalin's 1951 *British road to socialism* via parliament, and all that shooting, bombing and killing could have been avoided via Jack's "extreme democracy". Well, no, says Lenin: we have created a "soviet republic"; we will still use "bourgeois parliamentarism", the "old position", if we are thrown back, but we now have a far more advanced form of democracy than bourgeois democracy: "soviet democracy".

Jack says: "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."

And Daniel Gaido's *The origins of the transitional programme* says: "The united-front tactic found its first formulation at the initiative of the Stuttgart metalworkers in December 1920, and became the official policy of the KPD with the publication of the 'open letter' of the Zentrale of the United Communist Party of Germany, drafted by Paul Levi, on January 8 1921."

The 3rd Congress (June-July 1921) was primarily concerned with the reasons for the failure of the March action, so it was here that Levi's initiative bore fruition. "To the masses" was the correct slogan in Germany in March 1921, together with the demand for a united front of all workers' organisations against reaction, but the usual suspects, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin (the 'troika'), refused to implement this correct approach in September 1923.

As for the absence of 'democratic demands', Jack cannot avoid displaying his absolute contempt for "undemocratic" revolutionary violence. In Trotsky's *Their morals and ours*, he declares: "A slave-owner who through cunning and violence shackles a slave in chains, and a slave who through cunning or violence breaks the chains - let not the contemptible eunuchs tell us that they are equals before a court of morality!"

Not very PC there, Leon, but that is the point we were obliged to make about the Hamas outbreak on October 7 and it also applies to all uprisings of the working class and oppressed against global imperialism and its local proxy agents. We do not 'condemn' the massacres in Jamestown in 1609 of some 350 white settlers on native American lands, or Nat Turner's 1831 slave uprising in Virginia, killing nearly 60 white people, mostly women and children. Or the Weenen South Africa massacre of 100 Boers in 1838, the Algerian FLN, the Mau Mau in Kenya or the IRA Kingsmill massacre of 15 Protestant workers in January 1976.

Jack asserts: "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."

So Lenin and Trotsky should not have made the revolution in October 1917, but waited for the (bourgeois) "democracy" of the Constituent Assembly. The bourgeoisie, after all, have the only real form of democracy, we must believe. The struggles of the working class via their trade unions and political parties have secured many democratic rights for themselves under capitalism. But this is not to be equated with the fraud of bourgeois democracy, where the working class and oppressed get to choose between alternative oppressors every four or five years. All these rights are now under severe threat internationally, as police states and possible fascist regimes loom. Starmer or Sunak is a poor choice, even if we do call for a Labour vote where no revolutionary alternative or serious centrist force with a mass base exists.

When Trotsky led the Red Army to victory against the counterrevolution of the fascistic whites and 14 invading imperialist-sponsored armies by any means necessary, he should not have won his great world uplifting victory for the working class and oppressed in the whole world, but should have allowed his army to be defeated in the name of 'democracy'. He was worse than Lenin! We should have taken Lars T Lih's advice and followed the man that Lenin refers to as "the sugary Kautsky" in his *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

ACTION

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.

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.

National march for Palestine - ceasefire now!

Saturday November 11, 12 noon: Demonstration. Assemble Hyde Park, London W2. March to US Embassy, Nine Elms Lane, London SW11. Free Gaza. Stop the massacre. End the siege. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/events/874451094072619.

What it means to be human

Tuesday November 14, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology. Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviston Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'This land is our land: exploring new travellers' alternative world-making and activism'. Speaker: Freya Hope. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/1383459752205922.

Gaza, Palestine - a teach-in

Tuesday November 14, 7pm: Public briefing, W309, University of Durham West Building, South Road, Durham DH1. Unpack the crisis in Gaza in its historical, political and international context. Organised by County Durham Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/teach-in-gaza-palestine.

Ceasefire now! Stop the war in Gaza!

Wednesday November 15, 7pm: Public meeting, Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, M2. Discuss what is happening in Gaza, the causes and how to support freedom and liberation for Palestine. Speakers include Louise Regan (NEU), Tony Wilson (Unison) and Andrew Murray (Stop the War). Register for free tickets. Organised by Greater Manchester Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/events/275976004814814.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Transform founding conference

Saturday November 25, 10.30am to 5pm: Conference, Nottingham Trent University, 30 Burton 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.

Socialism 2023

Saturday November 25 and Sunday November 26: Socialist Party annual school, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1. 40 sessions around how to fight back, win and change the world! Tickets: one day £30 (£12.50), two days £40 (£20). Organised by Socialist Party in England and Wales: socialism.org.uk.

How do we defeat the anti-union laws?

Wednesday November 29, 7pm: Public meeting, The Bread and Roses, 68a Clapham Manor Street, London SW4. Planning the campaign to defeat the Minimum Service Levels law, and to force a Labour government to repeal all the anti-union laws. Organised by Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Council: www.facebook.com/events/648755220767194.

The 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.

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.

Fighting fund

Justified confidence

The highlight of this week's fighting fund is the fantastic donation of no less than £130 from Australian comrade MS. He writes: "Been remiss of me not to have been subscribing. So I've just subscribed. But you don't need to send me the paper - I'll read it online!"

In other words, it's not a subscription at all, but an annual donation - paid at the same rate as a sub costs if you're down under! Either way, thanks very much, comrade - your contribution is very much appreciated.

Other PayPal donations this week have come from TSW (£20) and MH (£10), while in addition 11 comrades contributed to our fund by bank transfer/standing order - thanks go to AC (£60), BO (£35), SC (£30), NR, GD and DV (£25 each), RG and

AM (£15), plus SM, NH and LG (a tenner each).

All that comes to £420, taking our running total for November up to £546, with, as I write, just eight days gone. Our target each month is actually £2,250, so we're ever so slightly behind the going rate, but I'm confident we can get there again.

But please help justify my confidence by doing your bit - send us a cheque, click on the PayPal button on our website or (best of all, because it's cost-free) make a bank transfer.

We can do it! ●

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

GAZA

Anatomy of genocide

Targeting of health infrastructure is definite policy. Ian Spencer assesses the terrible human cost of the Israeli assault since October 7

In the month since the start of its war on Gaza, Israel has killed over 10,000 people, including 3,000 women and over 4,000 children - a child murdered every 10 minutes. Nearly 25,500 people have been wounded, many of them gravely, with life-changing injuries.

The targeting of health infrastructure is now such a feature of the Israeli genocide that there can be no doubt that it is a deliberate policy, as are the lies used to justify it. A convoy of five ambulances was struck by Israel on November 4, near the Al-Shifa hospital, the largest in Gaza, despite appeals for safety for patients. According to the Israel Defence Forces, the ambulances were targeted "because they were transporting Hamas fighters" and the hospital "housed an underground command centre for Hamas".¹ This remains unproven and, given the IDF's track record on lying, unlikely.

The destruction of the ambulance convoy resulted in 15 deaths and 60 wounded. It was evacuating the hospital towards the Rafah border crossing but had to return, because the route was blocked by rubble. The population of the Gaza Strip, understandably, tries to shelter near hospitals to avoid the indiscriminate bombing. But the IDF understands this - which may explain why hospitals are being targeted! Then in a perverse, Orwellian, inversion of truth, it accuses Hamas of using the civilian population as a human shield.

Israel repeatedly questions mortality and casualty rates published by the Palestinian Authority ministry of health, which is the only reliable source of information on casualty rates. It has been assisted in this by Joe Biden, who said: "I have no notion that the Palestinians are telling the truth about how many have been killed. I'm sure innocents have been killed, and it's the price of waging a war."² In response the ministry issued a 212-page list of names and ID numbers of casualties.

BBC

The BBC too likes to imply that the figures may be unreliable by routinely referring to "the Hamas-run health ministry".³ Yet, the figures are based on reports directly from hospitals, which continue to document each casualty in a bed, or on the floor in a corridor. Each casualty and body in the morgue is reported by name and ID number to the ministry. Previous attacks by Israel were documented in the same way and, when investigated by the UN, were shown to be accurate.⁴ What we cannot know so easily is the numbers of those still missing, under the rubble and whose decomposed remains are unlikely to be recovered until after the war (if at all). However, this figure is currently estimated at around 2,500.⁵

The World Health Organisation has condemned the attacks on the Al-Shifa Hospital, Al-Quds Hospital and the Indonesian Hospital in Gaza City. WHO has pointed out that women, children and newborns are disproportionately bearing the burden of the slaughter and represent 67% of all casualties. The bombardments, displacement of population, destruction of health infrastructure, collapsing water supplies and restriction of food and medicines have severely disrupted maternal, infant and child health



Health workers for a free Palestine

services. There are an estimated 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza, with around 180 giving birth every day (on November 1 the Al-Hilo maternity hospital was shelled). In the absence of health facilities, women are giving birth in such housing as remains undamaged or even amongst the rubble. Consequently, medical complications of infection, stress-induced miscarriage and stillbirth are increasing.⁶

The indiscriminate nature of the killing has included 88 staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) - the highest death toll for the organisation ever recorded in a single conflict. A measure of the impotence of the UN - or what amounts to the same thing, its domination by the US - is that Craig Mokhiber, the director of the New York office of the UN high commissioner for human rights, resigned because he said the UN was failing in its duty to prevent the genocide of Palestinians. He is quoted as saying that the UN had also failed to prevent previous genocides against "the Tutsis in Rwanda, Muslims in Bosnia, the Yazidi in Iraqi Kurdistan and the Rohingya in Myanmar".

It is not as if nothing has ever been done. Nato went to war with Serbia and inflicted widespread bombing on its civilian population on the pretext of Serbia's "ethnic cleansing" of Muslims and Croats. However, the more extensive, prolonged killing and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians is passed over in silence, while the US, UK and much of the European Union not only fail to meet their

treaty obligations under the Geneva Conventions, but are arming Israel and providing political and diplomatic cover for it.⁷

Over half of Gaza is now homeless and dependant on facilities provided by UNRWA, which estimates that 4,600 displaced pregnant women and 380 infants require medical attention. There are 22,500 cases of acute respiratory infection and 12,000 cases of diarrhoea that have been reported - both a major cause of mortality in the newborn. There is widespread malnutrition and dehydration. Even if refugees reach a relatively safe haven, such as a UN school, the water ration is just three litres per person per day for all needs.

Injuries

Wars produce particular types of injuries. Crush injuries, for example, cause hypovolaemic shock, which can be fatal, due to the loss of plasma, which in the context of a Gaza starved of medical supplies cannot be replaced by intravenous infusion. Crushed limbs can lead to irreversible muscle cell death and require amputation. Even if someone is pulled from the wreckage, they may subsequently die because of severe electrolyte imbalance due to the release of intracellular electrolytes, which cause cardiac arrest, as well as kidney and multiple organ failure.

Blast injuries cause complex tissue damage, including traumatic lung and brain injury. Primary blast injuries result from high pressures created by the explosion. In addition

to the lung barotrauma, there is also ear drum rupture. There can be abdominal haemorrhage and perforation, as well as eye rupture. Secondary blast injuries typically involve penetrating ballistic damage from fragments, from the bomb itself, as a feature of its design, as well as that of debris. Tertiary blast injuries typically include bone fractures, traumatic amputations, as well as the same kind of injuries associated with crushing. Quaternary blast injuries include burns, which is particularly significant in Gaza owing to the Israeli use of white phosphorus bombs. Other lung trauma can occur from the inhalation of toxic gases, dust, smoke and fumes.⁸

Gunshot wounds are more complex than simple penetration injuries. They are likely to involve vital organs. A bullet revolves at high speed due to the rifling of the gun's barrel. Invariably, clothing fibres and associated dirt and infective agents are carried deep into the wound. Penetration of the chest leads to pneumothorax and those hit are at high risk of dying without specialist dressing to allow the reflation of the lung and subsequent chest drainage. Abdominal wounds invariably ensure gut trauma and probable death from peritonitis, if not properly treated.

The pressure wave associated with high-velocity projectiles lead to widespread tissue cavitation and permanent destruction, seemingly out of proportion to the size of the bullet. Naturally, the exit wound is considerably larger than the entry wound. People who watch puerile

action-adventure films are inclined to think that a larger bullet is more lethal. But the small size of the rounds carried by Nato soldiers, as well as the IDF, mean that the bullet is more accurate, flies faster and further than a larger round, such as those used by Hamas. The smaller round is more destructive by virtue of its velocity as well as muzzle energy. The fact that the Nato round is longer means that there is a greater charge behind the smaller projectile and consequently higher kinetic energy. Smaller rounds mean that soldiers can carry more of them. Each Nato rifle carries between 20 and 30 rounds in each magazine and therefore, with the flick of a change lever, every rifle is the equivalent of a sub-machine gun.

The point of this is to illustrate how the injuries of war frequently require highly specialised surgical treatment. But the hospitals of Gaza now have little water, antiseptic, analgesia or anaesthesia. The unavailability of intravenous fluids, antibiotics and even a clinically clean environment means that such surgical interventions are carried out under conditions that are worse than in a World War II field hospital. Injuries that would have been survivable in a well-equipped modern hospital are now more likely to lead to a prolonged, painful death or permanent disability.

Hygiene

The lack of hygiene and antibiotics greatly increases the likelihood of death from infection. Dr Marwan Abdusa, head of surgery at Al-Shifa Hospital, reports that "on a normal day we have a capacity for 210 beds", but "we now have more than 800 that need to be admitted". Moreover, "We have a health disaster. We have a type of worm, called white flies, covering the wounds after surgery. They appear after one day."⁹

While it is natural to highlight the destruction of health facilities - in part because it is in clear violation of the Geneva conventions and a war crime - the true threat to the health of the majority of Gazans is the increased likelihood of epidemic and water-borne disease. This is added to by the fact that, apart from the pitifully small amounts being delivered by aid agencies, the water desalination plant that Gazans were dependent on is no longer working for the want of fuel.

Much of the destruction of war and the killing of civilians is, as we saw in the crass remark by Joe Biden, regarded as being 'collateral damage' - the near-accidental and regrettable consequences of military action that cannot be avoided. However, no-one can make that claim of Israel's actions, which clearly fall within the definitions contained in the Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide. The backing of the US world hegemon makes justice unlikely ●

Notes

1. *The Daily Telegraph* November 6.
2. *The Guardian* October 27.
3. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67332684.
4. *Arab News* November 8.
5. www.map.org.uk/landing-pages/gaza-emergency-situation-2023.
6. World Health Organisation statement November 3.
7. *The Guardian* October 31.
8. blastinjuryresearch.health.mil/index.cfm/blast_injury_101.
9. *The Daily Telegraph* November 6.

LEFT

Wider solution needed

The SWP is championing a single-state Palestine using mistaken comparisons with apartheid South Africa. When it comes to Israel-Palestine, there is no bourgeois democratic solution, writes **Eddie Ford**

Zionism and the question of Palestine/Israel has long been a difficult and contentious issue. Historically, most of the far left in Britain has called for the abolition of the present-day Zionist state of Israel and its replacement by a larger Palestine that will be multi-ethnic, secular and allow for religious freedom - though exactly how that would come about largely goes unexplained. You could say that it is summed up by the slogan, 'From the river to the sea', that refers geographically to the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea - that is, the historic boundaries of mandate Palestine, as bequeathed by British colonialism.

As a slogan, it was initially popularised by the Palestine Liberation Organisation upon its founding in 1964 as a "main goal of the movement" - but over the decades it has been open to different interpretations and meanings. Something that the Labour MP for Middlesbrough, Andy McDonald, found out to his cost when he was suspended for using these "deeply offensive" words at the huge pro-Palestinian demonstration the other week in London. Presumably on the grounds, as home secretary Suella Braverman would have us believe (and which Sir Keir Starmer goes along with), that the slogan is an "expression of a violent desire to see Israel erased from the world" and thus must be anti-Semitic, as Israel likes to call itself the homeland for all Jewish people.

Sophie Squire

Anyway, the Socialist Workers Party - taking their cue from the PLO - has long argued for a one-state solution to the Palestine/Israel question. Therefore, ever since the current Israel-Hamas war began, we have been expecting an article to appear in *Socialist Worker* reaffirming and explaining its position. Well, it finally appeared last week in 'Single state solution' by Sophie Squire (November 1). She is a staff writer, so what she says must be taken as an authoritative statement of the SWP's position.

The problems with her article are immediately apparent: South Africa is presented as the model to emulate. Yes, "winning a single democratic state will be no easy task", she admits, and "revolutions across the neighbouring countries of the Middle East are needed to dismantle the imperialist backing that Israel relies on for its survival". Yet "the case of South Africa shows it's possible to topple an apartheid regime", going on to argue that "the threat of a revolution forced white South African leaders to dismantle apartheid laws that separated and disenfranchised black South Africans from white ones."

Firstly, what sort of revolutions in "neighbouring countries"? It is quite conceivable that the Muslim Brotherhood and their like could overthrow the Sisi military regime in Egypt and the Hashemite kingdom in Jordan. But such a revolution would be counterrevolution from day one. And, of course, that would do nothing to put a stop to US backing for Israel. Quite the reverse.

Secondly, apartheid in South Africa was not "toppled". There was the threat of revolution, yes, in which Angola and Mozambique served as front-line states, where



Key question is how

Umkhonto we Sizwe trained and organised attacks into South Africa. Nor does comrade Squire want to mention the role of Cuba in defeating South African forces in Angola or the overall backing provided by the Soviet Union. After its collapse in 1991, the African National Congress and the 'official' South African Communist Party agreed to a smooth transition whereby blacks got the vote but capitalism would be left untouched. This was not forced upon the US and its imperialist allies. It is what they wanted ... and facilitated. True, some black politicians made their way into the ranks of the capitalist class, not least through corruption, but there can be no doubt that the mass of the population are no better off in material terms than they were under apartheid. South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies on the planet.

Most importantly, however, comrade Squire shows no

understanding of the Marxist theory of colonialism. She knows the Boer word 'apartheid' can be applied to both South Africa and Israel and assumes that therefore they must be alike. They are not.

Apartheid

This shows the advantage of the analysis supplied over many years by comrade Moshé Machover and others who have regularly featured in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*. True, up to a point, you can go along with the apartheid designation - clearly, the Israeli state is racist and discriminatory. Only the likes of Suella Braverman and Sir Keir Starmer would dispute that. But, going back to the works of Karl Kautsky and before that Karl Marx himself, it is clear that we must distinguish between different types of colonialism.

In *Capital* volume 1, Marx wrote about three types of colonialism. First

there are "plantation colonies for exports only" - giving the example of the West Indies. Secondly, there are colonies "in rich and well populated countries ... given over to plunder", such as Mexico and India. And, thirdly, Marx wrote about colonies "properly so-called" like New England.

Karl Kautsky, the leading thinker of the Second International at the beginning of the 20th century, neglected to mention plantation colonies - he just talked about "exploitation colonies" in places like India and Mexico, and "work colonies", where the direct producers are settlers themselves (unlike Marx, Kautsky was quite complimentary about work colonies).

Instead of exploiting the native masses, the colonists exclude them, drive them off the land, kill them. That was not the case in South Africa. Black labour was vital for the mining industry. Whites tended to be supervisors. This is not the case in Israel. From the start Zionism set itself the aim of establishing a work colony ... an ongoing project. Palestinian workers have come into Israel from Gaza and the West Bank. But what Israeli capital has turned to for cheap labour is the far, not near, abroad. Note, during the October 7 Hamas attack, at least 30 Thai nationals, four Filipinos and 10 Nepalis are so far known to have been killed. Overall, there are reportedly more than 100,000 foreign workers in Israel, with the majority working as caregivers, as well as in agriculture and construction. Also, it seems that Israel is seeking out Indian workers to substitute for Palestinian labourers, in response to the recent cancellation of work licences for tens of thousands of Palestinian employees following the Hamas attacks.¹ More to the point, being a work colony, the system is designed to discriminate in favour of Jewish labour against Arab labour.

Crucially, as comrade Machover has pointed out, "there are few laws in history", but one law that you can confidently formulate is that, wherever what Kautsky called "work colonies" have taken place in modern times, "a new settler nation comes into existence" and "this has happened everywhere" - New England, Australia, New Zealand - and, of course, it has happened in Palestine too.²

Whether we like it or not, Israel, founded as it was on a mass act of ethnic cleansing, has since 1948 gone hand in hand with the coming into existence and consolidation of a definite Israeli Jewish nation - Israeli Jews are united in the same economy, speak the same language, inhabit the same territory, have the same culture and sense of identity. You cannot uninvent the historically constituted Israeli Jewish nation (or Hebrew nation), and it would be deeply unMarxist and reactionary to try to abolish it - they would desperately fight you with all means at their disposal and at huge cost in terms of human suffering and lives.

You need to break Israeli workers from Zionism, not get rid of them, which must mean gaining their consent. That can only come about by recognising their national rights - rather than assigned minority 'religious rights' for a population about half of whom are atheists or non-believers, which would be a recipe for failure and perpetual division. Remember,

even if Palestinians get the right to return, there would roughly be equal numbers of Israeli Jews and Palestinians in Palestine. And, of course, the Palestinians are in no position to force anything on the Israeli Jews. All they can do is resist.

At the moment the Israeli-Jewish nation is a privileged, oppressor, nation. Israel-Jewish workers are not going to swap their position in that nation for mere equality in a putative single-state Palestine (if that were possible). Nor are they going to accept a reversal of the poles of oppression. That is why the perspective of socialism and a regional Arab revolution led by the working class is absolutely essential. There can be no bourgeois democratic solution.

Aristocracy

That was not the case in South Africa. The potential revolution was obviously premised on mobilising the black masses, who were the overwhelming majority. Whites were divided between Afrikaans and English speakers and constituted not nations: rather a labour aristocracy. However, though we did not want it, there was a bourgeois democratic solution.

Hence, those comrades who use the word 'apartheid' purely to mean discrimination are missing something fundamental if they think the solution to the Palestine/Israel question can be a managed transition under capitalism - which is what the SWP's Sophie Squires appears to suggest. Though she refers to "revolution" a few times, what is not mentioned once is socialism or the role of the working class - a very significant absence. She seems to think that with enough pressure, enough heroic actions, enough street protests, enough strikes, Israel can be pushed towards a one-state solution.

Sorry, this is delusional - completely naive at best. Then again, it is no less delusional than believing in a two-state solution that Israel will never accept. The US pays lip service to the idea, but it knows full well how Israel will react to any such talk - so when the White House talks about a two-state solution, it is lying. At least Benjamin Netanyahu tends to be more honest along those lines. Those advocating either a one-state or two-state approach suffer from the same illusion that a solution can be found within the Israel-Palestine box.

Of course, what is happening in Israel is that politics is moving in a much more blunt and brutal direction - when it comes to rhetoric. Israel has always been an oppressive, expansionist, racist state since its origins in Labor Zionism, which used to prettify its colonial project by calling it socialism and claiming to spread civilisation to the barbaric Arab world. The revisionist wing of Zionism did not go in for such pretty words, saying quite rightly that the Arab masses will resist colonisation and will therefore have to be crushed - exactly Benjamin Netanyahu's message when it comes to Gaza ●

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Notes

1. gg2.net/israel-seeks-100000-indian-workers-to-replace-palestinian-labour-report.
2. 'Two impossibilities' *Weekly Worker* May 12 2022: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1395/two-impossibilities.

UNITY



Behaving like a chameleon: a common practice

A communist appeal to Socialist Appeal

Going from Fabian clause four socialism to self-declared communism is welcome progress, says Mike Macnair. But what that poses is unity in a Communist Party

Socialist Appeal is at present running a recruitment campaign under the slogan, 'Are you a communist? Then get organised' - it seems with some success. And the slogan itself is a radical step forward.

But how far is 'communist' a real commitment for Socialist Appeal, as opposed to a mere marketing device to appeal to radical youth (Socialist Appeal has been through several such marketing devices since the Blair years)? And the critical question is: what does "get organised" mean?

If it means only 'join Socialist Appeal', this is just a new form of the delusion experienced by the Healyite Socialist Labour League with its November 1973 transformation into the Workers Revolutionary Party, by the Cliffite International Socialists with its January 1977 transformation into the Socialist Workers Party, and by Socialist Appeal's former Granite co-thinkers in the Militant majority (now Taaffeite after the break with Grant) with its 1997 transformation into the Socialist Party (now, of England and Wales).¹ "Get organised" really needs an effort to organise *all* the communists, not just the 'Grantites'.²

And that needs more openness to *debate* with other sections of the left - and internally - than is the common inheritance of all these four fragments of the 1944-49 Revolutionary Communist Party.³

Strengths

We will begin with the strengths. First, 'Are you a communist?' is aimed at a section of the youth who are willing to self-identify as communists. This is an important positive development (though not, as yet, a mass one). Comrade Lawrence Parker rightly makes the point in his blog post about the campaign:

At root, the demand to call ourselves communist is a claim on unity in diversity. Once you make a positive demand that you are a communist, you are signalling a difference with the working class movement as a whole in a way that defining yourself as 'socialist' (which the Labour right also has a claim on), 'trade unionist' or 'activist' does not. Being a communist or in the Communist

Party does not mean that you are instantly set aside from the class as a whole, but it does imply a separation, a difference, which is the only practical foundation for any lasting unity. If a so-called united movement frowns on communists, and the communists thus feel impelled to soften or hide their identity, then that unity is not worth having.⁴

A second point here is that 'Nothing to do with us, gov', as expressed in the old Cliffite slogan, "Neither Washington nor Moscow, but international socialism", was never a plausible answer to the right wing's claim to tar all forms of communism with the brush of the Soviet bureaucratic regime. The common delusion of the Trotskyist left - that the Soviet regime was the main thing holding back the combativity of the working class and hence 'after Gorbachev, us' - was exposed pretty rapidly: indeed, even more rapidly than the illusion that neoliberal 'shock therapy' in the former eastern bloc would produce rapid capitalist development resulting in major prosperity.

From the perspective of 30 years on, it is now clear that, in spite of all their vices, the fall of the eastern bloc regimes was a massive *defeat* for the working class across the globe. That this defeat may have been inevitable does not prevent it being a defeat. Hence, open self-identification as 'communist' is a worthwhile recognition that this *was* a defeat. And it is the necessary beginning of a willingness to fight back against this defeat, as opposed to merely 'resisting' the latest capitalist attack.

Thirdly, as comrade Parker says, the Labour right also has a claim on 'socialism'. And this 'socialism' is nation-state-loyalist. It is so in its support for imperialist operations overseas: visible in Starmer's line on Palestine, in the votes of the US left-Democrat Congress 'squad' for military appropriations, in the destruction of Rifondazione Comunista over Italian participation in the Afghanistan war. It is so in its commitments to Heath Robinson/Rube Goldberg Keynesian schemes to 'restore the national economy' without confronting the *international* economic dynamics of capitalism.

It is so in the 'socialist' loyalists' persistent promotion of the idea that the capitalists' parties and the state core will play by the constitutional rules in face of persistent evidence that they will not: Berlusconi's media manipulations in 1990s-2000s Italy; the 2000 'Brooks Bros riot' in Florida and the persistent efforts at ballot-rigging since; in this country the big oil-promoted campaign of direct action against fuel price duties in 2000, the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign begun in 2015 and ongoing, the recent rightwing press-promoted campaign of criminal damage against Ultra-Low Emissions Zone enforcement cameras, and so on. In this context, to identify as 'communist' is to assert plainly the uselessness of state-loyalist 'socialism'.

Related to this, 'communist' asserts the need for a radically different social order: one based on human need and *human* development, not on the imperatives of 'efficiency'. As Alan Woods puts it in his November 2 article on the campaign in *In defence of Marxism*,

Our aim is to create a paradise in this world: a new world, in which life will acquire an entirely new meaning. And for the first time, men and women will be able to raise themselves to their true stature.

That is the only cause worth fighting for.

That is why we are communists.⁵

The CPGB's *Draft programme* puts it slightly differently, but with the same underlying idea:

Through society reabsorbing the functions of the state the need for it withers away. Democracy (as a form of the state) negates itself and gives way to general freedom. The higher stage of communism is a free association of producers. Everybody will contribute according to their ability and take according to their need. Real human history begins and society leaves behind the realm of necessity. In the realm of freedom people will become rounded, fully social individuals, who can for the first time truly develop their

natural humanity.

This is what we want to achieve. To win that prize we shall overcome all obstacles.⁶

Organise

'Get organised', says Socialist Appeal's slogan. The point is absolutely fundamental. The working class as a class needs organised collective action to defend its immediate interests against the employers, landlords and so on. Hence trade unions, cooperatives, mutuals and collectivist political parties.

Communists just as fundamentally need organisation. If we remain unorganised and rely on individual action, the capitalist class wins: because its control of concentrations of wealth allows it to employ paid agents: lawyers, lobbyists, advertising and PR agents, professional politicians, journo, and the institutional structure of the capitalist state order allows capital to dictate through these agents. Organised action can begin to counterweigh the capitalists' ability to pay for favourable 'public opinion', for election results, for ministerial and for judicial decisions.

It is a strength of Socialist Appeal that it does seek to organise some of the basic structural forms of a party. That is, it has a dues-paying membership organised in branches or cells, a leadership, and a fortnightly newspaper and other publications. In this respect Socialist Appeal is a fundamental step forward relative to the very large number of sects of one member who call themselves 'independent' leftists, and to ideas of 'networks', pure discussion circles, and low-intensity leftism of one sort or another. This strength of Socialist Appeal is, of course, common to the *organised* far left as a whole: the SWP, the *Morning Star's* CPB, SPEW and a variety of smaller groups, ourselves included.

The point of Communist Party organisation is to create a *political voice* for the independent interests of the working class and the struggle for communism: both by publishing, and by, as far as possible, electoral intervention. 'Rank and file' militancy in the trade unions, single-issue campaigning, and so on,

can perfectly well be conducted by ad hoc coalitions of 'independents' or by 'networks' and suchlike. On the other hand, a communist paper or journal is unavoidably in competition with the capitalist class's regular publications, backed by the capitalists with advertising revenue to help them drown out alternative voices. However small we start, regular publication and the maximum possible frequency of publication are essential. Election campaigns, where they are possible, take money and effort. Developing a political voice thus requires organised resources, membership activity, dues and fundraising.

Coloration

I started by saying that Socialist Appeal's slogan, 'Are you a communist? Then get organised', is a radical step forward. Step forward in relation to *what*, though? The answer is: in relation to the common practice of the far left of behaving like Chameleons and trying to take on 'protective coloration' from the surrounding movement, and thereby self-silencing or turning down the volume on their advocacy of communism.

Socialist Appeal and its predecessors are not the only practitioners of this method. The SWP and other groups do it so extensively that their independent political identity is hard to detect. But Socialist Appeal also has a long history of this practice. The old Granite Militant Tendency represented itself as 'Labour's Marxist wing' and elaborated a schema under which Labour would be won for the left, and could then win a general election and bring in socialism through an 'Enabling Act' authorising the government to legislate by decree. This was a 'leftish' version of the old 'official' Communist Party's *British road to socialism* and within the framework of the common ideas of the Labour broad left of the 1960s-80s.⁷

In this context, once the Grantites had been left alone in the Labour Party Young Socialists by the withdrawal of other Trotskyist tendencies (Cliffites, Mandelites) in 1967-69 in favour of open work, they were able to recruit and train youth without competition from other leftists in the LPYS milieu,

and were protected from immediate witch-hunting by the Labour broad left (which was animated by the old 'official' CPGB). The Militant thus grew to a considerable size by the 1980s. Then, with the capture of the CPGB by the Eurocommunists, the broad left broke up and serious witch-hunting started.

The 1991 split, in which the founders of Socialist Appeal were expelled from Militant, was initially a matter of the continuity of this Grantite project, while the Taaffe wing, claiming that Labour had become just another capitalist party like the US Democrats, went for open party-building and public electoral work. However, it took a long time for the underlying dynamics of the contradiction in Labour between, on the one hand, its bourgeois character as capital's 'second eleven' and, on the other, its name, its working class electorate and its trade union connection, to reassert itself. The contradiction surfaced in a subterranean way in manoeuvres between 'Blairites' and 'Brownites' after the 2005 general election, then in 2010 in the election of Ed Miliband as party leader, and first burst into full view with the Corbyn movement in 2015 - 24 years after 1991.

The Grantites were thus right and the Taaffeites were wrong on the analysis of the Labour Party. But there was from the early 1990s, and remains, no space in Labour for the practical pursuit of the old Grantite policy that built the Militant Tendency: this in fact depended on the general contradictions of Labour, not *immediately*, but as *mediated* by the old Labour and trade union broad left, animated by the old CPGB.

Hence Socialist Appeal had to, and has, shifted to other fields of practical work - and has taken on new protective colorations to fit these milieus. The first 'turn' was around Venezuelan solidarity work, based on Alan Woods' connections to the Spanish-speaking left, through his prior work in this field. In this context the Socialist Appeal tendency took on protective coloration as 'Bolivarians'; Woods met with Hugo Chávez in 2004; and so on. Since Chávez's death in 2013 this identification has somewhat faded, but remains as a solidarity theme.

Next, but ephemeral and probably limited to Scotland, was an abrupt decision after the 2014 independence referendum to leave Scots Labour for the Scottish Socialist Party (which Socialist Appeal had previously identified as marginalised by its crisis over Tommy Sheridan).⁸

Soon after this, the outbreak of the Corbyn movement drew the comrades back to Labour. How to approach it? In 2018 Socialist Appeal launched an organised and serious campaign for the restoration of the old Lassalle/Fabian 'clause 4' of the Labour Party rules.⁹ This was a discontinuity with the old Grantite approach in the 1960s-80s, which focussed on the Grantites' own programme, since it was plainly a broad-frontist project that aimed to draw Labour lefts into a campaign on their own Fabian political terms. It is thus radically different from Socialist Appeal's present promotion of communism and comrade Woods' broadly correct assertion in his article, quoted above, of the long-term aims of communism.¹⁰

Comrade Woods' argument also sits uneasily with Socialist Appeal's 'What we are fighting for', which appears as 'programme' on the menu of their web page. After a series of standard 'transitional demands' we arrive at:

We therefore stand for the nationalisation of the 100 biggest monopolies, banks and insurance

companies - under workers' control and management - without compensation. They have stolen enough from us already. On this basis, the economy can be democratically planned in the interests of the majority, and not for the super-profits of a few billionaires.

As internationalists, we fight for a Socialist Federation of Britain linked to a Socialist United States of Europe and a World Socialist Federation, in order to plan resources internationally for the benefit of all. This would allow humanity to begin solving the urgent issues of climate change, disease and poverty that face society and our planet.

Compare and contrast the final paragraph of the *Weekly Worker's* 'What we fight for' column (behind which stands CPGB's more elaborated *Draft programme*):

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.

It should be obvious that Socialist Appeal's 'What we are fighting for' is a lot less ambitious than either the CPGB's version or comrade Woods' article.

The question is thus posed: is Socialist Appeal's communist turn a real move towards open communist political work? (In this case Socialist Appeal needs to deepen the turn and rewrite its programme consistently with this.) Or is it merely a new form of protective coloration, to deliver more new recruits after the successive turns to 'Chavismo', Scottish nationalism, and campaigning for the Fabian clause 4? Socialist Appeal comrades, and those attracted by the 'Are you a communist?' campaign, or attending the organisation's November 10-12 school, need to address this question.

Fighting for

'Get organised', says the slogan: 'join us': that is, join Socialist Appeal. And Socialist Appeal's 'What we are fighting for' concludes with: "It is therefore time to energetically build the forces of Marxism, embodied today in the International Marxist Tendency, which alone offers a revolutionary way out of this crisis."

Let us begin by stating that Socialist Appeal is growing and recruiting youth. This is obvious. But it is necessary to say also that this is *also* true of both the SWP, which is the largest of the far-left organisations, and of the *Morning Star*-CPB, which is in the same size range as SPEW and Socialist Appeal. There are also, as I have already said, a range of smaller groups, the CPGB included.

Comrade Woods' article claims that the explanation of the success of Socialist Appeal's 'Are you a communist?' 'Get organised' campaign is that:

The reformists and the Stalinists are in crisis. And they are united in their hopeless confusion by the myriad of sects that swarm around the periphery of the labour movement.

It is precisely their ideological bankruptcy that has landed the whole of the self-styled 'realists'

of the left in a mess. Their contempt for theory renders them totally incapable of understanding the real processes at work in society and of reacting to them effectively.

Consequently, they have drawn the most pessimistic conclusions from the present situation.

In all this lamentable spectacle of defeatism, scepticism and demoralisation, the International Marxist Tendency stands out as an organisation that bases itself firmly on Marxism and Leninism, and that pays serious attention to theory. Our strength lies in the power of our ideas. Lenin stressed that without revolutionary theory the building of a revolutionary organisation is impossible. This idea is one thousand percent correct.

Comrade Woods offers no evidence whatever for these claims. And, in reality, when Socialist Appeal comrades attend Palestine demonstrations, or trade union meetings, or whatever - except the circles of the former Corbynite left - they will find the rest of the organised and unorganised left there as enthusiastic and upbeat participants, too.

Comrade Woods thinks of the present global situation as analogous to February 1917, when large masses had supported the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, but, as the situation matured, the Bolsheviks were able to win the majority:

The revolutionary process does not emerge all at once, fully armed, like Athene from the head of Zeus. It unfolds in stages, following a process of successive approximations.

As Trotsky points out in *The history of the Russian Revolution*, this process manifests itself as the rise and fall of different parties and leaders, in which, he says, the more radical always replaces the less.

The first wave of radicalisation that followed the collapse of 2008 brought to the front what you might call the left reformists, or at least some leaders that expressed themselves in very radical language.

In Greece, there was the sudden rise of Syriza and Alexis Tsipras. In Spain, there was a similar development with Podemos and Pablo Iglesias. In the United States there was the mass movement around Bernie Sanders.

But in February 1917, the tsarist regime was facing military defeat; the soldiers already ceased to obey their officers; and it was five years since the Bolsheviks had in 1912 won the majority of the workers' curia in the Duma elections, so that the Bolsheviks were not a grouplet like any of the Brit far-left groups, but already a faction that could win big in a general election, though temporarily knocked back by wartime repression. In addition, the eventual Bolshevik victory in October was a *political* victory, which (temporarily) won over the majority of the SR party - not one of pure membership and vote growth of Bolshevism.

I have personally heard very similar claims to those of comrade Woods about the impressionism, lack of grasp of the dialectic, and consequent pessimism, of the rest of the left and its failure to grasp the imminence of the revolution - from Gerry Healy of the WRP at a public meeting in 1975, and from Nahuel Moreno of the Argentinian Socialist Workers Party at an international faction meeting in 1979. In both

cases they were signs of delusive thinking. It is startling to hear those claims from Grantites like comrade Woods, since it can be seen from the histories that the same arguments from the dialectic to the immediately arriving revolutionary crisis were used by James P Cannon, Michel Pablo, Gerry Healy and co against the RCP majority - including Ted Grant - in 1946-49, when Grant and co were clearly half right (they only expected a short boom, not a prolonged period of growth), but Cannon, Pablo and co were wholly wrong.

These arguments in fact involve a misunderstanding of the dialectical 'transition from quantity to quality'. The water warms before it boils, and cools before it freezes. The qualitative leap - whose exact timing is indeed unpredictable - does generally not take place after *unobservable* prior gradual developments, but after *observable* ones.

This pseudo-dialectical delusion of 'revolution tomorrow' and 'breakthrough for our individual group' licenses downplaying the preparatory tasks of organisation and education. And in the present context it gives a philosophical gloss to the illusion that the relative success of your individual group's tactic means that your individual group is about to break through to the big time and marginalise the rest of the groups. It ain't true; and the illustrations I have given from the British left could be paralleled repeatedly from the histories of the French, Italian, Argentinian and no doubt other countries' far lefts.

Breaking separation

'Organise' then does not pose to us the task of Socialist Appeal leaping over the rest of the left to become a mass party (or of any of the other groups doing so). 'Are you a communist? Then get organised', if properly read, does not call on us to join *one* of the competing groups defined by particular theories (like Cliff's state capitalism) or tactics (like Grant on Labour Party entry or Taaffe on the rejection of entry) or the cult of the personality of particular theorists.

It calls on us to seek out ways to construct an effective party *out of the groups and breaking with their separation* - as the German SPD was constructed out of Eisenachers and Lassalleans, and several other parties of the Second International in the same way, as the Polish Communist Party was constructed out of Polish Socialist Party-Left and Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, and as the old CPGB was constructed out of the British Socialist Party and the pro-unity wings of the De Leonist Socialist Labour Party and other groups.

If we do not take this road, and revolutionary crisis actually arrives (as Woods imagines it is arriving), we will be as ineffective as the divided far left was in Chile in 1970-73, in Argentina a few years later, in Iran in 1979-81, and so on, and so on - recently in Greece, where the inability of the divided far left to act coherently meant that the Syriza government resulted in defeat and demoralisation.

To take the road of unity requires us to take the road of open discussion. We can see this in Socialist Appeal's own history. Lawrence Parker has made the point well: the opposition in Militant round Grant, Woods and Sewell fought, as it had to, for factional rights against the bureaucratic control of Taaffe and co. Quite inevitably, that fight spilled into the public domain. When Socialist Appeal itself has endeavoured to

contain discussion in private, the result has been complaints of the same bureaucratic practices - and splits.¹¹

Back to the point of Communist Party organisation, as I said above: it is to create a *political* voice for the independent interests of the working class and the struggle for communism: both by publishing, and by, as far as possible, electoral intervention. It is not to be Bakunin's 'invisible dictatorship', the coordinators of the day-to-day trade union struggle, etc; nor to be the left's *Großer Generalstab*, the 'general staff of world revolution'.

But creating a political voice also requires open debate, just as much as practical unity does. Because, if we tone down differences for the sake of unity, as opposed to agreeing to unite on what unites us, while debating out what divides us, the result is that the communists tone down their ideas to cling to the left social democrats - as Socialist Appeal did with the 'clause 4' campaign'. Then the left social democrats tone down to cling to the *right* social democrats - as the Corbynites did with the Labour right; and the right social democrats do the bidding of their capitalist state masters. The result is that the working class as a class does not get the option of choosing communism.

The CPGB invited Socialist Appeal to send a speaker to debate the question of communist unity at our Communist Unity school in August. We got a blank refusal from them. Maybe 'we're not important enough' - but just providing a speaker for an open debate is not much of a resource commitment. And it is just as much a problem that the comrades seem to have embarked on the path of Cliff, Healy and so on of delusions of grandeur, so that it is not only us who are to be ignored.

But our invitation remains open. The path of unity and of debate is the actual path of *communists getting organised* ●

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Notes

1. The 1981 renaming of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency led by Frank Furedi as the 'Revolutionary Communist Party' seems too quick (from foundation in the split in the Revolutionary Communist Group in 1978) to have been produced by delusions of grandeur following rapid growth, as these others were. We in the CPGB hold onto the party name, though we recognise that we are not the party, but merely a group campaigning for it to be reformed; that "There exists no real Communist Party today" ('What we fight for' column in the *Weekly Worker*). We do so in order to deny the right of the Eurocommunists to liquidate the party (in 1991) and to deny the right of the *Morning Star* group to claim it for their faction. The Maoist-derived CPGB(ML), CPB(ML) and RCPB(ML) merely follow a tradition of naming, going back to the original creation of western Maoist parties in the 1960s.
2. 'Healyite' from Gerry Healy (1913-89); 'Cliffite' from Tony Cliff (1917-2000); 'Grantite' from Ted Grant (1913-2006).
3. The 1944-49 RCP itself was a party name based on the illusion of success after rapid growth of the Workers International League from double to treble figures and the absorption by fusion of the remnants of the rival Revolutionary Socialist League.
4. communistpartyofgreatbritainhistory.wordpress.com/2023/09/21/socialist-appeal-are-you-a-communist.
5. socialist.net/are-you-a-communist-new-in-defence-of-marxism-out-now.
6. communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme/5-transition-to-communism.
7. See Jack Conrad's *Which road* London 1991 (available at communistparty.co.uk/resources/library/jack-conrad) - chapter 4 for discussion and critique.
8. D Harvey, 'Doing a Scottish jig' *Weekly Worker* November 27 2014: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1036/doing-a-scottish-jig; socialist.net/britain-ssp-crisis251104.
9. Eg, socialist.net/labour-and-clause-4-100-years-on; socialist.net/by-hand-or-by-brain-the-case-for-clause-iv.
10. For a critique of the Clause 4 campaign see labourparty marxists.org.uk/category/labour-structures-and-programme/clause-4.
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IDEAS

A curse on free speech

They want to stop us marching, they want to stop us protesting. The censoriousness of government ministers exposes the limits of free expression under capitalism, argues **Paul Demarty**

There is an unfortunate proliferation of *soi-disant* free speech warriors, whose advocacy of untrammelled expression mysteriously stops at the borders of the Holy Land.

We could take, for example, Douglas Murray, an undistinguished anti-woke bully-boy, who tweeted on November 2 his horror that

UK Hamas supporters are now planning a “million man march” on Remembrance Day. They plan to defame our war-dead and desecrate the Cenotaph itself. This is the tipping point. If such a march goes ahead then the people of Britain must come out and stop these barbarians.¹

“If” such a march goes ahead, with the clear implication that it should not, from a director of the ‘Free Speech Union’.

Americans may prefer the example of the notorious Bari Weiss, who earned her stripes attempting to get pro-Palestine professors fired, and then claimed to feel so intimidated by her colleagues at *The New York Times* that she cancelled herself. Having launched an online outlet called *Free Press*, she published much of the Twitter files material, but now has reverted to her undergraduate hobbies, pursuing pro-Palestine activists from one end of the internet to the other. Her website is now just a sluice of desperate Zionist apologetics.

Elsewhere, the old pattern is still in force. Nate Silver, the archetypal centrist data bro, chose this moment to worry about students’ attitudes to free speech, citing survey data from the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (or Fire, formerly the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education). The data seems to indicate that students are “asymmetrically polarised” on free speech, with liberals and progressives far more in favour of denying exemplary conservative positions than the reverse.²

Of course, even Silver must concede that the conservative examples are far “spicier” than the liberal ones - apparently, the idea that transgender people are suffering from a mental disorder is more controversial than the idea that religious liberty is used as an excuse to discriminate against gays and lesbians - and one wonders what the results would have been if conservatives had been asked to vote on the principle that Israel is a settler-colonial state. That said, the illiberalism of the liberals is obvious, as it has been for years, and communists should not be shy of condemning and fighting against this degradation in political culture, especially where the left lamentably follows suit.

Despite its poor survey design, Fire is at least consistent in its advocacy, and has taken clear lines against attempts at suppression of pro-Palestinian sentiment.³ The same could not be said of the Weiss empire, as noted, nor of the FSU, which is apparently far more concerned with the government’s ‘conversion therapy’ legislation than anything so trivial as the right of ordinary people to object to monstrous crimes abetted by their own state. In short, as is obvious to all with eyes to see, the right’s free speech campaign is



Branded a hate marcher

laughably hypocritical; the same must be said, alas, of many leftwing institutions now scrambling to defend the Palestinian movement when a moment ago they were busily demanding purges of supposed hate speech. The true, old-style liberal, free speech nerds - represented by Fire and Silver, who also criticise attacks on the Palestinian movement - are a very small, sad minority.

Classical arguments

All of this is perfectly obvious - and has been for years. Left and right are quite *symmetrically* polarised on this, in spite of the Fire survey: ‘Free speech for me, prior restraint for thee’. We need to understand why this is the case, however. We were told that we were at the end of history, and that history terminated in a global society that respected ‘individual freedoms’ of this sort. We look around, and we observe instead only a spirit of censorious revenge. They don’t respect our speech - so why should we respect theirs? Why indeed?

There are a few classical liberal arguments for free speech, both as a legal regime and as a cultural value. John Stuart Mill argued from uncertainty - human knowledge is inherently limited, and there is no belief in which we can reasonably assume such absolute certainty that we can *know* that the contrary is false; therefore, suppressing opinion is to the detriment of society, since it tendentially increases the risk of error. This is not very much in the mix today, though one very forceful advocate of it - pertinently in the present situation - is Norman Finkelstein.

More common is the notion of the “marketplace of ideas”, cited by Fire, in the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes, that “the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade of ideas - that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market.”⁴ (Ironically, the quotation

used by Fire is from the same judgment that gave us the “shouting fire in a crowded theatre” cliché, in which the august justice decided that anti-war agitators did *not* enjoy first-amendment protections.) From this point of view, the answer to bad speech is *more* speech - refutation, polemic.

The characterisation of public discourse as a ‘marketplace’ marks this out as an extremely bourgeois argument. Marxists have traditionally preferred to speak of the *battle* of ideas, given our particular lexicon of struggle. But it *seems* reasonable. There is nonetheless the empirical problem - it does not seem as though the best ‘product’ wins. Indeed, it does not seem as though *any* ‘product’ wins.

The complaints in the present bourgeois political scene about polarisation testify to this: creeping liberal censoriousness is at least partly justified with reference to the various pathological forms of public discourse, conspiracy theories, resurgent explicit racism, and what have you. We tried free speech, but look where it got us! On the right, even amidst all the free-speechifying of recent years, there is nonetheless the rediscovery of explicitly authoritarian and restrictive ideas of the polity, from neo-reactionary corporate monarchism to Catholic integralism, and ‘softer’ forms of each, all with a place for restrictive covenants on the press.

That, in the end, is also the trouble with Mill’s view: what if a correct idea is contradicted by a false one? We take it for granted that the correct one will ‘win’, but what if it does not? What if it *tends not to*? Then certain kinds of traditionalist reaction would seem to have a point - the truth is not what we are reaching towards, but what we are, in our hubris, ever falling away from.

There are good reasons for Marxists to *reject* the ‘marketplace of ideas’ version of the liberal argument. Mill’s version is a little more complicated, but the *utilitarian* interpretation of his case plainly fails on the historical record. This follows from the division of society into classes (what else?), and specifically its form in capitalist society, which both gives rise and gives the lie to these arguments.

Class societies are characterised by the exploitation of very large numbers of people by very small numbers. On the face of it, this is a pretty dicey proposition: presumably the large numbers of people could simply shake off their exploiters and get on with things. But they do not do that - or not very often anyway. Why?

The exploiting class has at its disposal, roughly, a carrot and a stick. The ‘stick’ is simple enough - if people get out of line, hang a few of them, *pour encourager les autres*. The ‘carrot’ is the whole world of phenomena that Marxists call, under different concrete descriptions, ideology. These are not so easily separated - even in the feudal age of the military aristocracy, there is a need for some section of the *plebs* to act as a military force, who must thereby be convinced to do so. Sometimes this ‘convincing’ is based on brute material interests, as when the feudal class offers protection to peasants against the raids of nomadic pastoralists, who would otherwise have overwhelming military

superiority (horseback riding, advanced archery, and such).

Beyond that, we meet ideology - the means by which the prevailing, contingent hierarchy is made ‘natural’ to its victims. Various accounts of how this works abound in the Marxist tradition, from Lukács’s reification to Gramsci’s hegemony, to Althusser’s ideological state apparatuses. I do not propose to ‘pick’ one here, but note that these 20th century theories tended to downplay something that I think is important - that ideologies are necessarily propositionally *false* to some degree. Because they are necessarily false, they must be defended by extra-rational means: attachments to them must be built up that make people reluctant to abandon them. This is quite as true of the reification stemming from pervasive commodity exchange as of the ideological state apparatus sustained through endless, ritual repetition.

Correctly

Althusser proposed, I think roughly correctly, that ideology has no history, in the sense that ideologies do not progress cumulatively like scientific knowledge. There is a pattern to their existence through time, however: a kind of punctuated equilibrium. An ideological paradigm can persist for a long time, before it exhausts its ability to deceive, at which point the bottom can fall out of it very rapidly.

In capitalist society, this combination - of no real history and of punctuated equilibrium - leads roughly to a cyclical alternation between a dominant, organicist conservatism and a dominant, ‘whiggish’ progressivism - the party of order and the party of liberty. Both promise to fix the unavoidable injustices of capitalism, either by attacking traitors, parasites and progressive fanatics (party of order) or the cruel vestiges of the pre-liberal past (party of liberty). What neither

can do is to acknowledge the source of social strife in exploitation, so they must always fail, and must always alternate.

It is for this reason that the ‘marketplace of ideas’ no more tends towards equilibrium than any other market; competition, because it cannot be about the fundamental question, cannot decisively result in the victory of the ‘best’ ideas. And likewise there is no reason to suppose, after Mill, that free ideological competition shall result in greater social cohesion than tyranny and more-or-less controlled opposition, since our society is based in the last instance on robbery and violence, and therefore its cohesion can only be maintained by plausible fraud.

We communists fight for free speech, and other political liberties, because, *along with* the two dominant ideologies and their sibling rivalry, broad access to publication and consumption of media allows radical and revolutionary ideas to spread as well - ideas that can expose the fundamental contradictions of the wider social order. And suppose we are victorious, and achieve a viable socialist society, then Mill’s argument *would* apply - the working class would be faced with titanic decisions about social organisation, and would need to keep the way to the truth open permanently; and Mill is quite correct that this cannot be done without keeping the means of political conflict available to all.

In the meantime, however, the Fires of this world are onto a loser ●

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USA

The forgotten war

Ukraine demonstrates how the sun is beginning to set on the US empire, argues Daniel Lazare. And now there is Gaza and the danger of a general conflagration in the Middle East

Five months ago, the mood was ebullient in both Washington and Kiev. Ukraine was about to launch its long-awaited spring/summer offensive, and observers were confident that a breakthrough was imminent.

"I think that this counteroffensive is going to be very impressive," retired US general David Petraeus said on June 3, while ex-general Ben Hodges commented on June 15: "I think the Ukrainians can and will win this fight." A RAND Corporation expert named Dara Massicot observed a month later that, although

the Russian front lines are holding, despite the Kremlin's dysfunctional decisions ... the cumulative pressure of bad choices is mounting. Russian front lines might crack in the way Hemingway once wrote about going bankrupt: "gradually, then suddenly".

The Economist added in mid-August: "Ukraine's counteroffensive is making progress, slowly; ten weeks in, the army is starting to figure out what works."¹

But all that changed, as summer gave way to fall. On September 28, *The New York Times* reported that despite the offensive, "The least territory [had] changed hands in August of any month so far."² The offensive, in other words, was adding to the deadlock. On October 30, *Time* magazine published a devastating portrait of Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky as a leader trying desperately to drum up international support. "Exhaustion with the war rolls along like a wave," it quoted him as saying. "You see it in the United States, in Europe. And we see that as soon as they start to get a little tired, it becomes like a show to them: 'I can't watch this rerun for the tenth time'."³

A few days after that, Valery Zaluzhny, the Ukrainian army's chief of staff, gave an interview in which he conceded: "There will most likely be no deep and beautiful breakthrough." The reason was twofold. Ukraine had misjudged Russia's determination to stay in the fight despite suffering what he said were 150,000 battlefield deaths. And, while the US and other Nato members had given Kiev enough arms to hold Russia off, he added, they have not given it enough to win. "They are not obliged to give us anything," Zaluzhny observed gloomily, "and we are grateful for what we have got, but I am simply stating the facts."⁴

The results are devastating for the Zelensky regime, which two days later complained that its top general was sowing "panic" among its main allies. The failure of the Ukrainian offensive is equally devastating for the Biden administration, which now has a second war on its hands - one winning it no friends on the international stage and leaving it facing a loss in public confidence at home that grows sharper by the week.

A poll issued on November 5 by *The New York Times* and Siena College in upstate New York brought particularly bad news. Donald Trump, it found, is leading by as many as 10 percentage points in five of the six key battleground states that could well decide the 2024 election



Volodymyr Zelensky: his army is losing

(thanks to America's antiquated electoral college). With Trump on his way to winning more than 300 electoral votes next November - well over the 270 needed to put him over the top - the survey found that Biden's position was deteriorating across the board.

Respondents

Over 70% of respondents described him as too old (with his 81st birthday less than two weeks away, Biden is looking increasingly uncertain and frail) and 62% say he lacks "mental sharpness". Those concerned about the economy gave him failing grades by a ratio of two to one, while support among blacks and Hispanics is slipping as well.

Military concerns are clearly adding to the jitters. "I actually had high hopes for Biden," a Georgia voter told the *Times*. "You can't be worse than Trump. But then, as the years go by, things happen with inflation, the war going on in Ukraine, recently Israel, and I guess our borders are not secure at all" (illegal immigration is up about 13% over the last year⁵). Travis Waterman from Phoenix, Arizona said: "I don't think he's the right guy to go toe to toe with these other world leaders that don't respect him or fear him." Waterman voted for Biden in 2020, but now considers him too "weak" and says he prefers Trump.⁶

This is what happens when presidents suffer battlefield reversals: supporters peel off in search of someone better able to command. Biden already has one military disaster on his record - the Saigon-like rout in August 2021 that marked the end of 20 years of US intervention in Afghanistan (a war he had personally championed from the start). But he may well end up with another if the situation in eastern Ukraine goes further downhill.

As for Gaza, the military odds plainly favour Israel, with its seemingly endless supply of electronically-guided bunker-buster bombs, weighing up to 2,000 pounds each. But a Zionist victory at the cost of tens of thousands of Palestinian deaths will leave the United States more isolated than ever - and more politically impotent too.

How did the US paint itself into a corner? Biden deserves much of the blame, since, as head of the Senate foreign-relations committee and then as vice-president under Barack Obama, he helped create the policies that are now blowing

up so spectacularly. But Ukraine in particular is a slow-motion train wreck that was in the works long before he stumbled on the scene.

Indeed, if you want to return to the roots, you will have to go back to at least the 1940s, when post-war reconstruction sent thousands of Russian workers streaming into the Donetsk coal basin in eastern Ukraine - followed by millions more in the 1950s and 60s, as industrial development accelerated. Nikita Khrushchev bumped up the Russian-speaking population even more by transferring the Crimean Peninsula from Russian to Ukrainian jurisdiction in 1954. But, with the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, the result was a newly-independent Ukraine that was more linguistically diverse than ever. In addition to Hungarian, Turkic and other linguistic minorities, the country was evenly split among those who spoke Ukrainian or Russian at home and those who said they spoke both.⁷ In 2008, 83% of those taking part in a Gallup poll said they preferred talking in Russian rather than in Ukrainian - another indication of linguistic preferences.⁸

Conceivably, a democratic, post-Soviet government anxious to keep the country together could have threaded the needle by guaranteeing equal language rights for all. Certainly, that would have been the socialist approach. But America, in case anyone needs reminding, is not socialist, but rather an imperialist power naturally drawn to the most extreme nationalist elements. Equal rights fell by the wayside as George W Bush threw his weight behind the government of Viktor Yushchenko - a politician from the country's Ukrainian-speaking north who favoured membership of Nato and the European Union and whose "pro-western" policies were increasingly threatening to Russian speakers.

In 2008, Yushchenko celebrated when Nato announced that it was putting both Ukraine and its southern neighbour, Georgia, on a path to membership. In 2010, he dropped another bombshell by formally naming Stepan Bandera - a World War II Nazi collaborator and arch-enemy of all things Jewish, Polish and Russian - a national hero. Ukrainian speakers in the country's nationalist west, which was part of Poland prior to 1939, were exultant, while Russophones in the south and east, which had remained loyal to the Soviets during the war, were appalled.

Yushchenko's successor, Viktor Yanukovich, annulled the decision, but the US-backed Euromaidan coup d'état sent Yanukovich packing in February 2014. As a result, dozens of statues and memorials in Bandera's honour soon sprouted up across the country, along with others honouring close associates, such as Roman Shukhevych, Bandera's military right-hand man.⁹

The fracturing of the Ukraine was on. Although the US blamed Russia for the rebellions in the east, the fact is that 2014 saw two parallel uprisings - one among Ukrainian nationalists in Lvov and Kiev and another among pro-Russians in Donetsk, Luhansk, Odessa and the Crimea. It was the US-backed Euromaidan coup that tore Ukraine apart, not interference by Russia. When Vladimir Putin invaded in February 2022 in response to a Ukrainian war on the Donbas that had claimed more than 14,000 lives (most of them pro-Russian), Biden dredged up the usual evil-empire rhetoric:

Now, the entire world sees clearly what Putin and his Kremlin allies are really all about. This was never about a genuine security concern on their part. It was always about naked aggression, about Putin's desire for empire, by any means necessary.¹⁰

Roadblocks

How many times has the United States invaded its neighbours in response to self-perceived security threats? The list is seemingly endless in the western hemisphere alone: Nicaragua in 1912, Mexico in 1914-16, Haiti in 1915-34, Guatemala in 1954, Cuba in 1961, the Dominican Republic in 1965, etc.

When Germany sent Mexico a half-baked offer of a secret military alliance in January 1917 to help it regain Texas, New Mexico and Arizona - an offer that no-one should have taken seriously for a millisecond - Woodrow Wilson seized on it as a pretext to declare war on Berlin. Yet, when Russia expressed alarm over America's deepening military alliance with Ukraine, the US pronounced itself mystified. Why get upset over something as inconsequential as a Nato takeover next door?

It has thus taken decades for the outlines of a first-class military disaster to take shape, but now it is all

coming into view. According to *Time* magazine, front-line commanders are refusing even presidential commands. When orders recently came through to retake the city of Horlivka, some 40 miles north of Donetsk, the response from front-line officers was: with what? "Where are the weapons?" asked one. "Where is the artillery? Where are the new recruits?" With the military reduced to conscripting out-of-shape 40-year-olds, a close Zelensky aide told *Time* that, even if the US and its allies come through with all the weapons they have promised, "we don't have the men to use them".

"He deludes himself," another Zelensky aide said. "We're out of options. We're not winning. But try telling him that."

America's Republican-controlled House of Representatives is another roadblock. Republicans failed to include Ukrainian military aid in a spending resolution in early October and are so far giving no indication as to whether they will do so in a second spending bill slated to go into effect on November 17. Eight Republican members recently sent Biden a letter asking whether taking back the Crimea is "realistic" (it isn't) or whether the war in Ukraine is undermining US ability to provide military assistance to Taiwan and Israel (it is).¹¹ As I write, the administration has yet to respond.

With 41% of Americans saying that the US is spending too much in Ukraine (up from 29% in June)¹², the walls are closing in, as public support for Ukrainian military aid begins to collapse.

The US is also paralysed with regard to Gaza, where Palestinian deaths now exceed 10,000, more than 4,000 of them children, and the West Bank, where far-right Jewish pogromists have killed more than 150 Palestinians since October 7 (Israel wants to purchase 24,000 US-made assault rifles, so the rampage can continue¹³). While no-one knows what lies at the end of the debacle, the long-term prognosis is not good. Domination of the Persian Gulf with its vast energy resources has been a top US priority since 1980. Yet control is all but certain to slip from America's grasp, as revulsion over Israeli tactics grows and Russia, China and Iran assert their power.

Bottom line: the sun on the US empire is beginning to set ●

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DSA

Taking steps to the left ... but hesitantly

Towards a vanguard party

Left forces made some real advances and the right is now on the back foot. Joseph Perez of the Marxist Unity Group reflects on the 2023 national convention

In August, the Democratic Socialists of America held its national convention in Chicago, hosting delegates from around the country to deliberate on the direction of the organisation. The DSA is by far the largest group on the US left and the convention is its highest authority, charged with determining its political positions and electing its national leadership.

DSA conventions tend to give a good reflection of internal dynamics. The resolutions that get passed and the mandate of the incoming leadership express the balance of political forces within the organisation. They provide a good barometer for determining the DSA's trajectory and the priorities of its most active layer of members. On this count, the recent convention has been indicative of a leftward shift in the membership.

The previous convention in 2021, which was conducted virtually, via Zoom, was widely considered to be a consolidation of rightwing political attitudes within the organisation. As fellow Marxist Unity Group member Donald Parkinson wrote in his reflection on the 2021 DSA convention,

DSA has taken steps back to the right after a leftward lurch at the last two conventions. A climate of fear and conservatism dominated the 2021 convention: fear of the socialist movement moving independently and standing on its own legs; and conservation of the status quo.¹

In contrast to 2021, the 2023 convention showed signs of a break

towards the left - but tentatively so, as I hope to make clear through an analysis of the voting.

I attended the 2023 DSA convention as a member of the Marxist Unity Group delegation, handing out papers, selling books and advocating principled Marxist politics, along with the rest of the MUG delegates. As I will show, the 2023 convention was a great success for the Marxist Unity Group; the caucus broke onto the national scene with a splash, electing two of our members to the national leadership and successfully setting the political agenda (at least in terms of what was discussed amongst the wider delegation in the halls outside the convention floor).

Disagreements

The votes on the resolutions up for debate reveal some fundamental disagreements in the DSA.

Beforehand, the convention planning committee had proposed an agenda that was free of any contentious political questions. While the committee argued that this agenda was created in order to prioritise resolutions with the most consensus (and therefore the most chance of being implemented), presumably it also wanted to keep disagreements to a minimum in order to put forward the idea of a 'big happy tent', or to avoid putting issues forward that could catalyse a split. While understandable from an administrative standpoint, the committee's agenda would have put a damper on the discussion of important political questions, which is ultimately the most important goal of a party convention.

To politicise the agenda, MUG delegates collaborated with those across tendencies to put forward an alternative agenda, which included time to debate trans liberation and anti-Zionist political strategy, and a resolution co-sponsored by Marxist Unity Group, which focused on a disciplined, oppositional, party-like electoral strategy. This alternative politicised agenda was passed, setting the tone for the convention's delegates: one emboldened to exert their democratic will, while tackling difficult political questions.

The first big vote was on a resolution called 'A fighting campaign for reproductive right and trans liberation'. This called for the DSA to commit to a national political campaign against the Republican Party and its project of using state-level legislature to ban abortion procedures and gender-affirming healthcare for trans people. By way of political strategy, the resolution called on the DSA to distinguish itself as an independent socialist wing of this struggle, arguing that the Democratic Party cannot be trusted to reliably confront rightwing forces.

This resolution was passed with a healthy margin in favour: about 62%. This particular vote is interesting, not so much because of the campaign (after all the idea of *some* kind of campaign for abortion and trans rights is fairly uncontroversial within the DSA), but because this resolution was in part dealing with how to distinguish the DSA from liberal Democrats.

The next big resolution was called 'Democratise DSA', written and mostly supported by the

rightwing factions. These factions, including the Socialist Majority Caucus and the Groundwork slate, comprised the majority within the national leadership and are characterised by a social democratic politics and a strategic orientation of tailing progressive Democrats, while blocking with the DSA's full-timers for undemocratic control of the organisation. The proposal would have expanded the national political committee (the highest elected leadership body within the DSA) from 16 people to 50 or so, as well as creating another 16-person body within the NPC that would function as a "steering committee" with expanded powers. 'Democratise DSA' was presented as the DSA right's flagship proposal - a big structural change that would shake up the leadership, and breathe new life into the organisation by introducing more opportunities for rank-and-file members to participate in a newly expanded leadership.

Since the resolution was proposing changes to the constitution and bylaws of the DSA, it needed a two-thirds majority in order to pass, but it was unsuccessful, with only 62% support. Delegates were understandably very suspicious. In previous years, the DSA right has been in a position of decisive influence within leading bodies. In that time they have done very little to correct what many in the organisation see as a lack of meaningful ways for rank-and-file members to influence the formal leadership.

In fact, the NPC has repeatedly alienated rank-and-file members by covering up for DSA elected

officials against the criticisms of its members and resisting their attempts to introduce democratic discipline. For example, during the 'Bowman affair', which began when DSA-backed congressman Jamaal Bowman voted for a bill that provided \$1 billion of funding for Israel's 'Iron Dome' missile system, the NPC shut down the BDS working group for posting tweets critical of Bowman's vote and the DSA's continued support of him.

MUG members interpreted 'Democratise DSA' as a resolution that would establish an unaccountable, shadowy 'politburo'. This group would sit above the expanded leadership body, the latter of which would serve as a rubber stamp for the actual decisions made by the former smaller, less transparent body. This concern for organisational democracy was shared by many delegates and factions, including the Red Star caucus, who we collaborated with to whip up votes against this resolution.

The vote against 'Democratise DSA' can be regarded as a vote against the DSA right wing's attempt to ensconce themselves within the leadership. It was one sign that there has been a political shift since the last pair of conventions, which were widely considered to have been rightwing consolidations.

Independent left?

The next vote of consequence was the resolution from the national electoral committee. The NEC is responsible for formulating DSA's electoral strategy, as well conducting its national endorsements process

for those people running for office and looking for the DSA's formal support.

The content of the resolution itself was not particularly controversial. Electoral campaign work is an area that may have the most support from members across the organisation, despite a lot of criticisms about DSA electeds and the frustration of the left generally with the tailist nature of its electoral work.

The amendments to this resolution provide insights to some fault lines within the DSA. One amendment was introduced jointly by the Marxist Unity Group and Reform and Revolution caucuses, entitled 'Towards a party-like electoral strategy', and a similar amendment was introduced by comrades in the Bread and Roses caucus titled 'Act like an independent party'. Both amendments attempted to inject language into the main text that would commit the DSA to taking concrete steps towards political independence from the Democratic Party, and forming a party or party-like organisation as a vehicle for that.

Both amendments emphasised the importance of distinguishing the DSA's socialist candidates running on the Democratic Party ballot line from centrist liberal Democrats. The main difference between the amendments was the weaker language of B&R's 'Act like an independent party' amendment that made no concrete proposals for political independence beyond a vague commitment to "develop our own party identity and common messaging".

The MUG/R&R amendment was much more forceful in its attempt to change the direction of the DSA's electoral work. Our proposal would have:

- made the DSA platform binding on any member in an elected office;
- compelled those elected officials to vote against any proposal to expand the police and state repressive apparatus;
- committed them to oppose and vote against any and all military budgets;
- prevented any DSA representative from voting for any measure to restrict independent working class organisation, including the right to strike;
- introduced some fundamental elements of democratic discipline for DSA representatives.

This is a case where the vote revealed a positive shift in the attitudes of the organisation with regards to the question of electoral work. The B&R's relatively weak 'Act like an independent party' amendment passed by a very healthy margin (80% to 20%), which confirms that the organisation, in marked contrast to comrade Parkinson's observation from the 2021 convention, at least rhetorically looks to a future where socialists will be able to stand on their own two feet politically without leaning on liberal partners.

The vote on the MUG/R&R amendment did not pass, with 60% voting against, although this is still an improvement on the MUG's previous attempt to introduce a similar resolution at the 2021 convention, when 70% opposed it.

These votes show that, while an increasing number of members are beginning to seriously consider the idea of taking steps towards an independent socialist party in the US, they still remain rather skittish on the prospects and what concrete measures are needed.

The relatively weak 'Act like an independent party' amendment carried the day because its non-committal approach appealed to the concerns most delegates had about

shifting to an oppositional style too soon. In any case, despite the defeat, the results of the vote were encouraging for what it seems to suggest about the growing support for independent working class electoral politics.

The national labor commission, which is tasked with directing the DSA's intervention in the organised labour movement, also put forward a consensus resolution. Like the one proposed by the national electoral resolution, it was not very controversial on its own - mainly being a reaffirmation of the activities that the DSA is already undertaking in the organised labour movement: a commitment to the so-called rank-and-file strategy; to continue organising those layers of workers who are not yet a part of the official labour movement; to continue the previous DSA work in organising logistics workers at firms like UPS and Amazon; and to push for democratic reforms within the existing unions on the model of the rank-and-file strategy.

Underdeveloped

The debates here were mostly indicative of the lack of a real developed view on the relationship between growing the socialist movement and the role of socialists within the organised labour movement.

The rank-and-file strategy remains the dominant perspective in the organisation. While substantially better than a strategic orientation favouring the labour bureaucracy (which was resoundingly defeated at the convention), the rank-and-file strategy is severely underdeveloped as a theory, and in practice displays a serious tendency towards economism. In some sense this is a reflection of the fact that within the labour circles in the DSA, rather than a communist party, the call is more for something along the lines of the UK Labour Party with a substantial trade union presence in its leadership.

The International Committee (IC), which is tasked with establishing and maintaining relationships with foreign socialist groups and parties, also put forward an uncontroversial resolution reaffirming existing work.

The interesting story here is an amendment that was proposed by the Bread and Roses caucus called 'For a class-struggle internationalism', which was essentially a third-campist amendment to the main text. The amendment is written seemingly to introduce the idea that some countries receiving political support from US imperialism should still be able to receive DSA political support too.

The amendment says:

Be it further resolved, the DSA seeks to learn from and stand in solidarity with movements around the world fighting for democracy and socialism against all governments that engage in the repression of democratic rights and side with capital over workers. This includes governments that ally with US empire, claim to oppose US imperialism, or even self-identify as socialist or leftwing.²

While the amendment makes no specific references, it is not hard to see that the concern here is the Nato proxy war in Ukraine. The IC had previously received intense criticism from third-campist elements in the DSA for allegedly acting as a front group for Stalinists. These third-campists pointed to the vote for the DSA to join the Sao Paulo Forum and the IC delegation's trip to Cuba and Venezuela as evidence of this fact. While it is true that the

IC contains many elements of the anti-war left who do have some ties to tendencies that can nominally be termed 'Stalinist', there are also many newer, younger members of the left who align with these older anti-war activists on questions of anti-imperialism. Even MUG members (who are definitively not Stalinists) align with the IC on matters like joining the Sao Paulo forum, opposing US arms to Ukraine and sending delegations to Cuba and Venezuela. Instead of raising the spectre of Stalinist entryism to win people to their positions, third-campists in the DSA should consider their failure to win newer members of the IC to their position as a sign of the *weakness* of their position.

'For a class-struggle internationalism' failed to pass - 36% for and 64% against - convincing very few delegates that exceptions to socialist principles of anti-imperialism need to be made in the case of the Ukraine proxy war. MUG and R&R comrades put forward a resolution outlining a revolutionary defeatist perspective on the war in Ukraine, but this resolution did not even make it to the convention floor. I suspect many on the IC and beyond supported the political positions expressed within that resolution (opposition to US arms to Ukraine, for example), but did not want to bring it to the convention floor because of fears that it would fail.

Finally, the last consequential vote of the agenda was a resolution headed 'Defend democracy through political independence', introduced by a B&R member. This resolution was another attempt to present an oppositional stance to the Democratic Party by arguing that the DSA needs to be seen as not just fighting the Republican Party, but also as a viable mass alternative to the liberal Democrats.

During the debate for this resolution, a motion was made from the floor to remove a particularly contentious sentence. The sentence in question stated:

The NPC shall publicly communicate disapproval to endorsed candidates and elected DSA members who reject this strategy in order to explicitly or tacitly support centrist leaders of the Democratic Party (for example, by attending rallies on behalf of centrists, political communications, or explicit endorsement of centrist Democrats).

The vote to remove this was successful, and so the resolution went on to pass without the sentence censuring DSA representatives who chose not to follow this strategy. The vote for that sentence was very close, with only 51% voting for its removal - more evidence that there is growing support in the DSA for oppositional electoral politics, but a lot of hesitation about applying it as the organisation's concrete policy.

Elections

Elections to the national political committee, the DSA's highest elected leadership body, further indicated a leftward shift. Marxist forces managed to pick up a combined five seats (the Marxist Unity Group with two, Red Star with three). One seat went to an independent affiliated to the DSA's international committee, one to a member of an anti-Zionist slate, and one was split between two representatives from the DSA's youth wing. The right wing won a combined six seats, and Bread and Roses picked up three.

A lot of comrades are calling this a left-majority NPC, which I am not quite sure is right. While the results represent a real blow to the right's

influence in the national leadership, they still form a big faction on the NPC. It seems to me that the real pivot of this arrangement is Bread and Roses sitting in the centre, who are well positioned to act as the deciding factor in contentious debates.

B&R itself is a particularly incoherent formation, having suffered a partial split a couple of years ago (that was never truly resolved) around the question of the 'dirty break' from the Democratic Party. It now persists with two divergent political wings: one that pushes political independence; and the other that urges caution and steady growth on the back of the existing coalitionist approach. This means that the success of most initiatives at the national leadership level will depend in large part on how successful factions are in convincing B&R as a whole to support them, or how willing B&R is to lend its support.

The leadership election results are more an expression of the losses of the right than they are an expression of a leftwing triumph - for the simple fact that there is not really a coherent 'DSA left', but rather a collection of factions on the left that share a general Marxist orientation. Risks for the DSA still abound: chief among them is the potential for an obstructionist bloc comprised of the right and the paid leadership (the 'full-timers') to limit the effectiveness of the DSA 'left wing'. And the votes on political independence still express a fundamental contradiction between word and deed (lots of words on political independence, but very little action) and a lot of hesitation from members, when the question of a break is concretely posed.

Nonetheless, the results from the convention are on the whole encouraging. They should encourage us to push harder towards constructing a unified Marxist wing of the DSA that can present a positive vision of class politics independent of the liberal bourgeoisie. The Marxist forces and the MUG itself have the momentum to do this, but we will need to solidify ourselves as a united front for those politics within the organisation in order to successfully win control from the right.

Personally, I believe the 2023 DSA convention was a resounding success for the Marxist Unity Group. The two NPC candidates we put forward were elected, and we managed to effectively propagate our political message far and wide through the distribution of a daily bulletin (with articles written in real time, responding to events from the previous day) and by selling all the copies that we brought to convention of the MUG's new book of selected writings, *Fight the constitution: for a democratic socialist republic*, which is available now on the *Cosmonaut* magazine web shop.³ Thanks to the *Weekly Worker* comrades for their guidance on the production of a daily bulletin.

The next two years for both the DSA and Marxist Unity Group will be full of much opportunity and risk; all we can do is continue our work of constructing a unified Marxist wing and hope that the 2025 convention will show that the DSA is continuing down the path towards a mass vanguard party, unified around a minimum-maximum programme for socialism ●

Notes

1. cosmonautmag.com/2021/10/the-fight-for-a-marxist-program-in-the-dsa.
2. s3.amazonaws.com/actionkit-dsausa/dsa/2023_DSA_Convention_Compilium_Final_with_Adopted_Agenda.pdf.
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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Empty houses and flats - occupy them

A right based on need

Moral outrage against Braverman's repugnant 'lifestyle choice' remarks is justified, but clearly not enough. Kevin Bean makes the case for the political economy of the working class when it comes to housing

In the end Suella Braverman's 'radical' solution to the problem of homelessness - banning charities from providing the homeless with tents - did not make it into the king's speech after all.

As she admitted herself, the 'plans' had only been pitched at the very last minute and so it was rather unlikely that they would be included in the government's legislative timetable for the coming parliamentary session. Even so, for a proposal which appeared to be floated on the spur of the moment, her comments made the headlines for a few days and became a focus for both the media and the Labour opposition, not to mention homelessness charities and campaigners.

Shelter

The home secretary's ridiculous 'argument' that homelessness and rough sleeping are a 'lifestyle choice' was easily demolished by Shelter and others, who pointed to the rise in homelessness in the last 10 years as a direct result of Tory government policies and cutbacks in social housing, local authority and social service provision - not to mention the savaging of healthcare and related mental health services.¹ The response quickly broadened out to include the impact on the homelessness figures of the cost of living crisis, unemployment and low pay, as well as unaffordable housing costs, rapidly rising rents and interest rates.²

Although the phrase, 'lifestyle choice', attracted most of the attention and justified anger, there was a lot more in her comments than that. Braverman highlighted that many rough sleepers were not from Britain and insisted that there was "no need" to sleep on the streets, given the alternatives and support available. Generously broadening her field of vision and point of comparison, she went on to point out how in parts of the US, such as San Francisco, "weak policies have led to an explosion of crime, drug taking and squalor", thus both scapegoating rough sleepers for the ills of society and defining serious social problems in purely criminal terms. She was not going to let that happen here:

... we cannot allow our streets to be taken over by rows of tents occupied by people, many of them from abroad ... What I want to stop, and what the law-abiding majority wants us to stop, is those who cause nuisance and distress to other people by pitching tents in public spaces, aggressively begging, taking drugs, littering, and blighting our communities.³

If Braverman's vision of hell drew on the horror stories of social breakdown and moral collapse that she has picked up from her frequent meetings with the wilder shores of the American conservative right, it also drew on reactionary bile and



A grim life

vicious politics found much closer to home. In the thought-world of the Tory right and their cheerleaders in the rightwing press, the homeless are just one part of a much bigger picture of lawlessness and disintegration. Not only are foreign invaders in small boats threatening our southern coasts, but they now are pitching their tents in the centre of our cities and bringing in their wake social disorder, crime and new threats to "the law-abiding majority".⁴

The home secretary has made this sort of nonsense her stock in trade, and so few have been surprised by her language or the hateful tone she adopts when talking about the homeless, migrants and asylum-seekers. As with her attempts to set the agenda by attacks on the demonstrations in support of Palestinian rights as "hate marches", Braverman is blatantly positioning herself as the leader of the Tory hard right and a potential challenger to Rishi Sunak following a likely general election defeat next year. Sunak himself has similarly thrown red meat to wavering Tory voters by his pledges on immigration, small boats and crime, and the heavy emphasis on 'law and order' in an otherwise rather thin king's speech.

However, Braverman has gone further in her rhetoric: it is clear that she is manoeuvring, with some suggesting that she is courting a sacking, and thus looking to the future rather than any immediate political gains. In explicitly refusing to endorse her language on the homeless, it is also clear that other

members of the cabinet are staking out future positions as well. Thus, as the Tories gear up for next year's general election, Sunak has to maintain control of a divided government and attempt to rein in Braverman (and others) whose eyes are on the leadership. She in turn will push back, using issues like "hate marches" and "lawlessness on our streets" to distance herself from the electoral disaster over which Sunak is expected to preside and so stake her own claim to lead the 'real', rightwing, Conservative Party.⁵

Challenge

In the political controversy over Braverman's comments, the more important issues of homelessness and housing were largely ignored. Some charities and opposition MPs took up the specific points raised by her comments on why the number of rough sleepers is increasing and the wide range of economic and social factors, alongside specific government policies and cuts, that create this crisis.

But homelessness was framed as an issue that only really affected the marginalised and the peripheral in our society. While the home secretary used the almost Victorian language of "the residuum" or "the criminal classes" to describe the homeless, the approach of many campaigners trying to eradicate rough sleeping frequently drew on an opposite, but equally 19th century discourse of poverty and its causes, and largely ignored the specific dynamics of housing in capitalist society.

Housing has long been a central question for the working class movement, with struggles for decent housing conditions, rent controls and the provision of affordable state and local authority housing developing from the mid-19th century. Engels in *The housing question* (1872) had discussed the relationship between capitalist development and housing, especially on how this impacted on the working class. Significantly, he drew attention to the ways in which both "bourgeois philanthropic" and state strategies to provide housing functioned, especially in Britain and Germany, in order to maintain the ascendancy of capitalism and embroil the working class within the political economy of bourgeois society.

While the nature of housing in contemporary Britain differs greatly from the situation that Engels was describing, the underlying political economy of capitalism remains essentially the same - although the politics of housing have taken a very different form, as the controversy over Braverman's remarks showed.

While Labour MPs and housing campaigners correctly decried the home secretary's attacks, this response was largely moralistic and offered little in the way of an alternative to the capitalist status quo. Yes, it is right to point out the impact on the rising levels of homelessness of cuts in social housing, local authority budgets and other services. But that is not enough: it is also necessary to campaign to restore the cuts and expand those services and link that to a militant campaign of

working class action.

In other periods of housing crisis, such as after World War II and the 1970s, the left directly linked the housing shortage to the failure of capitalism to provide even the minimum of decent houses in the big cities. As well as calling for the requisitioning of empty property and under-occupied mansions and royal palaces, the left initiated militant campaigns to occupy such property and hand it over to workers who were in need. Such an emergency programme of requisitioning is one way to immediately increase the supply of housing for the homeless. Remember how local authorities adopted emergency measures, funded by the state, to provide accommodation for the homeless and get rough sleepers off the streets? It can be done.

Immediate

However, our immediate demands on housing should not stop there. This will be a central issue in the forthcoming election. Both the Tories and Labour will promise to build more houses and to make it easier for people to 'get on the property ladder'. There will be commitments to expand social housing and pass legislation to strengthen the position of tenants. On the basis of the experience of the last 40 or so years, as housing has become a key feature of a financialised capitalist economy in Britain (and elsewhere) and land and housing have grown in importance as assets and sources of credit for home-owners and developers alike, these promises will amount to nothing.

Instead, we need the decisive break with the political economy of the capitalist housing market and its replacement with the idea that decent housing is a basic right, as set out in the CPGB's *Draft programme*.⁶ This not only points out how the provision of housing can be greatly expanded through the transfer of power and control over the means of production to the working class, but, like Engels in the 1870s and 1880s and the Austrian Social Democrats who built the Karl Marx Hof in Vienna, it points the way to how we can build new, social forms of housing and new, democratic, collective ways of life, when the shackles of the market are finally removed from society ●

Notes

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3. news.sky.com/story/suella-braverman-seeks-to-curb-use-of-tents-by-homeless-saying-it-is-a-lifestyle-choice-12999971.
4. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12478063/Meet-self-declared-King-Park-Lane-Romanian-traveller-lives-massive-tent-pitched-exclusive-Mayfair-opposite-1k-night-Park-Lane-Hilton-hotel-begs-money-IGNORED-police-orders-leave-area.html.
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