

weekly worker



Regression after trauma: Jon Lansman joins Jewish Labour Movement and the living dead

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No 1472 January 4 2024

Towards a mass Communist Party

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Provisional Central Committee:
Statement on Israel-Gaza war

LETTERS



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

Zionist lies

Daniel Lazare's mostly excellent article on Jesus ('An international socialist?' December 14) espouses a view that most ex-Catholics such as I definitely share - which is that Jesus was the first famous leftie. His article, however, would have benefitted by acknowledging that there are two different "gods". The one of the Old Testament, that those considering themselves Jews generally follow, who is vengeful and tribalistic (favouring Jews) and the one of the New Testament - who espouses loving thy neighbour and who turns the other cheek when faced with aggression. They couldn't be more different. Whilst 200 years of history have led to evangelical Christians and popes up to St John the 23rd espousing more of the vengeful Old Testament god and little of the New, it should be noted that the present pope Francis called for a ceasefire on October 29 - a call which Catholic Biden shamefully ignores.

Lazare's article falls down when he reflects on the present Palestinian massacre. He thinks

"communal hatreds are back", declaring Hamas's October 7 attack to "have opened the floodgates of sectarianism on both sides of the divide". With this one sentence he reflects the traditional Israeli blindness to history, for Hamas repeatedly explain that their arguments are not with Jews but with Zionism. Lazare displays the wilful ignorance that so many Zionists share, which is that Palestinians hate Jews, so Jews have no alternative but to hate them back.

This is quite untrue, as Hamas says in point 16 of its 2017 policy statement: "Hamas affirms that its conflict is with the Zionist project, not with the Jews because of their religion. Hamas does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine. Yet, it is the Zionists who constantly identify Judaism and the Jews with their own colonial project and illegal entity."

Lazare is promoting the lie that religion prolongs this war. Zionists promote the view that Hamas hates Jews because that entitles them to employ their Old Testament god in the service of "wiping out Hamas" (and therefore Gaza). Our media participates in this lie. But Lazare and our western media are

wrong: Hamas's war is against colonialism: if those calling themselves Jews were to abandon Zionism, Hamas have made it clear they would share the land. Lazare is too conservative, too set in his ways, to see this. In spite of his leftie aspirations, he falls 100% for the Zionist lie that this is a religious conflict. It is not: it is an anti-colonialist struggle.

One final point. Who was Jesus? He was both a true Jew and a Palestinian, unlike the Zionists who invaded in 1947. How do we know this? Extensive DNA studies by the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 2001, and more recently at Johns Hopkins University in 2012, indicate that the ancestors of Ashkenazis such as Netanyahu never emigrated from ancient Israel, whilst Palestinians have an 80% genetic match to the ancient Hebrews. As the Israeli historian Schlomo Sands observes, these Hebrews were not driven out by the Romans after the destruction of the second temple in 70CE; some of these Hebrews/early Palestinians converted to Christianity in the 4th century, followed by the majority who embraced Islam during the 7th century Arab conquest.

Most Zionist thinkers were aware of this: Yitzhak Ben Zvi, later president of Israel, and David Ben Gurion, its first prime minister, both stated on several occasions that Palestinians were the descendants of the ancient Judeans. So Jesus was a Christian, a Jew - and a Palestinian. I think if Lazare did a bit less writing and a bit more reading, then his articles could be immeasurably improved. Our website (onepalestine.land) will educate him.

What he needs to see is what we are presently witnessing - a Zionist movement convinced that they are the rightful owners of the land, but one which is actually exterminating the true descendants of the ancient Hebrews. They do this by proclaiming they are Jews (when we all know the ruling Ashkenazis are basically Europeans) engaged in a religious war against non-Jews. Those who oppose them must die, with a vengeful Old Testament god giving them *carte blanche* to smite any in their path.

The Palestinians, on the other hand, engage in an anti-colonial struggle, with Islam (which recognises both Christians and Jews as 'People of the Book', thus embodying many New Testament values of tolerance) as their pillar of support. If Jesus were alive today, I think we can guess which side he'd be on.

Pete Gregson (Chair)
One Democratic Palestine

Factional answers

In response to Ansell Eades' points raised in his letter ('Factions' December 14) I *did* in fact state briefly what the problems with factionalism within a *Communist* Party were in my letter published in issue 1467 ('Factions test' November 16), namely:

"Yes, there will be different tendencies and trends, but to allow these to become organised in any way, would mean that members of those factions would start to put the interests of their faction above that of the party - as well as becoming more interested in faction fighting *within* the party, as opposed to building the party as a whole *and* the mass movement."

The whole point of a faction

is to try and win the Communist Party over to the point of view - or even control - of that faction - so, *by definition*, that means putting the faction *above* that of the party. *That* is the basic problem with factions. Plus, they inevitably lead to splits and breakaways.

Ansell suggests a Communist Party affiliated to an independent mass party of the working class would itself be an example of a faction. This is a basic misunderstanding, or a confusion, of two separate concepts. An independent mass party of the working class, being a potentially federal party, allowing affiliation of socialist and communist parties, trade unions and other organisations of the working class, would by definition *not* be a Communist Party and therefore would *not* be operating democratic centralism.

Democratic centralism is the underpinning organisational principle of a *Communist* Party, *not* a mass, federal party of the working class. For democratic centralism to work effectively, it has to be within a party operating on the *basis of Marxism-Leninism*, which clearly a mass, federal, working class party is not likely to be.

Yes, any such Communist Party would try and win as many members within such a mass working class party to its points of view, even to become members, but that is very different - opposite in fact - to thinking the Communist Party *is* that mass, federal party of the working class - or should try and *take over* that role. The respective roles and functions are *different* but *complementary*.

There is a basic issue of principle of how communists and a Communist Party should work in the wider working class movement, and, frankly, it divides the principal writers of the *Weekly Worker* from the real communist tradition - and places them more in the chaotic fractured camp of Trotskyism.

That basic divide is between: (1) You try and win influence, credibility and elected offices (within the wider working class movement), through hard work, genuine dedication and commitment to the movement,

the ability to argue your politics and to win people to your point of view. The Communist Party *is part of* and *works through* the mass movement of the working class. It works openly and democratically, not through secrecy and conspiracy. You clearly understand the Communist Party is *not the same* as the mass movement, but that the CP can influence wider layers of the working class *through* the mass movement. Or: (2) You think the "party" (in reality, a Trotskyist group or sect) can only progress by building itself *at the expense* of the mass movement, that building the sect is the prime objective, even at the cost of the wider labour movement, the organised expression of the working class, losing its broad leadership within society, let alone its capacity to actually change it. That after all is the logic of Trotskyist entryism and lies behind the *Weekly Worker's* hostility to what it labels "broad frontism"; in fact, a *counterposing* of building "the party" to building the mass movement.

You get the ridiculousness and absolute absurdity of the groups and sects claiming everyone must join their particular fragment of "the truth" (as they see it) as the *only way* to build socialist and communist unity.

Working in the mass movement, to build and strengthen its mass political and organisational bases, is *fundamental* for genuine communists. And, as it happens, helps build the organisational basis and political influence of the Communist Party itself. Both sets of distinct tasks are complementary, *not* contradictory.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Two questions

Up to now, under the influence of the Communist Party of Vietnam and the socialist environment, I, a Vietnamese, have become an enthusiastic supporter of scientific communism and Marxist ideology and maybe you consider me a comrade, a communist. However, I don't have blind faith. I am someone who is always on the path of finding truth and righteousness. Therefore, as I learn more and more about

Fighting fund

Fire

Bad news. Our printers have suffered a fire. We do not know the cause. To make matters worse, as the fire brigade struggled to extinguish the flames, water from their hoses flooded down onto the computer and other equipment.

That is why there is no print edition of the paper this week. Naturally, efforts were made to find an alternative. However, that is not an easy thing to arrange at this time of year, and at the last minute, too. We hope things will be back to normal next week, but it might take longer, because we need a *regular* printer who will not only ensure delivery on time, week in and week out. Price is also an important factor. At present we get a healthy discount on the basis of providing a guaranteed income. We pay a month in advance by standing order.

So if any readers know of a reliable, quality printer based in London or the South East who is interested in a good business deal, let us know. Meanwhile, we shall be looking.

It is worth adding that we remain committed to producing a print edition of the paper alongside the online version. The fact of the matter is that our whole organisation is geared around the paper: commissioning, writing, editing, posting and selling. There are those, of course, who think print is oh so old fashioned - that papers, like books, TV and cinema, are ever so 20th century. We can safely leave such comrades sitting by themselves staring at their screens. Politics still consists of meetings, conferences, demonstrations, picket lines ... and serious reading is much easier, more pleasurable, if you have the real thing in your hands.

As for our finances, well, they are in good shape. Our fighting fund for December smashed through the £2,250 monthly target to reach a magnificent £2,619. Thanks go to all our contributors, but best of the lot was comrade AC's magnificent PayPal donation of £200 - not to mention the other three-figure bank transfers/standing orders from GB, KB, PM and SK.

Other donors were LM (£80), MM (£75), JC (£70), plus £50 each from MS, DB, AN and BK. Thanks also to TR (£40), GT (£35), JT (£25), OG (£24), together with GS, GR, DG and GS (£20), as well as comrades MZ, AR, JL, SS, AF, TT, MD and VP for their smaller, but still very much appreciated, contributions.

And despite the gloom about our printers, there is another ray of light. You might remember that comrade BK promised to match any sum that goes above the target, and - true to his word - he transferred £369 to the *Weekly Worker* account as soon as he was told about the December surplus (in addition to his monthly £20 standing order).

There were also donations from II and MW (£20 each), MD (£18), BG and MT (£15), MM (£11), AN, YM and CP (£10), plus DC and JS (£6 each). So we start the first month of 2024 with £530 already in the kitty.

A final note. Subscribers to the print edition - you will, of course, have your accounts adjusted ●

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

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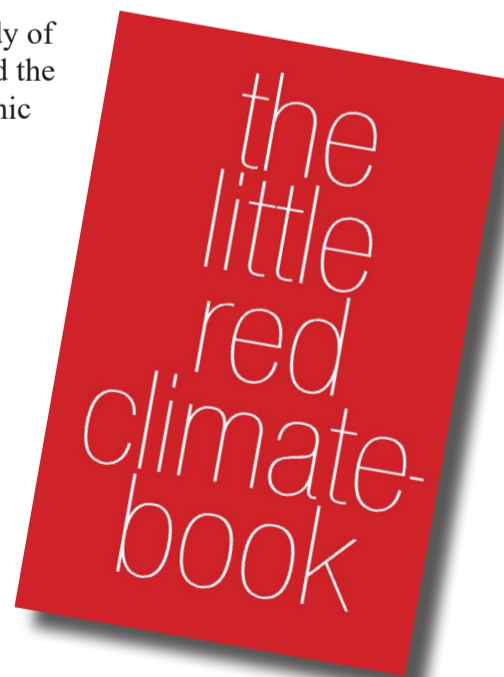
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politics and economics, as well as follow and participate in many debates between many different viewpoints, some questions that I cannot resolve about that Marxist ideal have sprouted in my mind. After asking for help from the bureaucratic theoretical apparatus of the Communist Party of Vietnam and some superficial and lack of reasoning from Vietnam Young Marxists unsuccessfully, I now have to seek help from you - socialist and Marxist activists, economists, theorists, etc.

My questions concern first of all the basis of this entire fighting movement - Marxist economics. I may come back another time with a few more questions concerning other aspects of this movement and ideology. But to get to that step, we need to complete this basic and most important problem first.

Here are my questions:

1. Does the commodity value come mainly from demand, market evaluation and utility, not from labour? (Explain the labour theory of value versus marginal value theory.)

2. Do employers, business owners, corporation bosses (capitalist class) earn money and create profits from their efforts in marketing and managing their companies, from the difference between value and price of goods (increased due to consumer demand after being marketed by the boss)? Therefore, the capitalist class gets rich on its own merit, not through the exploitation of surplus value by the working class (workers) and the workers' wages are fair for their labour.

Those are the two main problems that I really need to solve right now. The survival of my belief in Marxism depends on those basic issues.

Hope that you can answer my questions as clearly as possible, 'untie the knots' that I have been aching and longing to get rid of for so long. I will eagerly await your reply every day and every hour.

Finally, I would like to wish all comrades a new year with new victories and new successes in this prolonged revolution. Happy New Year 2024! Workers of the world, unite!

Nguyễn Phan Quang Anh
email

Inventing myths

I enjoyed reading in *Weekly Worker* number 1471 (December 14) the clarifying exposition of how myths invented to serve political ideologies particular to a time and social structure can be appropriated to suit other ideological programmes, and how, for true believers in the importance of these repurposings, neither the essential untruthfulness of those myths, nor the aesthetic qualities inherent to the manipulative and reactionary nature of the myths' original function, can be allowed to undermine them. Paul Demarty's piece on *Lord of the rings* was also interesting.

Jack William Grahl
Email

United defence

The need for united defence of the left and workers movement against repression by the state and the employers is urgently posed. Demonstrators who oppose Israel's slaughter of the Palestinians have been arrested for "hate crimes". The Tories are gunning for the unions: emboldened by the defeat of the strike wave, they are going forward with sinister legislation forcing the unions to scab on their own strikes. Added to that, they have imposed sweeping new laws to crush climate protests under which you can be thrown in prison for such activity as obstructing the highway. Things will likely get worse: the country is going to hell and everybody knows the crooked British ruling class is just getting started.

Several left groups have been suppressed for pro-Palestine activity, including Socialist Appeal, Socialist Alternative, the CPGB-ML and FRFI. But

when it comes to defending themselves against attack, the left stands divided. Each group organises its own defence, on its own turf, mobilising only its own forces and never collaborating or actively seeking to involve each other in common defence work. Divided we fall!

The Spartacist League has a crazy idea: why don't all the socialist groups get together in a room and plan to unite over defence work? Instead of the 'business as usual' sectarian practice of the left, we're proposing that, despite the many political issues that divide us, we should unite to organise protest, publicity and fundraising for the purpose of defence of pro-Palestinian and Just Stop Oil demonstrators.

Such a united-front defence campaign could be a step towards a broader platform for defence work that would reach across the whole workers' movement. Its policy must be to place all our faith in the class struggle and none in capitalist politicians, courts or bosses. Uniting all the forces on the left is particularly urgent to defend unions against any penalties or victimisations resulting from the anti-union laws. A common front for defence of the unions and their members is not just a nice idea - there is no other way! The alternative is to place our faith in the TUC to mount a real struggle, which is pure fantasy.

The need for a broad-based defence organisation was clearly shown in 2022 in response to the mass sacking of 800 P&O ferry workers. It was shown during last year's strike wave in which union members were often instructed by their leadership to cross another union's picket lines. A united-front defence organisation would seek to mobilise all union members to defend workers who face victimisation for honouring a picket line, a basic principle of the class struggle.

It was for the purpose of non-sectarian defence that the Spartacist League founded the Partisan Defence Committee, a class-struggle legal and social defence organisation (aptly described as "the Spartacist League in search of a united front"). But our own forces are tiny. It is only through joint action, uniting broader forces, that we can mobilise union power for defence of the oppressed and exploited when faced with sacking, imprisonment or other forms of victimisation. The example we look to is the International Labor Defense (ILD) that was set up in the 1920s by founders of American communism. James P Cannon, who led the ILD's campaign to save anarchist workers Sacco and Vanzetti from execution in the US, described the policy of class-struggle defence that we support, saying: "It puts all faith in the power of the masses and no faith whatever in the justice of the courts. While favoring all possible legal proceedings, it calls for agitation, publicity, demonstrations - organised protest on a national and international scale. It calls for unity and solidarity of all workers on this burning issue, regardless of conflicting views on other questions." ('Who can save Sacco and Vanzetti?' *Notebook of an agitator* 1958)

We welcome proposals from any group on the left for common defence work.

Partisan Defence Committee
email

ACTION

Day of action for Palestine - ceasefire now!

Saturday January 6, 6.30pm: Local actions nationwide. Demand a permanent ceasefire now and an end to the war in Gaza. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/day-of-action-for-palestine.

Say no to bailiffs

Monday January 8, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Acorn has been demanding an end to the use of council tax bailiffs in Manchester. Hear how the city council has responded and discuss the next steps. Organised by Acorn Manchester: www.acorntheunion.org.uk/boot_the_bailiffs.

Stop the War London activists meeting

Monday January 8, 6.30pm: Meeting to plan further mobilisations, Mander Hall, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. How to build on the consistently high number of protesters at recent Palestine demonstrations. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/stop-the-war-london-activists-meeting.

What it means to be human

Tuesday January 9, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'Egalitarianism made us human: why Graeber and Wengrow get it wrong'. Speaker: Camilla Power. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/904828811351749.

The communist women's movement 1920-1922

Wednesday January 10, 7.30pm: Online book launch of *The communist women's movement, 1920-1922: proceedings, resolutions and reports*, edited by Mike Taber and Darya Dyakonova. The editors will be joined by historians Brigitte Studer and Judy Cox who have written widely on the communist movement. Registration free. Organised by *Historical Materialism* journal: www.facebook.com/mike.taber.315.

Israel-Palestine: oppression and resistance

Online education and discussion series.
Thursday January 11, 7pm: 'The Holocaust industry' Ian Spencer discusses the lessons from Norman Finkelstein's seminal book *The Holocaust industry*. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.facebook.com/LabourLeftAlliance.

Ceasefire now! Stop the war on Gaza!

Saturday January 13, 12 noon: National demonstration, Central London - details to be announced. As Israel continues its bombardment of Gaza, the call for a full and permanent ceasefire remains unwavering. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.facebook.com/events/7341142185929930.

Why Palestine is a trade union issue

Wednesday January 17, 6.30pm: Online meeting for union activists. How trade unions can deliver solidarity to the Palestinian people. Speakers include Daniel Kebede (NEU) and Eddie Dempsey (RMT). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=744385171048395.

Lenin in Britain

Saturday January 20, 11am to 4pm: Symposium marking the centenary of Lenin's death, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1 and online. Registration free. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/447.

Arms out

Tuesday January 23, 7pm: National film and speaker tour launch, Scale Space White City, 58 Wood Lane, London W12 and online. Exposing the truth about militarism, the arms trade, and their devastating effects on communities and the environment. Registration free. Organised by Shadow World Investigations, Campaign Against Arms Trade, Declassified UK, Demilitarise Education and Forces Watch: caat.org.uk/events/arms-out.

Latin America conference ¡Adelante!

Saturday January 27, 10am to 5pm: Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Learn and take inspiration from the mass movements across the region. Show solidarity with struggles for sovereignty, against neoliberalism and US domination. Over 20 seminars plus stalls and films. Tickets £10 (£8). Organised by Latin America conference 2024: latinamericainconference.co.uk/laconfprogramme.

Protect the right to strike

Saturday January 27, 12 noon: March and rally, assemble Montpellier Gardens, Cheltenham GL50. Marking forty years since Thatcher banned trade unions at GCHQ. Today the government is restricting the right to strike for over five million workers. Oppose the minimum service levels act, restrictions on trade unions and threats to the right to strike. Organised by PCS South West and TUC: www.tuc.org.uk/events/protect-right-strike-march-and-rally.

Palestine, internationalism and the left

Sunday January 28, 10am to 5pm: Day school, London (venue tbc). Panels and discussions exploring the history of Palestine, its place in wider anti-imperialist struggles in the Middle East and its political importance to internationalist politics today. Organised by Workers in Palestine: www.workersinpalestine.org/news/day-school.

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Online Communist Forum



Sunday January 7 5pm

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

Use this link to join meeting:
communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register

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

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

CPGB



Protests almost instantly assumed mass proportions

Statement on Israel-Gaza war

1. Democratic opinion throughout the world is justifiably outraged by the Israeli assault on Gaza. In what is a blatant act of ethnic cleansing almost the entire population has been uprooted. Getting "our hostages back" provides the Israeli war cabinet with a smokescreen for a second Nakba. Ongoing military operations combined with denial of food, clean drinking water, shelter, fuel, sanitation, medicine and the rapid spread of infectious diseases could easily lead to death on a scale that amounts to genocide. Note, genocide is legally defined as acting with the intent to "destroy in whole or part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as such" - that includes acts of omission.

2. Israel seems quite content to let the majority of the Gazan population starve to death or die from disease, but its actions, not least packing huge numbers of people next to the Rafah crossing, show a clear intention of creating the conditions needed to trigger a mass exodus into Egypt. Some Israeli government ministers have been quite explicit about wanting another Nakba.

3. Calling for a ceasefire is not enough. We must demand that Israel immediately withdraws its forces, stops the bombing and lifts its siege of Gaza. The occupation of the West Bank must be ended too. Zionist settlers, with the active connivance of the Israeli Defence Forces, are bent on driving out as many Palestinians as possible through a vicious campaign of murder, intimidation and land grabs. As for the so-called Palestinian Authority, it acts as a police force for Israel in what is, in fact, a series of 'Indian reservations'. Not surprisingly Mahmoud Abbas is massively unpopular. He is a quisling.

4. It is incumbent upon the left in the west, crucially in the US, to fight for the ending of all military supplies to Israel. This is a demand to expose government collaboration in a potential genocide, but also a demand to be agitated for in terms of action from below. Those engaged in the transport industry - road, rail, docks, sea and air - could play a leading role in imposing workers' sanctions against Israel.

5. Israel claims to be acting in self-defence after the audacious October 7 attack from Gaza. However, as a colonial-settler state whose origins lie in mass expulsions, which treats Gaza as a giant prison, has annexed the Golan Heights and

East Jerusalem, militarily occupies the West Bank and has planted nearly 400,000 illegal settlers, it has no such right. Israel is engaged in an unjust, not a just war.

6. Whatever the atrocities, real and alleged, October 7 was a desperate act of resistance. Presumably the idea was to set the whole region ablaze. There can be no drawing an equivalence between the Israeli government and Hamas. True, it is a reactionary, Islamic, organisation, but whereas the likes of al-Qaeda, Islamic State and Boko Haram have no serious mass base, that cannot be said of Hamas. It is deeply implanted in the Palestinian population. According to a recent, post-October 7 poll, Hamas is supported by 44% in Gaza and 42% on the West Bank.

7. It is right to demand the overthrow of the Israeli Zionist regime. Zionism is a blood-and-soil ideology that necessarily involves discrimination, dispossession and expansionism. From the start Zionism aimed to establish Israel as a work colony; that means, if Israel is to be a democracy, expelling or at the very least marginalising, denying rights to the indigenous, Palestinian, population.

8. The Palestinian right of return must be championed. This is a right of habitation decided upon individually, or by family group. It is not, as is alleged by social-imperialist apologists for Zionism, a demand for an impossible *volk* movement of the entire diaspora - which now inhabits not just Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, etc, but the US and many countries in western Europe too.

9. While communists oppose Zionism, we recognise that since 1948 a definite Israeli-Jewish nation has come into existence. Israeli-Jews speak the same Hebrew language, inhabit the same territory, have a common culture and sense of identity. To call for the abolition of this, or any other nation for that matter, is thoroughly unMarxist. Such a call is either naive, utopian or downright murderous. The Israeli-Jewish nation is a historically constituted reality that has to be recognised and dealt with in a civilized, not a barbarous, manner.

10. No democratic solution to the Israel-Palestine question can be won without the consent of the Israeli people. Yet, the fact is that, despite the courage of a tiny minority of leftwingers and peace activists, the Israeli population has consistently, often overwhelmingly, supported the wars of their governments, irrespective of the death, suffering

and repression that this involves.

11. The 1947-48 war, which followed the declaration of Israeli independence, then the 1967 Six Day War, had well over a million Palestinians flee or being forcibly driven from their homes. The 'Arab citizens of Israel', subjected to arbitrary martial law which only ended in 1966, and now constituting some 20% of its population, still suffer from systemic oppression (which, according to Amnesty International, amounts to apartheid). Nearly six million Palestinians are officially registered as refugees by the UN. However, both the colonial subjects within and those without, continue to resist using whatever means they have at their disposal.

12. Amongst Israeli-Jews this engenders a permanent sense of insecurity. Israeli politics therefore moves ever further to the right in the vain attempt to crush Palestinian resistance. Expecting, or relying upon, Israel's so-called democracy movement - in reality a movement which favours constitutional checks and balances *against* democracy - to fight for the national rights of the Palestinians is delusional. The same goes for Histadrut. It primarily seeks to advance the *sectional* terms, conditions and interests of Jewish-Israeli workers.

13. The two-state solution hypocritically promoted by the US, its Nato allies and Labor Zionists and naively promoted by 'official' communists, Palestinian collaborators and the Labour Party soft left, effectively falls at the same hurdle as the single-state solution. We cannot expect Israel, as presently constituted, to concede the territory necessary to create a viable Palestinian state. Without a serious transformation of the regional, and indeed global, balance of forces, any such solution will simply not happen. Benjamin Netanyahu has the virtue of making that abundantly clear.

14. The Palestinian national resistance movement cannot win by its own efforts alone. The balance of forces simply precludes any such possibility. However, the Palestinians are an integral part of the wider Arab nation - total population around 460 million - and this commonality represents both a source of tremendous strength and a threat to the reactionary regimes in Cairo, Amman, Riyadh, etc. Solidarity with the Palestinians easily spills over into demands for radical economic, political and social change. Solving the Israel-Palestine

question is feasible therefore if the working class can put itself in a position whereby it leads the struggle for democracy and Arab unification.

15. Only such a strategy can hope to win over a majority of the Israeli-Jewish working class. A single Palestinian *capitalist* state is not only unfeasible, it offers nothing to the majority of the Israel-Jewish population, except perhaps a reversal of the poles of oppression and therefore a denial of elementary national rights. Israeli Jews will not accept any such solution: collective memory, especially since 1933, militates against such an outcome. Israeli Jews would desperately fight ... and at huge cost in terms of loss of life. After all, Israel is fanatically nationalistic, is strategically backed by US imperialism and is militarily very strong. Some armchair generals militarily rank it as the fourth or fifth most powerful state in the world. Nor should we forget its arsenal of nuclear weapons.

16. A socialist solution involving not only the Arab nation, but other neighbouring peoples too, would be another matter entirely. Israeli-Jewish workers would lose their nationally privileged position, true, but liberate themselves from capitalism and become an integral part of the new ruling regime. Towards that end it is more than advisable to offer the Israeli-Jewish, the Hebrew nation, full national rights, ie, the right to join an Arab socialist republic and the right to self-determination up to and including the right to go it alone.

17. Communists would, of course, advocate the unity of Arabs and Jews in a single state, but voluntary unity is vital. Military conquest of Israel is unimaginable, but we advocate rapprochement, assimilation and eventual merger.

18. Protests against Israel's assault on Gaza almost instantly assumed mass proportions. London has seen some of the biggest demonstrations in British history. Inevitably the establishment, including the Sir Keir Starmer leadership of the Labour Party, has hit back. There has been a concerted attempt to smear the pro-Palestine movement as anti-Semitic and therefore motivated by intolerance, bigotry and hatred. Eg, the slogan 'Palestine shall be free from the river to the sea' is condemned as a call for the mass extermination of Jews in Israel. A big lie.

19. The claim that anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism is now a tried

and tested weapon in the class war that was used with considerable effect against the Jeremy Corbyn leadership of the Labour Party. As we predicted, this weapon was bound to find wider application in combating opposition to Israel and unstinting US support for what is its most important and most reliable ally in the Middle East. Those on the 'left' who failed to actively combat the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' campaign in the Labour Party have revealed themselves to be charlatans of the first order.

20. All major parties in the UK are fully, unquestioningly, committed to the 'special relationship' with the US and therefore to the defence of Israel and therefore to the promotion of the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' big lie.

21. It would, of course, be amazing if there were not a rise in *real*, not fake, incidents of anti-Semitism (the same goes, albeit because of different reasons, for anti-Muslim incidents). Israel claims to be the state of all Jews, claims to represent them and act on their behalf, no matter where they live in the world. A few, politically backward, supporters of Palestine, will inevitably fall for this falsehood. Thankfully, the mass pro-Palestinian demonstrations have been notable for the presence of large numbers of Jews who militantly oppose Zionism. This has doubtless contributed to the almost complete absence of anything that genuinely smacks of anti-Semitism.

22. Clearly basic democratic rights are under attack. There have been calls from on high for banning demonstrations and ever more restrictions are imposed by the police. People have been arrested for the most ludicrous reasons, but mainly because of their opposition to the Israeli state, under legislation supposedly designed to protect ethnic and religious minorities.

23. The main lesson to draw from this is the correctness of upholding the unrestricted right of free speech and assembly. That must include reactionaries and fascists too: "you cannot pluck the rose without its thorns" (Marx). By supporting restrictions, including no-platforming in universities, sections of the left have unintentionally legitimised laws that are not only turned against the left, but, on this occasion, against the entire pro-Palestine movement ●

Provisional Central Committee
Communist Party of Great Britain

LABOUR

Joining the living dead

Carla Roberts wishes she was surprised that Jon Lansman has joined the Jewish Labour Movement

A psychologist might explain Jon Lansman's decision to join the Jewish Labour Movement at the end of 2023 as some kind of an attempt to escape trauma, stress and anger by regressing to his Zionist roots and Orthodox Jewish upbringing, including his much romanticised stay on a kibbutz at the age of 16. After all Lansman has seen his world come crashing down. Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party ended in a humiliating general election defeat. Embracing big business, Sir Keir Starmer has junked almost everything from the 2017 and 2019 'socialist' manifestos, and if that were not bad enough, in July 2020 Lansman found himself replaced as chair of Momentum by a firefighter and a climate activist.

But joining JLM is still an odd choice. After all, JLM was one of the key organisations behind the defeat of the Corbyn movement. As an official affiliate of the World Zionist Movement and sister party of Israel's Labor Party (Havodah), the JLM worked tirelessly to smear Corbyn and the left by making bogus claim after bogus claim about the supposed anti-Semitism problem in the party. The bourgeois press and the right in the party eagerly lapped up their nonsense, no matter how ridiculous or weaponised.

Surely, as one of Corbyn's "key allies" and decades-long leader of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Lansman must know what a despicable role the JLM played in destroying the Labour left's biggest opportunity in a lifetime? Corbyn put him in charge of setting up Momentum, so how could Lansman be so disloyal now and join the very organisation that helped bring him down?

The sad truth is that this was a long time coming. And it is not just down to Lansman's soft Zionism. It is a reflection of the total bankruptcy of the strategy of the entire official Labour left.

From the CLPD and Momentum via the slightly less horrid Labour Representation Committee to the various bitty groups represented in the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance: they all operate under the illusion that the Labour left needs to make peace with the 'centre' of the party.

Lansman is a long-time admirer of Vladimir Derer, the founder of CLPD, who he considers his political mentor: "Like Momentum, CLPD is an organisation which seeks to democratise the Labour Party, not to operate like a party-within-a-party. Similarly, Vladimir [Derer] was determined for CLPD to reach out to the centre of the party, since without doing so we would inevitably lose. The same is true for Momentum now", he wrote in 2017¹.

'Winning', for Lansman and the rest of the official Labour left, of course means Labour winning a general election (under any leader, no matter their politics) and forming a government - not winning the civil war in the Labour Party.

This is why Corbyn bent over backwards to appease the right inside and outside the Labour Party. And that is also the reason why Lansman closed down democracy in Momentum at the end of 2016. Lansman (and, sadly, Corbyn) never meant for Momentum to become a fighting organisation. He told the *Jewish Chronicle* at the beginning of 2023: "I wish we'd never had Momentum branches. It was never



Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell: their humiliating defeat brought Jon Lansman's world crashing down

our decision to set them up - they set themselves up."² But he certainly did his best to clamp down on them, not least by imposing his outrageously undemocratic constitution in a cloak-and-dagger-operation otherwise known as the 'Lansman coup'.

With the full support of Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell, Diane Abbott and others in the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs he went on to cancel preparations for Momentum's national launch conference, abolish the regions and downgrade the role of local groups. Lansman used a members' survey to claim endorsement for his new constitution, ensuring he kept control of what was his private property, while also sneaking in a clause that banned from membership all those who had been expelled in the witch-hunt against Corbyn and the left. Although Lansman has since been ousted from Momentum, this clause remains intact and continues to be enforced by the all-new leadership of wannabe Labour bureaucrats.

Zero tolerance

In other words, Lansman might not have started the witch-hunt against the left, but he certainly enforced it. While maintaining that he supported Corbyn "100 percent", he was always keen to state his view that there should be "zero tolerance" towards anti-Semitism.

From a communist point of view, zero tolerance towards any form of prejudice is entirely the wrong approach - we much prefer education and debate to convince people of their wrong ideas rather than tell them that they are 'beyond the pale'. After all, there is a lot of prejudice, whacky ideas and racism within society - they are part and parcel of the capitalist class society we live in. We want to win people over and convince them

that socialism and communism has something to offer them.

The problems with the strategy of trying to appease the right in the Labour Party are all too obvious. For a start, it is debatable how much better off the working class is under a rightwing Labour government of the Blair or Starmer variety: the self-censored left moans quietly about this war or that attack on the working class, while waiting for "the unions" to do something, anything.

And once you actually have a leftwinger in as leader, as happened by pure accident with Corbyn, the whole strategy quickly falls apart. The centre-right clearly had no interest in being appeased. There was no way they would have supported Corbyn as prime minister. They would have continued to plot, to sabotage, to undermine. Everybody could see it - apart from those on the official left who continued, right to the bitter end, trying to win them over by securing them in their cushy positions, be it in the regional offices, the CLPs or as MPs ... all the while pointing their fingers at so-called 'anti-Semites' and keeping their cowardly distance from the victims of the witch-hunt ("we can't have a suspended or expelled member speak on the platform"). This, sadly, included the Corbyn leadership itself, which - under its general secretary, Jennie Formby - vilified and smeared good comrades like Chris Williamson, Tony Greenstein, Marc Wadsworth and Jackie Walker.

Yes, Lansman is a touch worse than your garden-variety official Labour leftie, because his soft Zionism also made him a keen supporter of the much-criticised, fake definition of anti-Semitism promoted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

and adopted by the Labour Party under Corbyn (who made a half-hearted attempt to oppose it, but without publicly distancing himself in some sort of campaign, he had no chance).

Lansman fully embraced the attempt by the Israel lobby to redefine what anti-Semitism is: not hatred or discrimination of Jewish people, but criticism of Israel. He has stated, for example, that formulations like "I hate Israel" are not expressions of anti-Zionism, but are "clearly anti-Semitic".³

He was more than happy to sell out Corbyn supporters and, pressed by Stella Creasy and Louise Ellman at the 2023 JLM conference, was quick to point to "anti-Semitic left activists around the country", in particular those "in Riverside and Liverpool."⁴

No wonder that he ended up joining Corbyn's enemies in the JLM.

Lansman's Zionism is very similar to his Labourism: he appeals to the sensible 'centre-ground' - which in reality means support for the hard right. In an interview with *The Guardian* in November for example, he expressed "sympathy" for Keir Starmer's conclusion that calling for a ceasefire now in Gaza is wrong: "A ceasefire now could merely sustain Hamas as a continuing threat."⁵

You see, "Israelis and Palestinians have been betrayed by their leaders - each side needs a new leader as soon as possible, each of whom wants peace and has the confidence for their own people!", he recently tweeted.

Leaving aside the obvious contradiction of the latter (nobody who is calling for "peace" at the moment has the "confidence" of the majority of either population), his whole political outlook echoes the dumb 'bad apples on both sides' of the establishment media. He has been sharing dozens of tweets by Standing Together⁶, a campaign of Jews and Arabs living in Israel, which has been promoted in Britain by Nadia Whittome MP, fellow traveller of the pro-imperialist and pro-Zionist Alliance for Workers' Liberty. The campaign still peddles the illusion that there could be a capitalist 'two-state solution', when clearly no mainstream politician in Israel has any real interest in it whatsoever (Labor's Merav Michaeli pays mere lip service to the idea).

Standing Together focuses on "de-escalation and solidarity within Israel" by offering hotlines, workshops and other such worthy things, run by Jews and Arabs. Their mission statement reads like the naive wish list of a 14-year-old who just 'wants peace'. It is appealing to those in charge to be a bit nicer to the Palestinians and stop supporting illegal settlements on the West Bank. But the campaign makes no demands, for example, to change any of the racist laws that condemn Arabs within Israel to second class citizenship.

For Standing Together, the root of the problem is not Zionism or the structures of state oppression. It is just that for some unfathomable reason Jews and non-Jews don't seem to get on too well in Israel. Something a de-escalation course or, indeed, a new set of leaders who "want peace" are unlikely to fix.

Lansman is not a stupid man, so he knows all of that. But just like in the Labour Party, he wants to leave the structures of inequality intact. His main problem is that he has no confidence in his vision of socialism or, indeed, in the working class as the only force that can overthrow capitalism and liberate humanity.

We would not be surprised if Lansman was rewarded for services rendered with an OBE, a CBE or even a KBE by Sir Keir at some point in the next few years (presuming a Tory general election defeat). One thing is for sure, though, Lansman has not only joined the JLM, he has joined the ranks of the living dead.

Labour Marxists

Of course, while Lansman has betrayed himself, what took him to there is far from unique. I have come across quite a few self-declared "Marxists" in the Labour Representation Committee who will quote this infamous passage from the *Communist Manifesto* to justify their opposition to ever building a Marxist Party: "The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole."

Very odd, isn't it, that a booklet with the full title *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written by Marx and Engels as a political programme for the Communist League (described by Engels as "the Communist Party in process of formation") should argue against forming - a Communist Party!

Because Marx and Engels did no such thing. The German original makes it clear that in fact they said the exact *opposite*: "Die Kommunisten sind keine besondere Partei gegenüber den anderen Arbeiterparteien. Sie haben keine von den Interessen des ganzen Proletariats getrennten Interessen."⁷

Hal Draper translates it as follows: "The Communists are not a special party vis-à-vis the other workers' parties. They have no interests separate from the interests of the whole proletariat."

In other words, communists *do* form a separate party - but they do work and engage with other working class parties, because they are trying to equip them with a winning strategy for socialism.

Despite the fact that this was laid out in detail in 1994 in Hal Draper's very entertaining book *The adventures of the Communist Manifesto* (which pointed out many other mistranslations and misreadings), the official Labour left continues to ignore his important work - and continues to misquote Marx and Engels. A fig leaf for their own political cowardice ●

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USA

More ballot games

Another year, another legal attempt to stymie Donald Trump. Daniel Lazare detects echoes of 1860

The latest episode began this summer when William Baude and Michael Stokes Paulsen, law professors at the University of Chicago and the University of St Thomas in Minneapolis respectively, posted an academic article about the 14th amendment to the US constitution and its implications for the upcoming presidential election.

Adopted three years after the Civil War, the amendment is a 400-word block of prose that essentially transformed America from an agrarian federation to a Bismarckian industrial state. Among other things, it created a new standard of national citizenship, gave the federal government new authority to impose "equal protection of the laws", and barred anyone from office who had "engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the [US government] or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof."

The last item was key. Its purpose was to prevent ex-Confederates from taking over Washington the way they had before the war. But since Donald Trump had urged Republican rioters on January 6 2021 to storm Capitol Hill and prevent Congress from certifying Joe Biden's election, Baude and Paulsen argued that he was now guilty of insurrection as well. Under the terms of the amendment, he was therefore ineligible to hold office.

Problem solved? Although Baude and Paulsen are both associated with the rightwing Federalist Society, liberals seized on their argument like a drowning man seizing on a life raft. Democrats have spent the last six or seven years doing everything under the sun to stop Trump. They launched a phony hue-and-cry over Russian interference, they impeached him twice, they held congressional hearings on primetime TV into his role on January 6, and they hit him with 91 felony charges while slapping on two or three civil suits as well. But after all that, liberation had finally arrived.

Since the clause was "self-enacting," moreover, Democrats did not have to do anything beyond reminding state election officials of their constitutional duty to remove Trump's name from the ballot. After watching Trump climb steadily in the polls, they could therefore relax. Despite his advanced age and growing unpopularity, Biden was such a shoo-in that he would barely need to campaign.

Election officials

But there were problems. One concerned Trump's first amendment rights. Was his ability to speak his mind and campaign as easily tossed out the window as all that? Another concerned the people's right to vote for the candidate of their choice - was that out the window too? A third concerned the sheer improbability of it all. Did Democrats honestly believe that they could waltz back into the White House unopposed on the basis of a constitutional doctrine that no-one had heard about before August?

On December 19, Colorado's top court endorsed the Baude-Paulsen argument by ruling four-to-three that Trump was ineligible. A few days later, Maine's top election official struck him from the state ballot as well. In the meantime, however, Dan Patrick, Texas's irrepressible ultra-right lieutenant governor, threw a



Will he find himself behind bars?

curveball by announcing that he was considering removing Joe Biden from his state ballot in retaliation. If so, the results could snowball as other states strike off candidates they didn't like either. A two-party system would thus devolve into a patchwork of single-party dictatorships in each of the 50 states.

This is bizarre but not unprecedented. The same thing happened in 1860 when four candidates ran for America's top office: Abraham Lincoln of the newly-formed Republican Party plus John C Breckinridge of the Southern Democrats, Stephen A Douglas of the Northern Democrats, and John Bell of a centrist group calling itself the Constitutional Union. Although not yet anti-slavery, Lincoln was clearly heading in that direction since he was for holding the Union together at all costs. But others were all over the map, with Douglas in favour of appeasement, Breckinridge an outright slavery supporter who would later become a Confederate general, and Bell a determined centrist who would become known as "Nobody's man".

Voters had a lot to choose from. But they were hampered by the fact that nine states, all in the South, barred Lincoln from their ballot while anywhere from two to four states in the north barred Douglas, Breckinridge, or Bell. With the electoral system fracturing, the republic in general would follow suit just a few months later. If the voting process is disintegrating in 2024, it looks like America could once again be heading in the same direction.

To be sure, the US supreme court is all but certain to intervene before matters get out of hand. But it's hard to restore legitimacy when it is fast dissipating. If the court lets the Colorado and Maine decisions stand, then balkanisation will accelerate. If it strikes them down, furious Democrats will accuse it of gutting an all-important reconstruction-era amendment and thus encouraging precisely the sort of insurrectionism that the constitution is supposed to prevent. Since Trump appointed three of the court's six-member conservative majority, they will

also accuse him of rigging the game in his own behalf. The court's growing minoritarian quality - five of its conservative members were nominated by unelected presidents while four were confirmed by senators representing less than 50% of the population - does not help either. Whatever the court does, the consequence will be more instability rather than less.

The contrast with the United Kingdom is striking. The British constitution is also a timeworn relic of another age. But it responded with relative alacrity when confronted with a not-dissimilar problem in the form of Boris Johnson, another rambunctious rightist with a tangential relationship to the truth. Replacing him with Liz Truss in July 2022 did nothing to halt the Tory meltdown. But at least the Johnson problem was solved.

Yet not only is the Trump problem unsolved after all these years, but the man is stronger than ever while the political system is in growing disarray. As bad as conditions may be in the UK, at least it is not facing authoritarian takeover the way America is.

So what's going on? The answer is that while all bourgeois states are unhappy after years of slow growth, economic polarisation, plague, climate change and war, the United States is unhappy in a way that is absolutely unique. Wages have been flat for half a century, unionisation rates are down more than 60 percent, while a typical corporate CEO now earns 344.5 times what an average production worker makes, a 19-fold increase over the last half-century.¹ A major health crisis is brewing thanks to rising levels of obesity, psychological depression and "diseases of despair," which is to say suicide, drug overdose and alcoholism. (With 4.2% of the world's population, the US consumes an estimated 80% of the global opiate supply.)² According to economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton, a husband-and-wife team at Princeton who coined the term "diseases of despair", the reasons for the breakdown are clear: income stagnation, downward intergenerational mobility, and

fractured social and family relations.³

There's a growing imperial crisis due to the 2021 military collapse in Afghanistan, a failing war in the Ukraine plus a conflict in Gaza that is threatening to spread across the Middle East. There's the rise of a "Brahmin left" rooted in the top 10% that is so strident and hysterical on issues ranging from feminism to gender and race that it is driving millions of workers to the right.

Political mechanics

Finally, there's the question of political mechanics. America is not the only country with an ungainly political system. French president Emmanuel Macron must somehow make do without a majority in the national assembly while Hungary's parliamentary system is so disproportionate that Viktor Orban has the two-thirds majority he needs to change the constitution despite winning less than 53% of the vote.

But nothing compares with the 18th century system in the US, with its complicated checks and balances and its growing tendencies toward minority rule. Since elaborate compromises are required to keep such a ramshackle structure going under the best of circumstances, a growing social crisis has reduced it to a standstill for close to 30 years. The more gridlock deepens, the more temperatures rise on both sides of the aisle, which leads to even more gridlock than before and more social breakdown too. January 6 2021 was merely the first time a prolonged cold war led to an outbreak of mass violence. But it won't be the last.

This is why Trump appears to be strengthening in recent months, running even among black Americans according to a recent poll but pulling out strongly ahead among Hispanics and maintaining a two-point lead overall.⁴ Structural change is impossible due to a dysfunctional amending clause that allows tiny minorities to veto any and all efforts at constitutional reform. Since such a system has nowhere to go but down, frustrated voters are opting for a candidate who will simply smash stuff up. They want a bull in

a china shop, a role that fits Trump to a T. "I am your warrior, I am your justice", he told a crowd in Waco, Texas, in March. "... For those who have been wronged and betrayed ... I am your retribution."⁵ The cheers were loud and enthusiastic for the sort of scorched-earth rhetoric the Republican faithful long to hear.

Everything Democrats do to make things better just makes them worse. Beginning in early 2017, they raised a hue-and-cry over Russian political interference in a plain-as-day attempt to drive Trump out of office. Yet the only thing it accomplished was to make them look like hypocrites when they raised an outcry over Trump's feeble attempt at a coup d'état in 2021. The legal offensive they've mounted in recent years looks like an exercise at judicial manipulation whose goal is to stop Trump in his tracks, which it in fact is. The Colorado and Maine decisions are meanwhile aimed not so much at Trump as at his supporters instead: the "deplorables" who are "racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic - you name it," according to Hillary Clinton. As far as Democrats are concerned, they probably should not be allowed to vote at all.

This makes the party seem snobbish and undemocratic, which it is as well. Democrats are terrified that Trump is going to win and are therefore doing everything they can to terminate the process beforehand. But what they cannot understand is that the more they try to short-circuit the system, the more Trump's poll numbers go up.

Not that Democrats are crying wolf about what a second Trump presidency will mean. To the contrary, the spectre of rightwing authoritarianism is all too real. With the federal bureaucracy in open revolt, Trump's first term was little more than an extended amateur hour in which he found himself buffeted by one damaging news leak after another. But he seems better prepared a second time around.

He is promising all kinds of draconian actions - to use military funds to build detention camps for illegal immigrants, to invoke the 1807 insurrection act so he can deploy troops along the southern border, to use the Justice Department to go after political enemies, and so on. While vowing to "fundamentally re-evaluate[e] Nato's purpose and Nato's mission", he says he'll use military force to go after Mexican drug cartels.⁶ Where once they held themselves aloof, Washington think tanks led by the powerful Heritage Foundation are now throwing themselves into the fray - drawing up plans to gut the "administrative state" by ousting federal employees they believe are blocking Trump's agenda and replacing them with eager loyalists.

The more events spin out of control - and spin out of control they will - the more extreme Trump's response will become. A second Trump term will be ... interesting ●

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GOP

Haley's telling blunder

Many southerners happily fly the stars and bars, but they prefer to talk of state rights, not black slavery. Paul Demarty looks at Donald Trump's nearest Republican rival

The end of 2023 saw various developments in the United States' attempts to prevent the 46th president becoming, also, the 48th.

But there was also the Republican primary campaign itself. Trump had, for most of 2023, enjoyed a commanding lead, especially after Ron DeSantis - trumpeted as a real challenger in all quarters - saw his popularity crater, when people outside Florida started to get a good look at this shifty, whiny-voiced reptile. His campaign seemed to be run entirely for the benefit of deranged internet fascists; but there aren't actually that many of them, so the wisdom of this approach is doubtful. As the Proud Boys like to say, DeSantis fucked around, and he was found out.

This was of course a nightmare for 'sensible' Republican kingmakers, who had staked a lot on DeSantis's success. The history of 2016 seemed to be repeating itself - the nailed-on favourite (in both cases a serving or former Florida governor...) collapses into nothing, and we are then left with a field consisting of freaks, weirdos, serial losers - and Donald Trump, who is his own thing altogether. News began to leak out that the donor money was moving out of DeSantis's campaign - and into that of a certain Nikki Haley. And it seemed to be working: Haley became the clear second-place candidate, and a poll in New Hampshire had her trailing by only four points (though the national numbers still have Trump inflicting a historic humiliation on the rest of the field). Though the small and sparsely populated state elects few delegates, its status as the first primary decided by ballot makes it a good opportunity to work the media, and thus an important stop on the rubber-chicken circuit.

Then, on the 27th, she held a town hall meeting in the Granite State, whereupon she got herself into a tangle on the question of American slavery. The resulting controversy was, to be sure, driven primarily by Democratic-leaning media, and we do not expect it to make much difference in the primary contest (perhaps it will in New Hampshire itself). But it illustrates the difficulties faced by the Republican establishment in finding a 'sensible' candidate, and - more profoundly - the strange distortions of historical memory imposed on the US establishment by the betrayal of the freed slaves after the Civil War.

Foot in mouth

Haley clearly did not expect, on December 27, to be asked, bluntly, what the cause of the Civil War was. As soon as she was asked, she attempted to bat the question away, but was pinned down for an answer by the questioner. Eventually, she launched into a torrent of vague blather:

I think the cause of the Civil War was basically how government was going to run, the freedoms and what people could and couldn't do ... And I will always stand by the fact that I think government was intended to secure the rights and freedoms of the people. It was never meant to be all things to all people. Government doesn't need to tell you how to live your life.



Nikki Haley and family

They don't need to tell you what you can and can't do. They don't need to be a part of your life.

The questioner replied that it was "astonishing to me that you answer that question without mentioning the word 'slavery'". By now in a very testy mood, Haley demanded: "What do you want me to say about slavery?" Don't worry, came the reply: you've answered my question.

As the scandal overtook the media the next day, Haley backtracked, declaring that *of course* the Civil War was occasioned by slavery. She accused the man in the crowd of having been a Democratic plant. She provided no evidence for this claim, but regardless of whether there was literally a conspiracy on the part of Democrat apparatchiks to embarrass her, this person's question was clearly designed to have the effect it did. He knew it would make her squirm, and possibly corner her into saying something grotesque; and when she did, he thanked her and sat down.

That response was predictable, because Haley had already made it, repeatedly. Haley, after all, was previously governor of South Carolina - the first state to secede from the union, the home, for whatever reason, of the secessionist movement a decade earlier, called the 'fire-eaters'. When she assumed office, the Confederate flag flew proudly from government buildings in Charleston; and so it did when she left office to become Trump's first ambassador to the United Nations. It was only after the massacre of several black people by the fascist terrorist Dylann Roof in 2015 that the practice was ended (with Haley's support). Neo-Confederate ideology is common, and Haley would never have won had she attacked it directly, whatever her 'private' view on the matter.

Her circumlocutions are a piece of 'constructive ambiguity' worthy of the late Henry Kissinger. What "rights and freedoms" was the government obliged to "secure" for its people in the 1860s? The freedom from explicit legal bondage, and all its attendant horrors, that the Union bought at such enormous cost in blood? Or the freedom, the right, to *enslave*? Her talk of rights in this connection inevitably brings to mind

the 'states' rights' interpretation of the conflict common among neo-Confederates (and, to some extent, the original Confederates - there was even a general who fought in several important battles by the peculiar name of States Rights Gist, 'States' to his mum; a South Carolinian, naturally). When pushed, she could 'explain' that she only meant the rights of African-Americans to freedom.

All of which makes a certain amount of sense in the grubby world of conservative politics in the deepest of the deep south. Using the same line in New Hampshire, which lost thousands of its sons to the slaughter of the civil war *on the other side*, seems a little off. Yet, as we noted, no candidate actually cares about *winning* New Hampshire. They care about winning more populous and strategically useful states *from* New Hampshire. Even in the very heartland of the hated Yankees of the 1850s and 60s, Haley is imprisoned by the sensibilities of faraway southern nationalists.

Which rights?

Here it is probably worth probing a little deeper into the "rights and freedoms" that the fire-eaters proposed to defend by means of rebellion. Haley's hopelessly abstract conspectus of the conflict has at least a grain of truth to it: the irreconcilable differences between the southern planter elite and the northern (most especially north-eastern) bourgeoisie did present as a question of rights.

For the abolitionist wing of the northerners, at least, it was a historic crime that the famous "self-evident" truths of the declaration of independence - "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" - were denied to those who had black skin. Yet the life, liberty and happiness of the southern elite *depended* on slave agriculture. This was an antagonistic contradiction that expressed real interests on both sides.

Softer versions of the 'states' rights' interpretation of the war often imply that, while slavery was wrong, the conflict over it expressed something deeper: a conflict between

self-government in the states and the centralising power of the federal government. The historical record shows, again, that there is a certain truth there, in that - despite the betrayal of reconstruction - the post-war American state system was vastly more centralised than it ever had been, with a central bank, a standing army, and the capacity and will to embark on enormous infrastructural investments like the transcontinental railroads. Even during the war, the relative power of the Confederate states and the hastily-assembled central state apparatus repeatedly interfered with military mobilisations and conscriptions.

What this leaves out is the *content* of the 'rights' the south expected to be able to enforce. Every so often, a southern gentleman would have reason to travel to New England or some other hotbed of abolitionism; and he would want to travel with his domestic slaves. Once there, of course, the slaves had a tendency to run off to the shelter of those same abolitionists, or communities of black freedmen in the area. So the southerners pressed endlessly for - and eventually got - a Fugitive Slave Act, which imposed fines on public officials who failed to arrest escaped slaves, on evidence as weak as some slaveowner's word that he was the owner, and offered bounties to would-be snitches. The law was adopted in 1850 as part of a compromise omnibus, but became a persistent source of strife, as numerous northern polities defied it legally and extra-legally.

There came later the infamous 1857 Dred Scott decision, whereby a southern-dominated US supreme court found against Scott, a slave whose owners had moved to a free state, who attempted to secure his freedom by legal means. Roger Taney, the southern chief justice, inserted into the language of the judgment that Scott's case could have no standing because black people were not citizens, and enjoyed no rights under the constitution. The sectional divide worsened considerably after this outrage; before long, the southern hardliners were demanding a federal slave code, which would unambiguously establish their 'rights' throughout the union. Stephen Douglas, the northern

Democrat conciliator, protested that this was a futile effort, since who would enforce it in anti-slavery heartlands like New England? A good point, said the southerners: any such code must have its own federal force to impose it on 'Black Republicans' and 'abolitionist fanatics'. Along these lines, the Democrats split in 1860, opening the way for Abraham Lincoln's victory in that year's presidential election, and - inevitably - the war.

There is an important thing in common between all these initiatives, besides their vileness: the 'rights' they have to do with are not rights of *self-government* by individual states, but the rights of citizens of the United States to have their 'liberties' and peculiar institutions imposed *throughout the states*. It was about 'states' rights', alright: the right of South Carolina to make law in Massachusetts.

This was a very specific conflict, over the fate of an economic arrangement that no longer exists in the US. Whence Haley's coyness, in that case? The Confederacy itself is mostly potent as a cultural symbol today; overt neo-Confederate ideologues are marginal compared to the very many southerners happy to fly the stars and bars, and even they only rarely propose the reinstatement of black slavery. Their racism is of a distinctly contemporary type - at the extremes, full-on neo-Nazism, and elsewhere, the usual dog-whistles about inner city crime, affirmative action and so forth.

Northern capitalists

Yet the victory of the north resolved into the victory of the northern capitalists, who were arrayed against their own class enemy, the proletariat. The 'rights' defended by the constitution are, today, the rights of that class to exploit, in its own peculiar institutions. And it equally depends on state force: union-busting, the imposition of intolerable legal burdens on aggrieved workers, the manufacture of vast classes of insecure employees, from illegal migrants to those condemned to bounce in and out of America's prison system at due intervals. "In its majestic equality", wrote Anatole France a century ago, "the law forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, beg in the streets and steal loaves of bread." Legal regimes of rights do not secure a common social contract between different classes, but rather freeze the state of class antagonisms into place.

So when Haley complains that "Government doesn't need to tell you how to live your life", we know she really means: government cannot encroach on your 'rights', those rights are primarily capitalist property rights, and defending those rights - by the means mentioned - is precisely the function of government. Her sandblasting in the media is a result of her breaching a taboo about a conflict that has come, in mainstream historiography, to be seen as what it always was: a revolutionary war against a cruel and backward social system (really only in the last 50 years, mind you). Ironically, the upshot of neo-Confederate ideology - and Haley's cringing before it - is the defence of the world the Yankees built ●

POLEMIC

Not a religious war

Daniel Lazare lumps Hamas together with the Zionists, argues Tony Greenstein. But socialists should unconditionally support the oppressed

The two recent articles by Daniel Lazare, 'Class, culture and generation' (November 30) and 'Far from pacified' (December 7), are a disgrace for anyone who calls themselves a socialist, let alone a Marxist.

At a time when the Palestinians of Gaza are experiencing genocide at the hands of the Israeli state, fully backed up by US and British imperialism, who does Lazare attack? Hamas. Does this faux socialist not understand, in a situation such as the present, when millions of people are mobilised against the horrors that Israel is perpetrating in Gaza (and in the West Bank), that the first duty of socialists is solidarity with the oppressed?

Lazare tells us that Hamas is "the so-called Islamic Resistance Movement". Why? Is it not Islamic? Does anyone doubt that Hamas and Islamic Jihad are waging a bitter guerrilla war against the murderers in Israel's army? Instead Lazare says that Hamas "is doing more to facilitate Gaza's destruction than stopping it". Forgive me if I missed it, but I thought that it was Israel, not Hamas, which was bombing Gaza into rubble and killing its people.

As background to what is taking place in Gaza, Lazare informs us that there were "proxy wars in Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen". Afghanistan may have started out as a proxy war but it soon morphed into a full-scale invasion. In Syria too the United States played and is still playing a direct role. Nor do I accept that Washington's opposition to Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was simply about the "region's unparalleled energy resources". Afghanistan itself does not have energy resources. The United States' opposition to the Soviet Union was about the Cold War.

Ignorance

Lazare shows his ignorance when he tells us that the purpose of the Abraham Accords "was to force China to back off" after it had enabled "a Saudi-Iranian rapprochement that established the people's republic as a major diplomatic player in what the US had regarded as its exclusive preserve" and thus "return Saudi Arabia to the American fold, and reinforce Zionist hegemony too". There is only one problem with this. The Abraham Accords were negotiated *before* the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

As for whether the Abraham Accords are effectively dead, this is a moot point. On this I agree, at least for the moment, although the treacherous, repressive and corrupt Arab regimes will do their best to put it back on track. Only Bahrain, of the four countries that established diplomatic relations with Israel, has recalled its ambassador, and the UAE is continuing to pursue 'normalisation'. It is clear, however, that the establishment of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel is off the agenda.

Lazare echoes another Zionist myth: that Israeli Jews fled the Nazi holocaust. This is untrue. At most about one-third of Israel's population in 1948 were holocaust survivors and many of them came to Israel because the Zionist movement did its best in the United States to close off other avenues of emigration.

Zionist colonisation of Palestine



Gaza: IDF tanks versus Hamas tunnels

began in 1882 with the First Aliyah. One of the most effective of Israel's propaganda lies is that Israel was created as a result of the holocaust. It wasn't. If Lazare reads my book *Zionism during the holocaust* he will know that during the holocaust the Zionist movement concentrated on one thing and one thing only - establishing a Jewish state. It actually hindered and opposed the actions of those who tried to help and save those Jewish refugees who could escape the Nazi dragnet. In January 1944 it even tried to prevent the establishment of the War Refugee Board in the United States. The WRB saved over 200,000 Jews.

Lazare's Jewish exceptionalism means that his main enemy is not Zionism but the resistance organisations thrown up by Zionist colonisation. You don't have to subscribe to Hamas's politics to recognise that it is in a life and death struggle with Israel. Instead Lazare indulges his obsessions, telling us that "Jihad is not merely a tactic ... but a way of life" and that "war is the state, as far as Hamas is concerned".

This is a typical imperialist lie. Hamas has repeatedly offered Israel a long-term ceasefire. It is Israel that has refused. It is Zionism which was born in blood and fire and which is wedded to war and expansion, not its victims. This racist reversal of reality is a reflection of Lazare's social chauvinism.

Lazare quotes Ismail Haniyeh as saying, in 2014, "We are a people who value death, just like our enemies value life." Likewise he quotes Ghazi Hamad: "We are called a nation of martyrs, and are proud to sacrifice martyrs." The Zionists, too, are fond of reminding us that Hamas is a death cult. But there is nothing exceptional in such rhetoric, whether it is from Hamas or the young resistance fighters of Jenin. Irish republicanism also elevated martyrdom to an almost godly status. There is nothing unique about this in anti-colonial movements. It is how the oppressed of the earth turn the violence of their opponents into a weapon against them. It is the psychology of resistance. Just as the British painted the Irish Catholics as priest-ridden, so Lazare does the same to the Palestinians.

Shamefully Lazare concluded his December 7 article by comparing Hamas to fascists, telling us that

"words like these cannot help but summon up memories of the Francoist battle cry, *Viva la muerte* (Long live death!), or Hitler ranting in his bunker".

Israeli neo-Nazis

There are neo-Nazis and racial supremacists involved in what is happening today in Gaza - but they belong firmly in the Zionist camp: people like Itamar Ben Gvir, Israel's police minister, who used to march to the chant of 'Death to the Arabs' and who has openly called for genocide even before October 7, or Bezalel Smotrich, who called for the "wiping out" of the Palestinian town of Huwara.

Lazare clearly has not seen the letter that Danielle Aloni, one of Israel's captives, wrote to the 'generals of Hamas', praising them for their kind behaviour to her daughter Emilia "in spite of the difficult situation you faced".¹ Danielle wrote: "I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your extraordinary humanity shown towards my daughter, Emilia." This doesn't strike me as coming from Hitlerites. Of course the Zionists are doing their best to discredit this letter.

There is little doubt that Hamas miscalculated when it launched the October 7 action, hoping to free Palestinian captives. Clearly they misjudged Israel's response, not least because they did not understand the changes in Israeli society.

Despite this, Hamas has set in train changes that, more clearly than ever, show that the Zionist project is now reaching its endgame. The Israeli state has fulfilled its historical role and is inherently unstable. The Middle East will never be the same after October 7. What it has demonstrated is the weakness of this Sparta by the Mediterranean. Without the support of the US in restocking its supplies of weapons, Israel would not have been able to mount its genocidal war.

It is also clear that Hamas has inflicted very heavy casualties on Israel's forces in the ground war. By the first week of December over 5,000 had been wounded.² Israel had previously tried to cover up its casualties but research by *Ha'aretz* and other Israeli papers showed that *individual hospitals* recorded receiving more casualties than the

total number claimed by the Israeli army.

Historically, the ratio of wounded to dead is 3:1, although advances in medical science have reduced the number of fatalities. For example, in the Iraq War (from 2003) there were 7.3 wounded to every death.³ If the number of Israeli wounded today is 8,000, this would suggest something like 2,000 Israeli deaths - yet Israel is still claiming only 179 wounded as of January 1. Israel has military censors at every Israeli hospital to prevent the true casualty figures coming out.

Lazare quotes the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist League, the Palestinian section of the Fourth International in 1948, and says that "the situation 75 years later is unchanged". I disagree. The situation has changed a great deal, not least in Israel itself with the demise of Labor Zionism. The RCL was also wrong in taking a neutralist stance in 1948 because it saw the fight against the emerging Israeli state as being primarily a proxy war fought on behalf of Britain.

Socialists will ask why Lazare does not understand that when imperialism is on the attack one *unconditionally* supports the oppressed, even despite their backward or reactionary politics?

In 'Class, culture and generation' Lazare referred to the "homicidal tendencies on the part of Likud and Hamas" - like a bourgeois liberal, politically incapable of distinguishing between the nationalisms of the oppressor and the oppressed. As if the violence of workers, too, should be equated to that of the state. Lazare's article is a shameful concession to imperialism.

Despite their demonisation by the Zionists, Hamas's politics are not anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish. They hold to the traditional line of Islamic religious groups who make a distinction between Judaism and Zionism. It wasn't in the Arab or Muslim world that the holocaust took place, but in Christian Europe. This despite the latter-day invention of a Judeo-Christian heritage.

Survival

There is no comparison whatsoever between the politics of the Palestinian resistance, including Hamas, which is waging a desperate fight for survival, and the genocidal Jewish supremacism of the far-right Zionist government led by Likud. This is understood by the vast majority of the Palestine solidarity movement, but not by Lazare. We *unconditionally* support the Palestinian resistance fighters in Gaza, including Hamas, against the Israeli army. There is no equation to be drawn between the oppressed and oppressor, as Lazare believes.

Lazare stated that "almost no-one celebrates the murderous October assault other than a few idiots in the Socialist Workers Party in the UK ...". This is not true. Most Palestinians supported the October 7 attack, futile and hopeless as it was. Not because of the death of Israeli civilians but because it represented a fightback, by the oppressed, of the oppressed.

The October 7 attack was an audacious attack on the Gaza division of the Israeli army - and it is becoming clear that many if not most of the Israeli civilian casualties

were caused by the trigger-happy murderers of the Israeli army.

It is also clear that the Zionists deliberately falsified what happened on that fateful day. There were stories of naked Israeli women being paraded in Gaza City, 40 beheaded babies and mass rapes. The portrayal of the indigenous population as sexual predators - which was a feature of the US Deep South - has become part of the Zionist propaganda mill.

If Hamas is 'the great unmentionable', that might be because the UK government has proscribed both its military and civilian wings as part of its own support of Israel's genocidal government. The British government is criminalising support for the Palestinians.

It should be clear, even to the arch-chauvinist Lazare, that Hamas's treatment of Israeli captives was in stark contrast to Israel's treatment of Palestinian captives. Some Zionist apologists have accounted for the reaction of Israeli hostages by saying that they suffered from Stockholm syndrome. If so, then it's strange that no Palestinian prisoners suffered from the same malady - but perhaps that is because they all suffered beatings, torture and food deprivation.

The reaction of fellow hostages towards Hamas fighters, whom they waved goodbye to and shook hands with, including the testimony of Yocheved Lifschitz, an 85-year-old woman who testified to her humane treatment, is in stark contrast to the reaction of Israel's Palestinian hostages. The military correspondent for Israel's Channel 13, Alon Ben David, said that he had spoken with some of the released captives. All said that the Hamas fighters had "gathered the members of each kibbutz together, which gave them a greater sense of comfort."⁴ The hospital employee, Avi Shoshan, who arranged Yocheved's press conference, is now facing dismissal for his actions in allowing the truth to ruin Israel's false narrative of Hamas barbarity.

The behaviour of these Israeli captives stands in marked contrast to the spiteful and shameful bigotry displayed by Lazare, who refuses to let the facts get in the way of his concession to Zionist racism. Lazare needs to understand what basic international solidarity means at a time when the Palestinians are facing a second Nakba ●

In December, Tony Greenstein was arrested on "suspicion of supporting a proscribed organisation", Hamas, on the basis of a single tweet on October 15. His computer equipment has been seized and he is currently on bail whilst the anti-terrorism police investigate. He will learn whether he is to be charged with an offence on March 20

Notes

1. www.trtworld.com/middle-east/israeli-mothers-letter-to-hamas-thank-you-for-extraordinary-humanity-16005866.
2. Over 5,000 Israeli soldiers injured since October 7, with 58% seriously: Israeli media, Middle East Monitor, December 9 2023: www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231209-over-5000-israeli-soldiers-injured-since-oct-7-with-58-seriously-israeli-media.
3. 'Principal wars in which the US participated - casualty ratios': stats.areppim.com/stats/stats_afghanxdeadwound.htm.
4. www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231128-israel-freed-captives-testify-to-being-treated-extremely-well-by-hamas.

IRAN

Threats mask timid actions

Yassamine Mather says that neither the US nor Iran want an all-out war, but after the assassination of Saleh al-Arouri in Beirut and the bomb attacks on Qasem Soleimani's admirers, tensions are reaching breaking-point



Qasem Soleimani: nearly a hundred killed going to his tomb

Foreign secretary David Cameron announced officially that, in a December 31 call with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, he made it abundantly clear that Iran shared responsibility for preventing Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, given their long-standing support. Innocent lives and the global economy are at risk, he warned.

The US claims that there have been some 100 Houthi attacks on shipping in just the last month. Joe Biden too wants to blame Iran. He sent yet another threatening message to Iran's rulers, this time via Saudi Arabia: control your proxies or face the consequences - presumably a threat of a US 'shock and awe' punishment strike.

Yet the Islamic Republic has tried, especially over the last few months, to maintain a difficult balancing act - restraining its so-called proxies in the region, while, for appearances sake, maintaining a suitable level of anti-Zionist rhetoric against Israel. The supreme leader's pronouncements have reflected the diverse and at times contradictory positions within the ruling circles. I shall try to explain.

To begin, a reminder of where we are at. In the immediate aftermath of October 7, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was quoted telling Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, on his visit to Tehran, that Iran was not aware of their plan and therefore cannot be expected to support them in the current Israel-Gaza war. Understandably, this was considered a poor excuse by very many Palestinians. They had expected a lot more from the much vaunted 'axis of resistance': Iran, Syria and Hezbollah. To add insult to injury, Iranian president Raisi attended the summit held in Riyadh on November 11: Iran's position turned out to be exactly the same as the conservative Arab monarchies. In terms of global politics, there were no differences between Iran and its new friend MBS in Saudi Arabia.

However, as the death toll began rising in Gaza, reaching tens of

thousands, pressure has increased on all Arab and Muslim countries to do something to stop Israel's ethnic cleansing and potential genocide.

Hitting ships

There have been some low level tit for tat exchanges by Hezbollah on the border with Israel; unverified claims by the pro-Iranian Islamic Resistance group in Iraq, which boasts that on December 29 it rocketed Israel's southernmost town of Eilat, on the Red Sea; and, more effectively, by the Houthis, who have succeeded in hitting ships heading for the Suez canal. Many companies have rerouted cargoes via the Cape and thereby added to final consumer prices.

US hopes of forming an international coalition to respond to Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping seems to be flailing. In late December the US established Operation Prosperity Guardian. However, many US allies do not want to come on board. Italy and Spain have, for example, publicly distanced themselves from the venture. It is also clear that the Houthis are unlikely to stop their Red Sea attacks, despite recent missile intercepts and the sinking of three of their boats.

The US administration has been keen to avoid an all-out war between Iran and Israel. That is why - in support of its key Middle Eastern ally, the Zionist state in Israel - the US has taken up the task of 'revenge' attacks against Iranian or pro-Iranian forces in Syria and Iraq. However, by all accounts the killing of Iranian commander Razi Moussavi in Syria, on December 25, was an Israeli assassination job. Moussavi was described by Tehran as "one of the most experienced advisers" of the Quds Force, the foreign arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

According to Iran's ambassador in Damascus, Hossein Akbari, the general's house was targeted "at 4:20pm (13:20 GMT) by three missiles ... The building was destroyed and Moussavi's body was later found in the yard." Hezbollah

issued a statement: "We consider this assassination a flagrant attack that crosses the limits" adding that Moussavi had supported the organisation for decades.

This was followed on January 2 by a drone strike on the Mashrifiyah area in the Dahiyeh district of Beirut, killing Saleh Arouri, a leading member of the political wing of Hamas. The area also houses Hezbollah offices and a number of apartments and cars close to Arouri's residence were destroyed: indicating multiple drone strikes.

Now we have the killing of at least 95 people in two bomb explosions near the tomb of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani on the fourth anniversary of his assassination by the US. Scores of others were injured in the January 3 attack which hit a procession near the Saheb al-Zaman mosque in the city of Kerman. Supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, vowed the "terrorist attack" would be met with a "harsh response".

However, who carried out this horror remains unknown. There are no claims from any groups for what is believed to have been the deadliest such attack in Iran in 42 years.

Although the threat of escalation between Hezbollah and Israel and potentially Iran and Israel has increased, there is still no sign that Iran or Hezbollah will start an all-out war with Israel. In some ways this is a reflection of major differences inside Iran on how to deal with the ongoing horror in Gaza.

Ultra-conservative sections of the Iranian clergy around major Shia seminaries have advocated a much harder line vis-a-vis Israel. But contrary to western and Israeli propaganda, Iran's official position has always been ambiguous. Until recently Iran has advocated a referendum in which the "original people" of Palestine - whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim - decide what government should run their country. However, in more recent statements, ayatollah Khamenei has not mentioned this position; instead he emphasises that Iran does not

seek "the destruction of the state of Israel".

True, ultra-conservative clerics in Qom have frothed and fulminated. For example grand ayatollah Hossein Nouri Hamedani stated on October 21: "It is necessary to go as far as the complete elimination of the brutal Israeli regime." Another hardline cleric, ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, addressing a small government-sponsored Palestine demonstration, reiterated that Israel "will certainly be destroyed. His seminary would stand by the Palestinians until the "full liberation of Quds [Jerusalem] and the formation of a Palestinian state."

All this is in complete contradiction to the pragmatic position of the supreme leader and the Raisi government, who are painfully aware of the risks facing Iran, should it advocate the destruction of the state of Israel or indeed start a diversionary war to relieve the besieged Gazan Palestinians.

Those advocating 'war until Qods is free', do not deny the apocalyptic consequences. However they claim to believe that, some time before the reappearance of the '12th and final Shia Imam' (Muhammad al-Mahdi, who is said by Shias to be currently alive, and hidden in the so-called 'major occultation' before he brings justice to the world), an army will be raised in Iran that will take control of Jerusalem. According to these 'believers', after their army retakes the city, "the 12th Imam will reappear".

Liberator

There are clerics in Iran who have argued over the last few years that ayatollah Khamenei is the legendary liberator of Jerusalem. Fortunately not many people, even amongst the power elite, share such crazed views. However, such marginalia is often picked up by Zionists and those who want a war with Iran.

Although ayatollah Khamenei has at times tried to distance himself from these ultras, his latest pronouncement, made on January 2 at one of the many gatherings

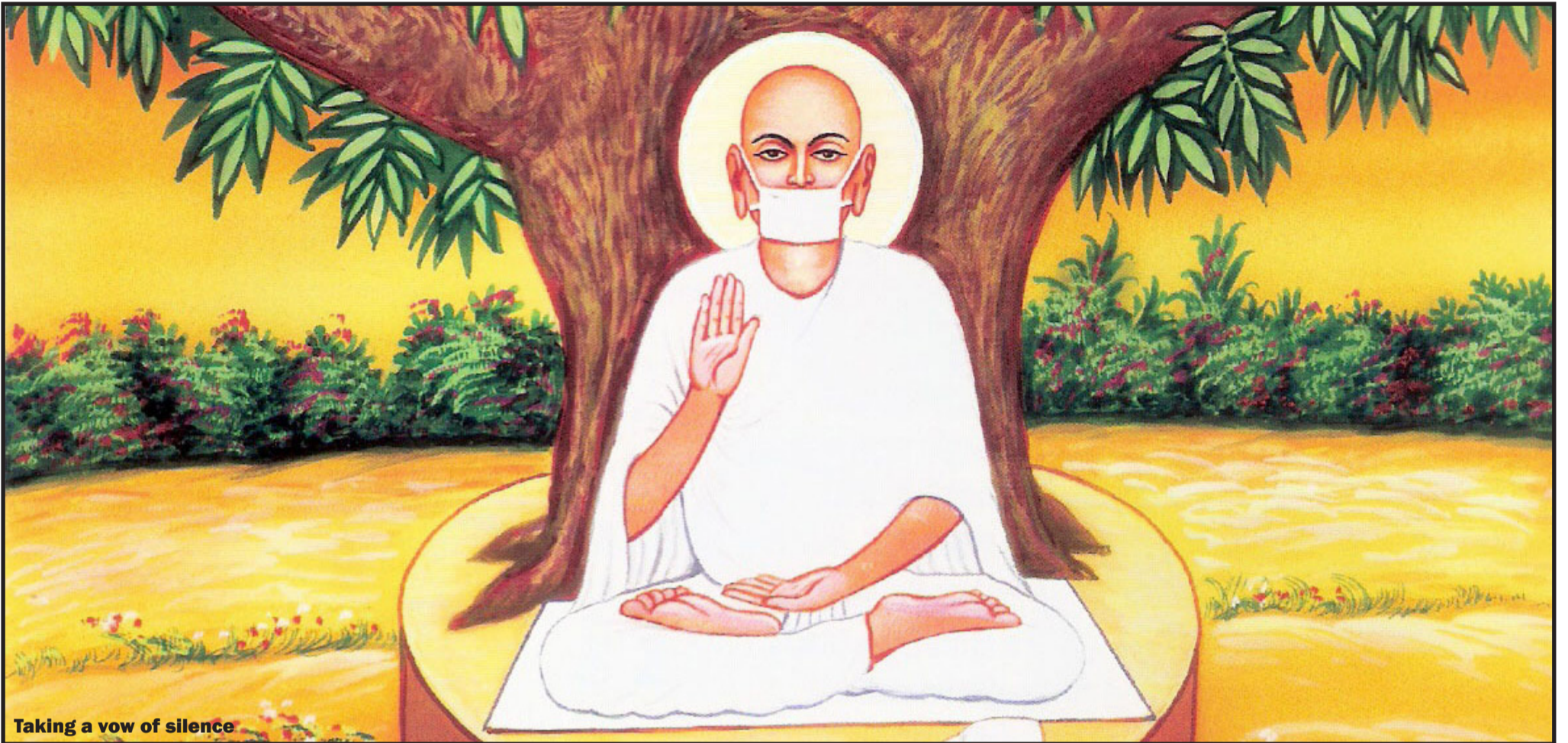
marking the anniversary of the US assassination of Soleimani - he met his widow and daughters - has rung alarm bells. Khamenei referred to a strange vision whereby he purportedly heard the voice of god. Of course if god is talking directly to Khamenei, he is on a par with the prophets. Someone should remind our supreme leader that the last Iranian dictator to make such a claim was the shah ... and he ended up dying in exile.

On the other wing of the Islamic Republic's many factions, the reformists have often advocated the 'two-state solution' in Israel-Palestine and there are now reliable reports from Qom and other seminaries that some younger Iranian clerics are doing the same. Of course, such a solution is completely unrealisable, but Iran's close relations with China and Russia, and not forgetting its renewed relations with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, push it in that direction diplomatically. Following Raisi's recent trip to Moscow, Iranian foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian claimed that Iran and Russia were working on "an initiative" - widely assumed to be a variation of the so-called two-state solution.

No doubt Benjamin Netanyahu and his allies, both amongst Trumpite US Republicans, but also warmongering Democrats, are looking for any excuse to expand the current war in Gaza to an all-out blitzkrieg against Hezbollah, Syria and Iran. In this context the cautious approach of Iran's rulers reveals their well-founded fears.

Meanwhile, in the opening days of 2024, Egyptian football fans, in their tens of thousands, showed their solidarity with Palestine, chanting: "we will fight and die with you". We have also witnessed a new round of mass protests in Amman, Kuwait, Bahrain and Bagdad. Yet the current situation in Iran is quite the reverse. There has not been a single major protest in any city in support of the Palestinians. For that we can and should blame the empty posturing of the theocratic regime ●

POLEMIC



Taking a vow of silence

Nothing positive to be gained

On the need for a new mass socialist/communist party: a reply to the CPGB-PCC from Talking About Socialism...from a Marxist point of view

In recent weeks there have been not a few references in the pages of the Weekly Worker to *Talking About Socialism...from a Marxist point of view*¹ (henceforth referred to as TAS, but we stress that 'from a Marxist point of view' is an essential part of its name and defines its politics). TAS has been the subject of several letters and articles. We've even featured as an item for discussion at a CPGB members' Aggregate (Weekly Worker, issue 1464²).

What's the background to this? In an article on the TAS website on 16 April 2023, 'No short cuts'³, Nick Wrack argued,

We need a new mass socialist party. This cannot be conjured out of thin air. It has to be built patiently, but urgently. It will be started by those who are convinced of this strategy, and this will inevitably involve small numbers at first...

The article concluded,

There are several Marxist groups in the UK at present. But they all work separately from one another. There are in addition many thousands, I would estimate, of Marxists who are not in any organisation at this time. We need to find a way to draw those 'independent' Marxists together to discuss the possibility of working in a more coherent and organised way. We need to raise the possibility of all Marxists, including the groups, of coming together to create a single, unified socialist/communist party, akin to the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920.

That would be a huge step forward. If you want to get involved, please contact us.

Nick Wrack followed this up in a further article dealing with the launching of the new Transform⁴ party, 'What sort of new party of the left?'⁵, published on the TAS website

on 29 July 2023. It concluded:

"We do need a new party. We need a mass socialist party. We cannot suck it out of our thumbs. Those who agree with the idea of building such a party should join with us, and with others, to build such a party. We would like to discuss our ideas with those involved in Transform and all others on the left. Socialists-communists (I use the words as meaning the same) need to work together to build the beginnings of a new mass socialist party. There are thousands of socialists-communists in Britain who are not in any existing organisation. We call on you to join our discussions. There are thousands of socialists in parties like the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal. These parties should be seeking to form a united new Socialist-Communist Party. Together we could build a serious, significant socialist-communist party which could dramatically transform the political landscape in the trade unions, and on the left in general."

On TAS 25 August 2023, TAS published a Statement,⁶ in which we introduced ourselves as:

a group of Marxists who believe that we urgently need a serious, democratic organisation for Marxist ideas and activity, with the aim of building support for socialist/communist ideas and for the construction of a mass socialist/communist party.

The Statement goes on to set out basic Marxist principles which we present as providing a good starting point for building socialist/communist unity towards the party objective. It ended with,

18. Through discussion and activity we aim to promote the ideas of socialism/communism, to make them popular within

the working class and to build a group that campaigns to bring into existence the embryo of the new mass socialist/communist party that we need. 19. To this end, we invite all who share our aims or who are interested in finding out more to join our discussions.

One might have expected a positive, maybe even mildly comradely, response from the CPGB leadership to our public advocacy for socialists/communists to work together to create the basis for a new, clearly defined socialist/communist party.

Instead, the response has been hostile, ranging from the aggrieved, peeved, indignant and disingenuous [Mike McNair] to the vitriolic and personally abusive [Jack Conrad]. Both Mike McNair and Jack Conrad are members of the hubristically named 'Communist Party of Great Britain - Provisional Central Committee' (CPGB-PCC). Far from welcoming it, they are both outraged at our audacity in calling for a new socialist/communist party.

This is a great pity. We in TAS believe that we have a lot of political ideas in common with the CPGB, as presented in Weekly Worker, even if we might have differences over how to engage with other socialists/communists, how to attract new adherents to socialism/communism, and how to conduct ourselves. The CPGB's present approach is clearly not attracting new members.

We have had a far more positive response from readers of the Weekly Worker.

Disingenuous

The first mention of TAS in the Weekly Worker came in an article by Mike McNair on 28 September 2023, *It's good to talk*⁷. After making some remarks about the Socialist Party Students' challenge to Socialist Appeal students to debate, with which we generally agree, Mike then turns, rather abruptly, to reflections on Prometheus⁸ (some of whose initiators are collaborating in TAS) and TAS

itself.

Here we get the disingenuity. He writes,

And it appears from comrade Wrack's July 29 article discussing the 'Transform' initiative, that he at least shares with us rejection of the project of building a new Labour Party.

Mike suggests that all might not be as it seems. Yet it is clearly set out in black and white. We are in favour of building an openly socialist/communist party, not a left-of-Labour Labour Party. And this approach goes back a long way, as Mike knows.

Mike quotes a large part of the extract from the TAS article that we quote above. He then purports to give a history of the two of us and attributes to us

[A] long history in the various broad-front projects.

It is a history much of which we share with the CPGB. We have sat in meetings of many of these projects with members of the CPGB. We have always tried to argue for socialist politics within them. We have also argued for a 'partyist' approach.

More to the point, Mike states:

It is great news if comrades Wrack and McMahon have drawn the lesson from experience to break with their long-standing commitment to broad-frontism to take an initiative to unify 'socialists-communists' as 'socialists-communists', rather than making broader unity round 'something less' a precondition for unity.

"If"? Mike knows from the articles referenced and others on the TAS website and from the Zoom debates that are recorded and public for all to see on YouTube that there is no *if*, which is used deliberately to suggest an element of doubt, uncertainty, or ambiguity: *you can't really expect us to take these people seriously!*

We do not have a "long-standing

commitment to broad-frontism", but have participated in broad fronts to argue for socialist ideas. Nor have we ever made "broader unity round 'something less' a precondition for unity". In fact, we have argued the opposite⁹. We have been communists since the late 1970s. Since our induction into the revolutionary Marxist movement, we have each shared a belief in the necessity of a specifically socialist/communist party, with a programme for the fundamental transformation of society, carried out by the working class.

More than this, though. Even if Mike disagrees with the full extent of our own self-assessment, he is well aware that we have been publicly and actively arguing the same position since our drafting, with others, of the Socialist Platform¹⁰ in Left Unity, which we initiated with others in 2013. It was so 'broad frontist' that Mike and Jack, and all members of the CPGB signed it. In addition to the Socialist Platform itself, there are other articles from that period, including in the pages of the Weekly Worker, arguing for a clearly defined socialist party, meaning a party committed to the abolition of capitalism and its replacement by a society based on common ownership and democratic planning.¹¹

In Mike's own recent article, "Unity based on solid principles"¹² he refers to a previous article of his in 2013¹³, in which he wrote, "Should LU describe itself as 'socialist'? Nick Wrack has argued that it should", and refers to Nick's article of 21 May 2013 on the Left Unity website, "Socialism or something less?"¹⁴ He can't pretend he doesn't know.

Then comes the real issue for Mike and Jack: our failure to specifically reference the CPGB. What a slight! We did not explain "why a *new* initiative is necessary." Well, we weren't aware that one already existed. Moreover, exclaims Mike, we did not explain "why it is *inappropriate* to unify efforts in this direction with the CPGB, which has been arguing for 30 years for a regroupment of communists as communists..."

Nowhere do we suggest that it would be inappropriate to discuss with the CPGB how to jointly advance such a project. Far from it. It was implicit in our open appeals to the whole world that we wanted anyone with whom the call resonated to respond - but we expected a more positive response from those who claim to share the same objective. Contrary to Mike's assertion, we do not believe that discussing socialist differences is a waste of time. We think it is very important - essential, even.

Mike ends with a rather silly response, like a child stomping his foot in the playground. He won't engage with our call for discussion. He issues his own call. "I was here first."

In our short article in response to Mike, carried in Weekly Worker (issue 1462, 12 Oct 2023), under the Editor's title, 'Get in touch with us'¹⁵, we decided to ignore the silliness. We set out our aims and objectives in a little detail, which we don't repeat here. For a small group like ours, we are pleased with the ripples of interest that our Statement and articles have generated, and we hope to be able to engage more with comments and criticisms than we have so far been able to do. We appeal to all those who agree with our Statement - or who at least accept it as a basis for collaboration - to get in touch¹⁶.

Following our reply, Jack Conrad took up the cudgels. In 'Getting in Touch' (Weekly Worker, Issue 1463, 19 October¹⁷) he, like Mike, complains about our call for communist unity. How dare we not mention the CPGB! Sin of sins! We do not genuflect to the CPGB's "four decades of open, tireless and undeviating struggle for a mass Communist Party". The CPGB, we are told, "towers above" TAS. "Towers", I tell you! Unfortunately, there appears to be no-one in the CPGB able to restrain Jack and tell him gently that his words might be a tad over the top.

Apparently, only the CPGB has the right to call for a united communist party. When TAS does it, or argues against 'broad left' party projects, we are "plagiarists".

"[N]owhere is the CPGB mentioned," Jack exclaims, "and, therefore, nowhere do they set out their points of agreement and points of disagreement with the CPGB, which would, of course, be the only serious - the only honest - thing to do, especially when writing in the Weekly Worker. Despite that, the two of them have the nerve to lambast the confessional sects for ignoring "each other, pretending that they are the only band in town, insulating or inoculating their members against the ideas of other Marxists"."

Apparently, we must apologise for not having written the article that the CPGB-PCC demanded of us. Our article was an explanation of who we are, setting out briefly our priorities. It was not an engagement directly with the politics of the CPGB. One might have thought that sending our article to the Weekly Worker was a clear indication that we thought the CPGB might be interested in what we had to say.

"Their current failure to engage with - even to mention - the CPGB testifies to opportunism in matters of organisation."

Does it? Really?

And so ensued a heap of ordure poured over us personally and others associated with our project. Politically, we are dismissed as 'born-again communists'. You see, the only real Marxists are to be found in the CPGB-PCC. Everyone else is a 'poseur'. Like the leaders of all sects, they assert that you can't be a true believer if you're

not in their particular one.

To make the point that the CPGB are the real deal, while we are counterfeit, the article is illustrated by an image of two lions, side by side. One is a big, fully maned, adult, male lion. Next to him is a cuddly toy lion, forlornly diminished in the great cat's presence. You have to smile.

Jack implies that the Socialist Platform in Left Unity came after the Communist Platform of the CPGB. This is wrong. It was initiated by several of us who were active in the Independent Socialist Network. We took the step of approaching the CPGB to see if it would support it. It did. Its members signed it.

The Communist Platform was launched later, after a meeting of some, but not all, Socialist Platform signatories voted not to accept amendments to the document from the CPGB but to take only indicative votes on them. This outraged the CPGB-PCC and led to them launching their own Communist Platform and attributing false motives and bad procedure to those of us who initiated the Socialist Platform.

Our argument for not taking the amendments was simple. A huge amount of work had gone into drafting it and then getting people to sign it. We had originally thought that it would be possible to amend it. However, we became concerned that were the document, which by then a large number of people had signed, to be changed without consulting them and involving them in the decision to make changes, we couldn't be sure that they would still support it.

Putting it bluntly, we could not properly get people's signatures to one document and then present a different one to which they had not agreed. There was no desire to placate or protect the Alliance for Workers' Liberty or to hide our politics. Rightly or wrongly, the reason was that simple. The CPGB argued that those present at the meeting should have the right to decide. That is, indeed, what happened. To the CPGB's annoyance, those present at the meeting decided to take only an indicative vote on the amendments.

In our view, the CPGB-PCC realised too late that our initiative to launch the Socialist Platform was something that it should have done. They realised that our initiative exposed their own lack of initiative on the very issue they claim to have the monopoly - socialist/communist unity. They used the disagreement as justification for belatedly launching its own Communist Platform, which thus weakened the united force of socialists/communists going to the Left Unity conference. Subsequently, we voted for both platforms at the conference and encouraged other Socialist Platform signatories to do the same.

Nick Wrack is described as having a 'visceral hostility' towards organised communists, yet the CPGB, it is claimed, wanted him on its PCC¹⁸.

Jack continues in his condescending, patronising, disparaging and insulting manner. Read it again if you doubt us. This is his 'harsh polemic'. We have been around a long time; we have thick skins, so the lashing is laughable. We don't believe these methods are persuasive, edifying, or inclusive. They are, in fact, designed to repel, rather than to attract.

Appeal to all socialists/communists

Jack disparages those socialists who are not at this time in any existing Marxist group and who might be attracted to TAS discussions and activity.

"The appeal of TAS is to the disappointed, the demoralised,

the hurt, even the downright cynical. More of a trauma recovery group than a serious organisation of communists then."

No. The appeal of TAS is to every worker, young person, and anyone else who wants to see an end to the nightmare of life under capitalism. If some have been disappointed, demoralised, hurt, or even become cynical, yet want to be reinvigorated and motivated to get involved, then we are more than happy to provide a home.

The CPGB-PCC may want to go through the existing left but its manner of engagement is counter-productive and it has little, if anything, to show for its efforts. We have many disagreements with the existing organised Marxist left but in hard times anyone who has stayed committed to Marxist ideas has to be commended. We hope one day to be in a mass socialist/communist party with them, and with the CPGB.

There are many serious comrades who are not in any of the organised Marxist groups, who are still there, plugging away in their unions, workplaces, community groups and solidarity networks, who we hope to reach. We believe that many can once more be galvanised in the face of continued attacks on our class into an organised force for socialist/communist change. We don't write anyone off. And, yes, we do also want to attract new layers. Most of them won't turn to the CPGB because its invective is repulsive. However much the CPGB-PCC thinks it a strength, it isn't. It puts up an unnecessary barrier to anyone who might want to learn more or get involved.

The reality is that the CPGB-PCC has made little headway in its four decade campaign for communist unity and has not done so for a very long time. The frustration and disappointment at the lack of progress peeks out occasionally - much more so, recently - in the letters' pages of Weekly Worker, and in the reports of its Aggregates.

In the week following Jack's article, on 26 October 2023, the Weekly Worker carried a report of a CPGB members' Aggregate, by one James Harvey¹⁹. Does James Harvey exist? The use of multiple names for the same author is a dishonest way to present to the world the impression that there are more comrades involved in the production of the Weekly Worker than there actually are. The Weekly Worker has carried articles in the past criticising other socialist organisations for inflating membership figures. The Weekly Worker should practise what it preaches.

The report reveals the enraged animus of the CPGB-PCC to TAS.

We have little time for recent 'do your own thing' initiatives such as Nick Wrack's and Will McMahon's Talking About Socialism project, the broad parties/fronts past, present and future, the freelance gadflies and the little army of the lost and lonely.

One gets the impression that the last thing the CPGB-PCC wants is new members. Jack Conrad argues for the need to "actively maintain barriers stopping people from entering the CPGB." It's hard to reconcile this with a 'communist unity' project. They don't want new members but criticise anyone who hasn't applied to join or made an approach to work with them.

The Weekly Worker's attempt to inoculate readers from our appeal for unity in a common project towards the creation of a new socialist/communist party will not work. In

fact, it has already backfired, in that it has sent readers to us. We may be very small. But we're not going away.

Following the articles cited above, the CPGB-PCC sent TAS an invitation to debate our differences and points of agreement. However, the hostility demonstrated in those articles shows that the invitation is disingenuous; it cannot be taken seriously.

We are small, new, and our priority at this stage is to develop our network, publications and Zoom discussions. In the New Year we hope to organise face-to-face meetings in selected towns and cities. At this stage we see nothing positive to be gained by discussing with the CPGB-PCC, which already has a pre-determined and hostile assessment of who we are and our value to the cause of socialism/communism. We therefore decline the invitation.

We do hope that relations will improve and that at some stage in the not-too-distant future we may both find it possible to discuss on a more rational and comradely basis.

We look forward to a time when all - TAS, CPGB, and all other Marxist organisations and individuals who share the goal of international socialism/communism - are in the same party. A mass socialist party is sorely needed.

Comradely,

Will McMahon
Nick Wrack
On behalf of TAS
7 December 2023

The authors insisted that this article must be published without changes to "style, tone, grammar and punctuation", which they say are "personal matters". We are therefore not responsible for the spelling and other errors

Notes

1. talkingaboutsocialism.org.
2. 'Opportunism in matters of organisation' Weekly Worker October 26 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1464/opportunism-in-matters-of-organisation.
3. talkingaboutsocialism.org/no-short-cuts.
4. transformpolitics.uk.
5. talkingaboutsocialism.org/what-sort-of-new-party-of-the-left.
6. talkingaboutsocialism.org/about.
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8. prometheusjournal.org.
9. 'Socialism - or something less', May 21 2013: leftunity.org/socialism-or-something-less.
10. leftunity.org/socialist-platform-statement-of-aims-and-principles.
11. 'For a mass socialist party, democracy is essential', February 7 2013: leftunity.org/for-a-mass-socialist-party-democracy-is-essentia; 'Is a new left party possible and what should it be like?', February 28 2013: leftunity.org/left-unity-meeting-three; 'Tusc: let's get this party started - the current Tusc model has failed, March 7 2013: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/952/tusc-lets-get-this-party-started; 'What sort of mass party do we need?' A talk to the April 27 2013 CPGB London Communist Forum. It was published under the heading, 'How can we supersede the sects?' (Weekly Worker May 2 2013: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/960/nick-wrack-how-can-we-supersede-the-sects). It was also published on the Left Unity website under the title, 'Socialism and Unity' (leftunity.org/unityandsocialism); 'Socialism - or something less', May 21 2013: leftunity.org/socialism-or-something-less.
12. Weekly Worker November 2 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1465/unity-based-on-solid-principles. Mike references Nick Wrack's article.
13. 'Broad parties: theories of deception' Weekly Worker June 20 2013: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/967/broad-parties-theories-of-deception.
14. leftunity.org/socialism-or-something-less.
15. 'Get in touch with us' Weekly Worker October 12 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1462/get-in-touch-with-us.
16. talkingaboutsocialism.org/contact-us.
17. 'Getting in touch' Weekly Worker October 19 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1463/getting-in-touch.
18. This was never canvassed with Nick.
19. 'Opportunism in matters of organisation' Weekly Worker October 26 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1464/opportunism-in-matters-of-organisation.

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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Cop28 was a
virtue signalling
jamboree

Record-breaking in the wrong way

Storms, floods, drought and fire on an almost biblical scale presage social breakdown. It is socialism or barbarism, says **Eddie Ford**

Globally we had record temperatures, sizzling heatwaves, devastating floods, wildfires, fierce storms, and all manner of other extreme weather events in 2023 - with no signs of letting up.

Just over the past few days Storm Henk has battered the UK with over 300 flood warnings after large parts of England and Wales saw strong winds and heavy rain leading to flooding, travel disruption and power outages. The strongest gust of wind recorded on land was 81mph at Exeter airport in Devon. Nearly a week earlier, a small tornado tore through Greater Manchester during Storm Gerrit, leading to three fatalities after a car became submerged in the River Esk amid ferocious weather and severe flooding. Though it would be a mistake to Cassandra-like ascribe every weather event to human-induced global warming, it is hard not to see the impact of climate change on the frequency of storms. We know that increased sea surface temperatures warm the air above and make more energy available to drive hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons. As a result, they are likely to be more intense and come with extreme rainfall.

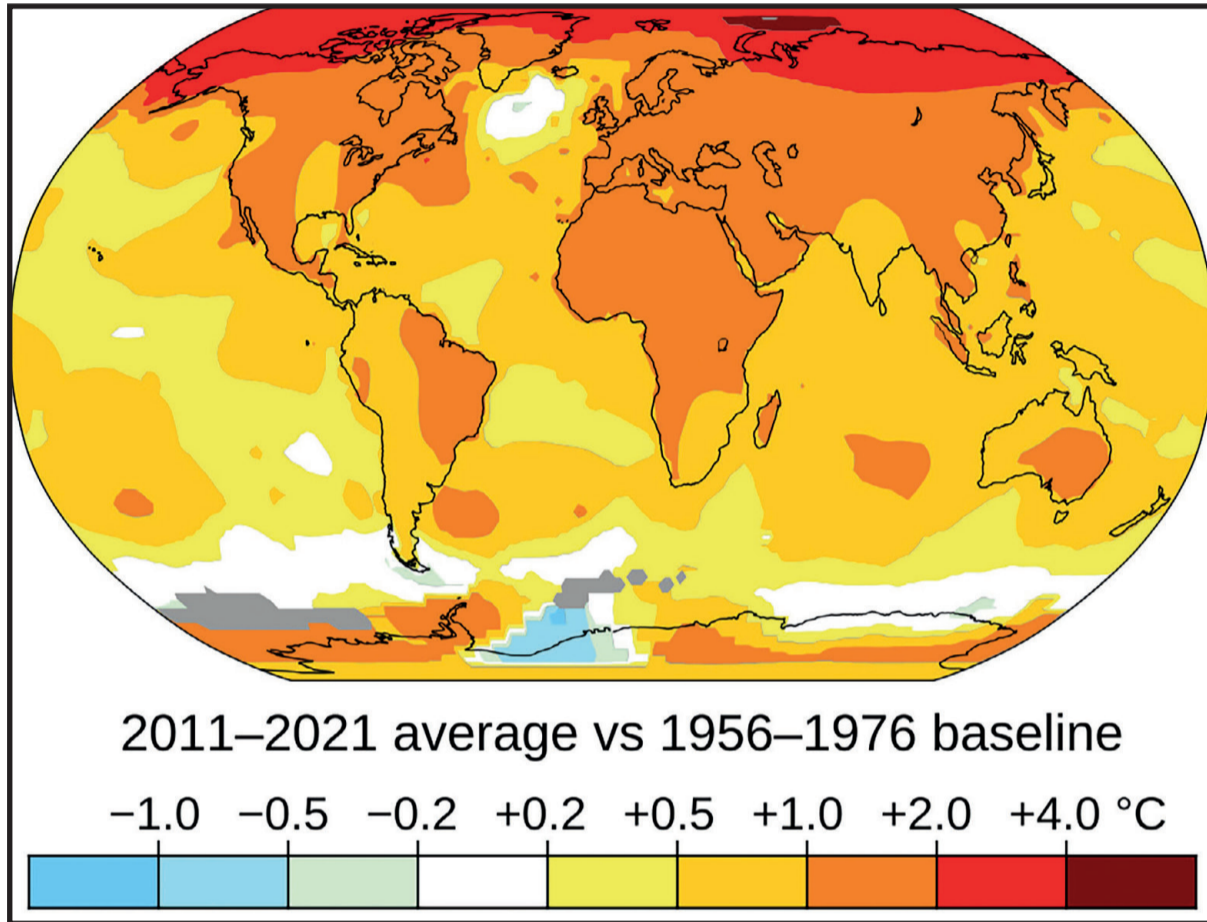
All this followed the not particularly surprising news that the UK had its second-hottest year on record in 2023, according to provisional data from the Met Office - the average temperature at 9.97°C was marginally lower than the 10.03°C recorded in the previous year. Such a warm year, they say, would have occurred only "once in 500 years" without global warming. The heat peaked in June and September, both record hot months in a series dating back to 1884, and the UK's 10 warmest years have all occurred since 2003. In today's overheated climate, the Met Office reckons that such warm years are to be expected every three years.

Ever higher

But it is the same pattern throughout the world. As widely chronicled, including in these pages, the world experienced the highest mean temperature on record for the first 11 months of 2023 at 1.46°C above the pre-industrial average. Hence, from January to November, the average was 0.13°C higher than 2016, which was previously the warmest calendar year on record.

Now, some of this can be attributed to the El Niño event which arrived in June. A totally natural phenomenon, of course, it emerges from the central and eastern Pacific near the equator, and is responsible for the warming and cooling of large areas of the ocean - which significantly influences changes in global temperature and where and how much it rains. The outcome being six record-breaking months and two record-breaking seasons in the northern hemisphere.

Thus June, July and August brought the hottest summer by a large margin, with a global average of 16.77°C, a 0.66°C rise. While September, October and November



Temperature change in the last 50 years

made for the warmest autumn with an average temperature of 15.30°C, which was 0.88°C higher than the previous average. As for July, globally it was the *hottest month ever recorded*, also by a large margin, at 16.95°C - beating the previous record set in July 2019 by 0.33°C. But just be glad you were not living in Phoenix, Arizona, that saw a life-sucking 31 days of temperatures reaching 43°C or higher between June 30 to July 30, surpassing by two days the 2020 record.

China had its own extreme weather last year, of course. In late July and into early August, typhoon Doksuri unleashed 744.8mm of rainfall at a reservoir on the outskirts of Beijing, the highest since 1891. In the US, pre-existing drought conditions and winds from hurricane Dora resulted in the deadliest wildfire for more than 100 years - at least a hundred died, with many thousands evacuated and over 2,000 structures destroyed. And in late August to early September, wildfires in northern Greece became the largest ever in the European Union, with 93,000 hectares burnt. And on, and on, and on. Not for nothing did the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration calculate in mid-December that there was a "greater than 99% chance" that 2023 would turn out to be the hottest year in its 174-year dataset.

Ominously, the pattern outlined above looks set to continue, if November was anything to go by - being the warmest November ever recorded. On November 17 and 18, the earth's global average surface temperature was more than 2°C higher than pre-industrial levels - the first time scientists have ever

recorded such a reading. Given that the El Niño effect is set to reach its full strength in the northern hemisphere this winter, more extreme weather events are likely to be unleashed in 2024.

Warming oceans

Out of all these statistics, perhaps most disturbing of all was the sharp increase in sea surface temperatures, which have been abrupt even for an El Niño year. Climate scientists do not yet fully understand why the ocean heat increase has been so dramatic, nor what the consequences will be for the future. First signs of a state shift? A freak outlier? Indeed, ocean temperatures began reaching new highs long before El Niño kicked in.

But whatever the exact reasons, from late March through to October the world's average sea surface temperature consistently broke daily records. By July, these temperatures were nearly 1°C above average, as marine heat waves racked nearly half of the globe's oceans, and the European Union-funded Copernicus Climate Change Service - using billions of measurements from satellites, ships, aircraft and weather stations around the world - found that October marked the sixth consecutive month that Antarctic sea ice was at record lows for the time of year at 11% below average.

In fact, western Antarctica was affected by several winter heatwaves associated with the landfall of atmospheric rivers. In early July, a Chilean team on King George Island, at the northern tip of the Antarctic peninsula, registered an unprecedented event of rainfall in

the middle of the austral winter when only snowfalls are expected. In January, a massive iceberg, measuring about 1,500 square kilometres, broke off from the Brunt ice shelf in the Weddell Sea. It was the third colossal calving in the same region in three years. Sea surface temperatures hit an average of 20.79°C, the highest on record for October, and Europe saw above-average rainfall - notably in Storm Babet, which hit northern Europe, and Storm Aline, which impacted on Portugal and Spain, bringing heavy downpours and flooding. It almost goes without saying that such warm waters are unprecedented in modern records - maybe even for the last 125,000 years. Ocean life suffered, naturally, as the relentless accumulation of all that heat took its toll. Coral reefs suffered widespread bleaching across the Gulf of Mexico, the northern Atlantic, the Caribbean and the eastern Pacific.

Looking at all this, James Hansen - director of the climate programme at Columbia University's Earth Institute and whose 1988 testimony to the US Senate is widely regarded as the first high-profile revelation of global heating - has warned that the world was moving towards a "new climate frontier" with temperatures higher than at any point over the past million years. He is far from alone in having such fears. Five years earlier, the authors of the 'Hothouse earth' paper envisioned a domino-like cascade of melting ice, warming seas and dying forests, which could tilt the planet into a state beyond which human efforts to reduce emissions will be increasingly futile. As we look at the dramatic rise in sea

surface temperatures last year, this seems more and more of a possibility.

James Hansen has said the best hope is for a "generational shift" of leadership, which shows, of course, that while he is doubtless an outstanding climate scientist, he simply does not get social science. The climate crisis can be summed-up in four short words: it's the economy, stupid.

Obviously that is not a message that those who attend the annual Cop jamborees want to hear. Instead they use these vast conferences to virtue signal and haggle over resolutions that have absolutely no effect in the real world. Cop28, held in Expo City, Dubai, last year, was par for the course. Over 70,000 people given accreditation for the event, with 400,000 more granted access to the surrounding "blue zone". The whole thing is said to have had the largest carbon footprint of any climate summit - very many using private jets to swan in and swan out.

Fitting

Putting Sultan Al Jaber in charge of the proceedings could not have been more fitting - he is CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company and we all know what he really thinks. Before the conference had even begun he was complaining that there was "no science" behind fossil fuel being phased-out and achieving the target of limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5°C as set out in the 2015 Paris Accords. Indeed there were plenty of stories doing the rounds that the UAE used the conference to strike new oil and gas deals. Still, what did you expect?

So what was achieved? For years, the Cop negotiations had been bogged down in arguments about whether to call for a "phase out" or "phase down" of fossil fuels - countries such as Russia, Saudi Arabia and China rejecting the 'phase out' formulation, instead they want 'phase down'. And praise be to god, Al Jaber was able to proudly announce that a final compromise agreement had been reached.

The joint resolution now says "transition away" from carbon energy sources. Naturally, this is going to be done "in a just, orderly and equitable manner" to "mitigate" the worst effects of climate change, and net zero will be magically reached by 2050. But it won't. On present trends the world is set to exceed the 1.5°C limit very soon and then hurtle towards 2°C and doubtless beyond. What that means for 2050, 2070, 2100 is extraordinarily difficult to tell in climate terms. Socially, however, the danger is clear - descent into some kind of barbarism.

Civilisation still might be saved, however, but it can only be saved through the working class organising into a party and taking power at a global level. There can be no local or national solutions. Protest politics are clearly inadequate. It really is a case of socialism or barbarism ●