

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



Alexei Navalny: the death of a persistent critic and irritant to Putin's FSB-capitalist regime

- Letters and debate
- Andrew Feinstein PPC
- Ukraine: two years on
- Strategy polemic

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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PALESTINE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

LETTERS



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

Left opposition

Your entertaining article on the February 3 Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition convention in Birmingham is rightly scathing about the state of the left ('Farical Labour Party mark two', February 8). We agree it is split into umpteen "sects, grouplets and 'parties'", each "doing their own thing", yet they are mostly pushing the same political programme which is a variant of Corbyn's left Labourism. But what is the CPGB doing about it?

There is an urgent need for a strong, united, working class opposition to the Tories and Starmer's Labour in the election. The left must join forces in a common electoral platform representing the interests of the working class. Tusc's campaign draws a class line that is sorely needed. It provides a vehicle for working class opposition to Labour, while allowing participating groups the freedom to run their own independent campaigns.

Communist unity is a constant theme in your press. But what's the point of it if you're not prepared to fight for unity of the working class against Starmer in the election? Communist unity cannot be separated from the struggle to unite the working class against its class enemy. Your article criticises Tusc, sometimes along the same lines as we do, yet you put forward no proposal for working class opposition to Starmer. That makes you no different than the myriad other "sects, grouplets and 'parties'" that your article decries.

As a way out of the present impasse of the left, we propose a public debate with you on the theme: what strategy for communists in the election? Even better, we should encourage other groups to participate in a panel discussion and debate our differences openly, all the while putting to the fore how to advance the interests of our class.

Our perspective is laid out in our February 9 leaflet, 'Why the Spartacist League supports Tusc and why other groups should do the same'. It challenges the British bourgeoisie on 'red line' questions, saying:

1. Liberation of Palestine;
2. Down with Nato;
3. Expropriate the banks;
4. Citizenship for immigrants;
5. Down with the monarchy.

By sharply opposing the bourgeoisie on these questions, our programme also draws a line against the Labour and trade union lefts. At the Tusc convention we put forward amendments, one of which stated that we should only support left Labour candidates (eg, Zarah Sultana) if they oppose a Starmer government. By voting down that amendment, Tusc is keeping the door open to unity with those 'lefts' who will support a Starmer government. That gets to the core of our criticism of Tusc. Its aim is to breathe new life into Corbynism using the same "broad church" model of unity with the right wing as Corbyn did, with disastrous results.

Contrary to the letter published in the *Weekly Worker* ('Tusc and Sparts', February 15), our approach to the election does not contradict the description of Tusc in *Workers Hammer* (No251) as "an openly reformist 'broad church' electoral coalition, to

revive the Corbyn movement, oblivious to the fact that Corbynism already proved its bankruptcy precisely because of its reformist, 'broad church' programme". This political characterisation of Tusc is completely valid and we restated it at the convention. Our approach is to fight for communist politics inside Tusc. Our criticisms of it, including our amendments, if adopted, would *strengthen* Tusc as a vehicle for working class opposition to Starmer.

The working class is weak, atomised and demoralised as a result of the defeat of the strike wave. Unity of the class is of paramount importance for rebuilding its fighting capacity and preparing for future battles. The *Weekly Worker* is right to condemn the lack of unity and reformist illusions on the left. But are you prepared to do something to overcome these? Let's at least debate the issue.

Eibhlin McColgan
Spartacist League

New Zoom series

Readers of the *Weekly Worker* might be interested in two new Zoom series that are being launched jointly by Why Marx? and the Labour Left Alliance on March 7. Our current series on 'The History of Israel-Palestine' has been hugely successful: the introductions have been of outstanding quality and many of them have found their way into the *Weekly Worker*. An average of 130 people have been attending our weekly meetings on Thursdays at 7pm; dozens more have been following the livestreams on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, while the edited videos have been watched by thousands.

We are hoping many of those - and perhaps even a few new faces - will join us on Zoom for the two new series that will run on alternate weeks. On March 7, we start the 'Communist Culture Club', which will run every two weeks and discuss not just new (and old!) films, podcasts and books, but also take a look at cultural questions in the broadest sense of the word. In our first session, for example, Roger Silverman will take a look at 'Shakespeare from a Marxist perspective', while actor Tam Dean Burn will give his impression of the opera, *Marx in London!*, that is currently playing in Glasgow and Edinburgh. We will also hear from Ben Lewis, who will (re-)acquaint the audience with the "radical roots" of International Women's Day on March 8 and the role played by German communist Clara Zetkin.

In the following session on March 21, comrade Dan Lazare will discuss if socialists should reject Orwell, "just because the right love him"; Anne McShane will introduce the audience to the Palestinian poet and writer, Mourid Barghouti, while Tam Dean Burn will discuss "why the third Intifada will be cultural". In future sessions, Chris Stafford and Cat Rylance will lead a discussion on 'Why communists stand in elections'; Harry Paterson will explain 'Why socialists shouldn't be reverse snobs about opera' and Simon Hannah asks, 'Is the film *In time* the most Marxist film ever?'

We are still playing with the format and will adjust timings and introductions as necessary, so hopefully comrades will bear with us! We are very open to proposals for shorter or longer introductions, film reviews, discussions about your favourite book, etc. Please email proposals to info@whymarx.com.

From March 14, Ian Spencer will be presenting a bi-weekly series called 'The ABC of Marxism', in

which we want to rediscover some of the basic ideas of Marx and Engels - and their political method. Too often, their work has been split up into economics, politics and philosophy, when clearly their ideas in these areas are deeply interlinked. We want to recombine those ideas and present them in a coherent and hopefully entertaining and thought-provoking manner, to help new generations discover just why Marx and Engels have been so important in our working class history. But we also want to reach the long-term socialists and communists with whom we've had such fruitful discussions about Marxism in our previous sessions. Discussing and sometimes arguing over their ideas in an open and democratic way is the best way to learn and perhaps reassess some of their work.

Comrade Spencer will start the series with a look at Marx's and Engels' crucial concept of the "working class as the gravedigger of capitalism", in the context of the transition of feudalism to capitalism and how their 'lived experience' in Germany and England helped shape their ideas. The comrade has planned eight sessions, but who knows where the series takes us - we've been known to expand and adjust sessions according to the debates with the audience.

Sign up to both series to keep abreast with the timetables, etc, at www.whymarx.com/sessions.

Why Marx? and LLA
email

Factions

Comrade Andrew Northall has reverted back to anti-faction absolutism - he wants communists to ban factions in the party (Letters, February 15). Previously he argued that, although factions are clearly sometimes an historical necessity, they should not be aimed for or constitutionally enshrined (Letters, February 1). Now the comrade makes his position clear when he says bluntly: "They should not be permitted."

According to Andrew, the correct application of democratic centralism on the basis of Marxism-Leninism (a theory and practice which collapsed in the former Soviet Union) allows members ample opportunities in their branches and on elected higher committees to influence and shape policy. In this fantasy world, Communist Party members always act as individuals in their effort to influence or change party policy. But we know that in real life people will have co-thinkers who seek to win over the party. That is the essence of a faction, not its organisational form.

Since factions produce and distribute their own material, informed party members will know what they stand for and can evaluate them on this basis. Like most things in life, they have a negative and a positive side. They can be disruptive, but who can deny that factions also sharpen your political wits, raising your consciousness to a higher level?

If factions are sometimes historically necessary, why should they be banned? Communists need not advocate factions, because having factions is not an ideal situation, but it may be necessary to form one - therefore formally banning them would be wrong. I certainly don't advocate factions, but I would argue against banning them for the reason given previously by Andrew: they may be necessary at certain stages.

There has never been a case in history where a communist party had independently taken power on the basis of banning factions, and

we can be certain that we will never be provided with an example of one. The automatic banning of factions in the party is a sign that the party is becoming bureaucratized. It is essentially a sign that a totalitarian leadership is taking over. Most of these bureaucrats are usually not candidates for leading communism to power. In Russia, the banning of factions came after the Bolsheviks won the civil war, and the revolution was victorious. But Andrew wants to ban factions before the revolution, and even before the communists have won over the working class. This simply leads to a bureaucratized party before, instead of after, the revolution and reduces the chances of such a party ever taking power independently. The two best examples of a communist party coming to power independently were the Bolsheviks and the Communist Party of China - and both had factions.

Lenin was not the origin of faction phobia. The *Dictionary of political thought* by Roger Scruton explains that "Fear of, and hostility towards, factions motivated much of the 16th and 17th century absolutism, and subsequent constitutionalism often had, as one of its aims, the stilling of faction through permanent procedures of balance and conciliation" (p164).

Faction phobia is clearly not new, and hostility towards them was behind much of the absolutism of the past - just as it is behind much of the totalitarian mindset today. Since the question of factions has a long political history, we should not be too surprised that this issue arose within the context of communism. Nor should we be surprised that it arose within Russian communism, given the political tradition of tsarist absolutism, which due to negative events found its reflection in communist ranks at the highest level. When Lenin banned factions he was simply reverting back to Russia's political past, which was tsarist absolutism.

If we ban factions (although,

as I have pointed out, Andrew previously told us they may sometimes be necessary), we give an important weapon to bourgeois counterrevolution in the party and socialist state. As communists, we don't need to advocate factions, but we don't need to ban them either. Why? Because sometimes they might be necessary.

Finally, Andrew says that I persistently assert that the Bolsheviks should not have made a revolution in 1917. This is not my view, and I have never argued it. What I argue is that Russia was not ready for the transition to socialism, and therefore Lenin was wrong to go over to Trotskyist-style ultra-leftism and start a *socialist* revolution. It was on this basis that Trotsky joined the party. The Bolsheviks should have led a radical democratic revolution in a united front with the other socialist parties on the basis of a mixed economy. Lenin's New Economic Policy, originally promoted by Trotsky, was a late recognition that this strategy was correct.

When the Mensheviks pointed out that the Bolsheviks were stealing their policy, they were arrested. But they had contributed to their own fate by walking out of the soviets when the Bolsheviks seized power.

Tony Clark
For Democratic Socialism

Revolution?

Hannu Reime, the pedantic academic from Helsinki, objects to my characterisation of the Maidan events of 10 years ago as a "US-sponsored counterrevolutionary coup", because there was no revolution and therefore there could be no counterrevolution.

Certainly neither "Viktor Yanukovich, the super-rich, super-corrupted then-president of Ukraine" (who was also democratically elected, he forgot to mention), nor Vladimir Putin were revolutionaries of any shape or form, I must agree. But they were never the main enemy: that remains US imperialism, and the Kiev regime is its proxy in the

Online Communist Forum



Sunday February 25 5pm
Two years since the launch of the 'special military operation' - 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 and
Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk
For further information, email Stan Keable at
Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk

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

assault on the global south and all its enemies, as it tries to halt and reverse its historic declining grip on the world. Its aims of continuing to suck the lifeblood out of Africa, south-east Asia and all semi-colonial lands is now approaching World War III. Victoria Nuland's "fuck the EU" and installing the US preferred candidate in power and the admitted \$5 billion they spent in preparing and organising the Maidan coup might assist Hannu in working out the rights and wrongs of the conflict.

But, if we consult Wikipedia, we discover that there was indeed a revolution - the 'Revolution of Dignity', which triumphed magnificently. They were fighting "widespread government corruption and abuse of power, the influence of Russia and oligarchs, police brutality, human rights violations, and repressive anti-protest laws". And there was a counterrevolution: "Pro-Russian, counterrevolutionary protests erupted in southern and eastern Ukraine. Russia occupied and then annexed Crimea, while armed pro-Russian separatists seized government buildings and proclaimed the independent states of Donetsk and Luhansk, sparking the Donbas war."

Please do not mention the Odessa Trade Union House massacre of May 2 2014, where fascists killed at least 46 inside that building (relatives claim up to 100 were slaughtered), battering to death those who made it to the ground, whilst the police and army benignly looked on. The inhabitants of the Donbass did not need Putin to tell them that they had to defend themselves against the fascist onslaught.

To celebrate the 10th anniversary of these great events on January 14 one Mark Estabrook has produced *Euromaidan revolution* volumes 1 and 2 - a snip at only £795! He gushes in praise of the "revolution": "We should never forget these brave people. This book is about Kyiv, Ukraine (Maidan) [in] February 2014 ... This book is a celebration of the Ukrainian people. God bless Ukraine!" - he finishes with a version of Stepan Bandera's rallying cry.

But on the fifth anniversary of the Maidan events *The Independent* had a few words of caution about these events. On November 20 2018, Oliver Carroll reported from Kiev: "The protest ultimately chose its own, revolutionary path, and not every step along the way was beautiful. As Maidan moved to its more militaristic phase, the democratic ideals that motivated the original EU flag-waving activists to the streets often seemed far away. The flags, for a start, changed. In place of the yellow stars of Europe came the black and red of the Second World War anti-Soviet partisans, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. While the nationalist militias that flew these flags may never have represented the majority of protestors, they were certainly its loudest and strongest. In the last weeks they were a key cog of the resistance. When, for example, protestors detained 'titushki', the Yanukovich-hired thugs who intimidated Kiev for weeks on end, the task of administering 'justice' was often handed to the rightwing radicals ... In the months that followed, as a shell-shocked nation came to terms with its revolution, these nationalist groups claimed a chunk of the political vacuum. To this day, they continue to occupy key positions in and around government, and without clear popular legitimacy. The interior ministry's links with the far right continue to be one of Maidan's most troubling legacies."

Al Jazeera informs us that the Azov regiment was founded by Andriy Biletsky, who merged the Patriot of Ukraine (founded in 2005) and the neo-Nazi Social National

Assembly (2008). In 2010, Biletsky said Ukraine's national purpose was to "lead the white races of the world in a final crusade ... against Semiteled *Untermenschen* [inferior races]". The Ukrainian far-right fascists of the Azov Battalion, the Right Sector, etc politically dominate the Kiev armed forces. There are photographs of straight-arm Nazi salutes and of banners and tattoos sported by the Ukraine army, consisting of the swastikas, the Black Sun, etc.

Hannu Reime clearly does not know where lies revolution and where lies counterrevolution.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Not Galloway

Carla Roberts gives a good account of the discreditable shambles which the Rochdale by-election has become ('Thou shalt not criticise Israel', February 15). It is an indictment of the abysmal depths to which Labour under Starmer has sunk.

But Roberts goes on to call for a vote for George Galloway. As a former Galloway supporter, I have been saddened to see his political degeneration. At one time an articulate and courageous spokesperson against imperialism and Labour betrayals, Galloway has adopted a ragbag of positions, some of them openly reactionary.

Roberts does not mention the independent candidacy of Mark Coleman. Yet to me he looks like the only honest candidate in this swamp of corruption. As a supporter of Just Stop Oil, Coleman has gone to jail in pursuit of his principles, despite having serious health problems. He is campaigning against Labour's betrayals, and especially against the fact that Starmer has now effectively become a climate-change denier.

Coleman is a clergyman - nobody's perfect. But I would far sooner have someone guided by his moral principles to attack Labour's rightward move than a self-proclaimed atheist willing to back Starmer and Islamophobia.

In my view the revolutionary left should give Coleman full practical support in terms of finance, leafleting, etc. A good vote for Coleman would be a warning shot to Starmer, and an encouragement to all those hoping to build a left alternative to Labour.

Ian Birchall
North London

No debate

Every year Harlow Labour councillors attend a Holocaust Memorial Day event, at which the holocaust and other genocides are remembered, yet the Labour East regional office of the Labour Party will not allow members of Harlow Labour Party to discuss a motion supporting the upholding of an international law - the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which came into being as a response to the holocaust.

The International Court of Justice has ruled that the state of Israel must take certain measures to avoid committing genocide in the war in the Gaza Strip. Israel has ignored this ruling and, given that the UK is providing both direct military assistance and weapons to the state of Israel, the British government could be found guilty of complicity in genocide.

I submitted a motion to Harlow Constituency Labour Party calling on Keir Starmer to demand that the government uses all the means at its disposal to ensure that Israel complies with the ruling by the International Court of Justice, and I was told that my motion was disallowed.

Since when was it controversial to discuss upholding the Genocide

Convention? As far as I am aware, every political tendency across the political spectrum, from neoliberal conservatives to anarchist communists, is opposed to violating international humanitarian law. I am beginning to wonder if I have crossed over into a parallel universe.

The death toll in the Gaza Strip mounts by the day, and still the Labour prospective parliamentary candidate for Harlow keeps silent. If a politician is not prepared to speak out in support of measures to prevent genocide, then it must be asked whether he is actually a careerist devoid of any principles.

John Wake
Harlow

Same clowns

If we mixed the red, white and blue, and the green, white and gold together, we in Ireland could all embrace that as our national flag. We could play Irish sports and 'other' sports on alternate days and that way we'd all be happy, right? The 99% of the other aspects of our shared culture like watching television and smartphone use, and driving and talking about the weather, etc, we could just keep the same.

We're born into a society which conditions us to see ourselves as 'either one or the other'. We're conditioned to focus on the inconsequential - like the colour of the flag, and the football team we support, for example. We may not realise that a change in the economic system would make a fundamental difference, or the change in the financial system. Just a change in the border.

Imagine having a maximum wage. That would be real change. The implications would revolutionise society. Now, it doesn't mean everyone would be happy about this, but come on ...

Whether we are governed from Dublin or Westminster won't make any difference. We're still being governed by the same clowns who've helped legitimise the emperor's new clothes.

Louis Shawcross
County. Down

Mass party?

Sure, a tiny outfit of a few people will likely be unable to have much of an impact, but what do you mean by "mass party"? What would the criteria for joining such a party be?

Marx wrote that the dominant ideas are those of the ruling class. Would anything revolutionary ever be more than a small minority up to the eve of revolution? I think we certainly need a revolutionary party, but I hesitate to describe that as "mass" in any way. It is the class-conscious revolutionary vanguard, not a government in waiting, nor open to the entirety of the class, regardless of political perspective.

Ant Evans
email

Dogmatic

Michael Roberts uses the "period after the launch of the ECB's asset purchase programme in 2015" to demonstrate that the state of "the real economy" influences monetary conditions, and not vice versa ('Isabel Schnabel's last mile', February 15).

But he seems to wilfully ignore the global financial crisis, which was the proximate cause of universal balance sheet weakness in the 2010s. Did the credit crisis and the failure of Lehman Bros cause a sudden change in the rate of profit or the productivity of labour? No, it was a monetary, financial and psychological shock, of the type whose pertinence to economic effects he dogmatically denies.

Jack Grahil
email

ACTION

Ukraine: how to stop this war

Saturday February 24, 2pm: Online rally. After two years of war hundreds of thousands are dead. The west is supplying Ukraine with weaponry to further Nato's expansion plans, with no end in sight. Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn and Lindsey German. Organised by CND and Stop the War Coalition: cnduk.org/events/ukraine-how-to-stop-this-war.

Lakenheath: its role in the US war machine

Monday February 26, 7.45pm: Webinar. US nuclear weapons are returning, putting Britain in the front line in any future US-led war. How does the base - RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk - fit into the USA's wider military plans? How do we stop this? Organised by CND: cnduk.org/events/lakenheath-its-role-in-the-us-war-machine-cnd-webinar.

Arms dealers out of Twickenham stadium

Tuesday February 27, 1.30pm: Protest outside Twickenham rugby stadium, Whitton Road, Twickenham TW2. Weapons companies profiteering from the genocide in Gaza will be taking part in the International Military Helicopter Fair inside. Organised by Richmond and Kingston Palestine Solidarity Campaign: caat.org.uk/events/militaryhelicopter2024.

What it means to be human

Tuesday February 27, 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: 'Batek Shamanism: healers, warriors and cosmopolitical diplomats'. Speaker: Ivan Tacey. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/369462305727513.

Rail cuts cost lives

Rallies and parliamentary lobbies organised by the RMT union: www.rmt.org.uk/campaigns/rail/rail-cuts-cost-lives. The government is cutting over a billion pounds from the Network Rail budget for safety-critical infrastructure maintenance work. **London, Wednesday February 28, 1pm:** Old Palace Yard, Westminster, London SW1. **Glasgow, Thursday February 29, 10.45am:** Visitor's entrance, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99.

Stop bombing Gaza! Ceasefire now!

Thursday February 29, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, School Lane, Liverpool L1. Speakers include Fran Heathcote (PCS), Libby Nolan (Unison) and Chris Nineham (Stop the War). Organised by Merseyside Stop the War: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Israel-Palestine: oppression and resistance

Thursday February 29, 7pm: One state, two states or something altogether different? A roundtable discussion with Moshé Machover, Adam Keller, Tony Greenstein and Steve Freeman. Concluding session of this online education and discussion series. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

The world at war - a trade union issue

Saturday March 2, 10.30am to 4.30pm: Conference for trade unionists, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Building on the huge upsurge in anti-war trade union activity. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Palestine, war and the Middle East

Sunday March 3, 2pm to 5pm: Anti-war assembly, Tyneside Irish Centre, Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1. Join activists to discuss the situation in Gaza and the Middle East, and how to build the Palestine solidarity and anti-war movements. Organised by Newcastle Stop the War: www.facebook.com/events/1106470723815607.

End cold weather deaths

Wednesday March 6, 12 noon: Budget day protest. Assemble College Green, Westminster, London SW1. Tory government policies have led to hundreds of thousands of avoidable deaths. Demand an end to deaths fuelled by poverty. Organised by End Fuel Poverty Coalition: www.axethehousingact.org.uk

Communist culture club

Thursday March 7, 7pm: Fortnightly online culture meeting. Includes Ben Lewis on Clara Zetkin and International Women's Day, Roger Silverman on Shakespeare from a Marxist perspective and Tam Dean Burn reviewing the comedy opera *Marx in London!* Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

40th anniversary of the miners' strike

Saturday March 9, 11.30am: Assemble for entertainment at Broadway Hotel, Dunscroft, Doncaster DN7. March to Hatfield Main Colliery, then Hatfield Main Club, to hear Arthur Scargill. Organised by Doncaster Coalfield Strike Anniversary: www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1629591487785380.

Screen Cuba: films to change the world

Saturday March 9 to Friday March 22: Festival of Cuban cinema since 1959, The Garden Cinema, 39-41 Parker Street, London WC2. Inspiring shorts to ground-breaking features and documentaries, plus discussions with Cuban film specialists. Tickets £12 per film. Organised by Cuba Solidarity Campaign: www.thegardencinema.co.uk/festival/screen-cuba.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

PARLIAMENT

Through the looking glass

Scott Evans spotlights Sir Keir's desperate balancing act between a pro-Palestine electorate, wobbly MPs and the shifting messages coming from the White House ... and the surreal goings on in the Commons

For the first time, Labour, both in Scotland and now in Westminster, has called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. So, has morality triumphed? Can we rest easy, knowing an 'ethical' Labour government is on its way?

No, of course not. Sir Keir and the Labour leadership is attempting to balance three related priorities: (1) worried MPs and prospective MPs, who fear for their careers, given a largely pro-Palestine electorate; (2) not upsetting the pro-Zionist lobby and scuppering the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' big lie; and (3) international politics; in other words, loyally echoing Joe Biden and the US state department.

Scottish Labour

This article was originally intended to discuss the Scottish Labour conference motion, before the shitshow around the Scottish National Party's Gaza motion in the Commons on February 21, and the scramble to bodge procedural rules, so that Labour could put in its own amendment on top of the government's. We will start by looking at the Scottish Labour conference motion, which provides helpful background.

The conference took place over February 16-18 and had two headline motions: firstly, the one proposed by its women's conference on "sex-based rights", which was voted down on the basis of being transphobic, and, secondly, one on Gaza, including a call for an "immediate humanitarian ceasefire", which was *unanimously* supported.¹ (Worth noting also is the fairly substantial protest which marched on the venue on February 17, which was addressed by shadow secretary of state for Scotland Ian Murray, who in late 2023 *abstained* on a vote in the Commons supporting a ceasefire.)

The motion was backed by Scottish Labour leader Anwar Sarwar, who has been taking a slightly tougher stance on the issue than the national party for some time. It began by condemning not only October 7, but the subsequent general devastation, with "over 20,000" Palestinians killed and more than 100 Israelis still "held hostage". It also affirmed Israel's right to protect itself "in line with international law", and called for the *complete* removal of Hamas in Gaza. In other words, this was a soft Zionist line, not worthy of any praise at all.

But the key call was for "an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza". This put the motion to the left of Starmer on the issue - that is, until Starmer himself only a couple of days later came out and called for exactly the same thing! Yes, Starmer stresses a *lasting* ceasefire, but so does the motion. The motion said that for any ceasefire to last all rocket fire into and out of Gaza must cease, and there must be an "unconditional" release of hostages (note that there was no demand on Israel to release its prisoners). It called for "essential" aid to be restored and its passage "facilitated" in order to create a pathway to a peace process. Finally, there was the call for a two-state solution, in line with US official policy.

I am unsure what changes the motion went through before reaching this final composite made up of submissions from three CLPs, but it was clearly designed to merely signal the presence of a heart in the Labour Party without saying anything substantively different to a generic



Mainstream politicians are completely out of touch when it comes to Gaza and Palestine

and directionless 'Down with this sort of thing'.

Of course, a "sustainable ceasefire", and variants with the attendant weasel words, are just a respin of the "humanitarian pause" idea - itself not incompatible with initial calls for a ceasefire, since the term 'ceasefire' on its own does not say anything about how long it has to last. "Immediate ceasefire" now, but, but, but ... is more than the party has committed to before, but so what? This stupid semantic game that Labour and other soft Zionists are playing frankly leaves a bad taste in the mouth - while Palestinians continue to be driven from their homes, starved and killed on such a huge scale.

SNP motion

Enter the SNP motion, put before the Commons, which has since caused quite a commotion. It was more unequivocal, not containing all the qualifications of the Scottish Labour motion. It called for an immediate ceasefire, pointed out that the vast majority of the 28,000 killed by Israel are women and children, and noted the 1.5 million Palestinians sheltering in Rafah. In the end, Labour submitted an awfully wordy amendment, which crucially removed the reference to

Israel's "collective punishment" - illegal under international law. The problem for Starmer here was that the Scottish Labour motion *also* called a spade a spade on this - one of its few positive points: "there is no justification for the collective punishment of 2.2 million citizens in Gaza".²

Labour's amendment to the motion also called on Israel not to go ahead with a ground assault in Rafah - in line with statements coming out of the Biden administration. Not that the US or the UK will ever put any teeth into such pleas: eg, by threatening to halt arms supplies. Besides this, it added the two-state solution, the necessity of a safe and secure Israel, and 'but' clauses very similar to those in the original Scottish Labour motion. Rumour had it that Labour would be calling for its MPs to abstain on the SNP's motion and vote for its own amendment, but proceedings never got that far.

Last November, 56 Labour MPs defied the whip to back the SNP's motion on ... you guessed it, supporting a ceasefire, like Labour says it does now. This time, whether or not more retribution occurs was almost literally up to the speaker of the Commons, Lindsay Hoyle (formerly a Labour

MP). Would he take the government's or both the government's and Labour's amendment? According to precedent, if only one is taken, it must be the government's. Without Labour's own amendment many Labour MPs may have felt compelled to vote for the SNP motion (either on principle or otherwise!) - spurred on by Scottish Labour's motion the prior weekend. Abstaining after that - not to mention the huge demonstrations across the country - would have been rather embarrassing. And, with rumours of an even larger revolt than previously of up to 100 MPs (including at least two shadow cabinet members), tensions were high.

As it happened, Hoyle decided to say hell to precedent and allow Labour's *and* the government's amendment³ (which meant knocking from the agenda the SNP's second motion, on green investment - to jeers from MPs). This was after procedural delays caused by Labour, and was followed by more delays after both the SNP's and Tories' furious reaction to this decision.⁴

The clerk of the house, Tom Goldsmith, has called all this a "substantial breach of the standing orders or a departure from long-established conventions", while Tory

William Wragg tabled a vote of no confidence in the speaker. Hoyle left the chaos to the poor old deputy speaker. Tory Penny Mordaunt, leader of the House, said the government would play no further part in the proceedings, and a vote for parliament to sit in private was overwhelmingly rejected, Hoyle returned to defend his decision, and the Labour amendment was passed amid an SNP and Tory walkout with no further vote on the motion itself ... later, of course, he grovellingly apologised.

It seems to have been quite easy for some to forget, in all the excitement, that this was a vote ostensibly on preventing Israel continuing its genocidal war on Gaza and the Palestinians more broadly. What we saw in the Commons though was nothing even approaching democratic: it was a clown show. Which of the Tories, Labour and SNP is the sensible party of democracy and freedom?

Broader context

No doubt street demonstrations and other acts of solidarity help get things on the political agenda which would otherwise have been ignored or delayed. They encourage politicians with half a backbone to go against the easy career option, and convince them to stick their neck out.

Some on the left just glibly declare⁵ - without evidence or reason - that this or that shift in government is due to this or that demonstration and therefore we just need to carry on street/strike action to 'keep up the pressure' until (one fateful day) along comes the revolution.

Needless to say, a substantial part of what is going on here has little to do with Gaza itself. Many SNP MPs and MSPs, I am sure, do care - certainly Scottish first minister Humza Yousaf, whose own family has been directly affected. But they knew what effect it would have on Labour, while Labour itself would not be walking the current tightrope without the need to placate the USA and the capitalist class.

"Humanitarian pause", "immediate ceasefire", "sustainable ceasefire", "just and lasting peace" - all these have get-out clauses. But that is not the point: whatever words Starmer's Labour uses, none of it changes the fact that the UK is subordinate to the USA on questions of foreign policy. The US could reverse the various exceptions the UK enjoys to the USA's global system of imperialist subordination and reduce the UK from a willing client state to an unwilling one. Over-focusing on the demand for those in positions of power to make some gesture, some statement, to disassociate from individual X or condemn organisation Y is a reflection of a highly media-focussed form of politics ●

Notes

- I struggled to find a copy, except on Twitter: twitter.com/paulhutchon/status/1758182763499270187/photo/1.
- Let us forget, the SNP is not to the left of Labour on everything. It is currently being attacked by Labour in Scotland for not supporting a windfall tax on energy companies.
- More or less. The Tory amendment was only to be heard if Labour's was voted down. Though this clearly incentivised the Tories to vote against Labour's, not that they wouldn't have anyway.
- Murray had the cheek to try and characterise this as the SNP and Tories playing games, while the adults-in-the-room Labour are trying to get on with serious business: twitter.com/IanMurrayMP/status/1760377273163632945.
- Eg, socialistworker.co.uk/palestine-2023/labour-ceasefire-vote.

ELECTIONS

Unseating the Right Hon Sir Keir

In a bit of political theatre, two campaigns have selected Andrew Feinstein to contest Keir Starmer's seat in the forthcoming general election. **Carla Roberts reports**

There is no doubt that Andrew Feinstein would make an outstanding leftwing candidate for any parliamentary seat. Born in South Africa, the son of Viennese holocaust survivors, he joined the African National Congress as a teenager and in 1994 became an MP. However, unlike Nelson Mandela, he never joined the South African Communist Party - though was still greeted with jeers of "You communist!" when he first entered parliament.¹

Feinstein introduced the first ever motion on the holocaust in South African parliamentary history, stating that "previous suffering" - by Afrikaners at the hands of the British colonisers, or of Jews by the Nazis - in no way justified the brutal oppression of black South Africans or Palestinians.² In 2001, he resigned from parliament "as a sign of protest against the ANC's refusal to investigate a £5 billion arms deal that was accused of large-scale corruption" and has lived in London since, working as chief executive of Corruption Watch UK. He is an expert on the arms trade and has written a much-praised book on the subject: *The shadow world* was made into a documentary film (featuring Feinstein himself) and won various awards, including 'best documentary feature film' at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 2016.

He might not be a communist or Marxist (he describes himself as a "proud leftie Jew" on X), but he has something that is sorely missing from many self-declared 'socialists': the man has a spine. Unlike Jeremy Corbyn, he manages to stand up for the Palestinians - and at the same time openly fight the anti-Semitism smear campaign. While Corbyn and his allies (especially John McDonnell) buckled under pressure from the right, promising to do everything and more "to root out anti-Semitism in the party" and sacrificing supporter after supporter, Feinstein had no problem calling out the conflation of anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism for what it was - a big lie designed to defeat Corbyn and, crucially, stop all criticism of Israel.

He has spoken at various events and protests organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt and other groups, explaining that false charges of anti-Semitism are designed to weaken and undermine solidarity with the Palestinian struggle.

On February 11, Feinstein "won" in a poll conducted by the snazzily-titled Organise Corbyn Inspired Socialist Alliance (Ocisa), which was set up just over 12 months ago with the single purpose of "unseating Keir Starmer" and remains tightly controlled by one Jim Breese. "Over 95% of votes cast by Ocisa members that registered to take part in the process" went to Feinstein, though it is unclear how many people participated - or, indeed, how many "members" the campaign has.³ In any case, we understand that he beat two other candidates. It is actually unclear if Feinstein put his own name forward or if he was 'nominated' by somebody. Transparency is not the strong point of the campaign (neither is spelling or grammar!).

The barely legible website explains: "The group is Socialist and aim to implement the 2017 Labour Party election manifesto



Andrew Feinstein: Copenhagen 2016

through a concerted campaign against the current leadership of the Labour Party."⁴ The Facebook group explains that you can only participate if you show

adherence to the plan: Because this group wants the implimentation [sic] of the specific plan to remove Kier [sic] Starmer from his seat in Holborn and St Pancras any post, or activity (outside) or comment that undermines this goal will result in removal from the group.

I am not sure if the phrase, "activity (outside)", really is about policing members' activity outside of Facebook, which would be ... err, astonishing, but I can confirm that I have been removed from the group not once, but twice, for daring to mildly question "the plan". Still, the Ocisa election fund stands at an impressive £32,020, as we go to press, and there are over 7,000 people in the Facebook group, so Feinstein will not sneer at the group's support.⁵

For the Many

The comrade managed to get himself nominated by an *additional* campaign just before Ocisa went public. On February 12, he tweeted: "I am very grateful to the Camden For the Many local hub and Ocisa for endorsing me as a possible independent candidate in Holborn and St Pancras. I've indicated I am willing to stand" - though he wants to have a "more extensive consultative process".⁶

For the Many is the "communication and coordination network" founded by Feinstein, Ken Loach, Ian Hodson (Bakers' Union) and Audrey White (Merseyside Pensioners Association) back in October 2023. But it has not really come to very much and one would be hard-pressed to find details of its 'Camden hub' - or any others, to be frank. Between December 10 and February 12, there have been zero posts on any of its social media accounts, and the website has not been updated for a while either.⁷

As I understand it, the group has been somewhat paralysed, because there has been some 'disagreement' about the way forward. One half of the steering committee wants to continue as a network, while the other wants to - wait for it - form a party! And presumably one based on Jeremy Corbyn's election platform of the same name. Forgive me if I cannot name how many groups/parties/organisations currently exist that are basing themselves on the 2017 Labour Party manifesto - whatever the number is, it is way too many *For the Many*.

It is absurd that seasoned socialists

seem to believe that all they need to do is put forward Corbyn's entirely reformist and tame manifesto - and the masses will flock towards them. No, comrades, it was not the adopted programme that made millions of people vote for Labour under Corbyn: it was largely the fact that some of the tweaks and reforms proposed could actually have been implemented by a Labour government. There is no chance of any of the myriad of groups and sects doing that.

Andrew Feinstein, we should stress, has not officially hitched his wagon to Corbyn's programme. He has also not stated if he really believes that he could "unseat Starmer", as Ocisa's declared aim states.

In 2019, Starmer won with 64.9% of the vote - admittedly, that was 5.6% less than in 2015. But the 36,641 votes cast for him still represent a whopping majority of almost 30,000. The Tories' Alexandra Hayward came a distant second with 8,878 votes or 15.6%. That is almost insurmountable. Add to that the fact that this general election will be all about getting rid of the Tories and it does not take a genius to work out: Keir Starmer will not be unseated any time soon.

So why form a campaign that is designed to fail? Why concentrate on one particular politician? Is Starmer really worse than Rishi Sunak, or Jacob Rees-Mogg? It seems that many people on the Labour left still feel incredibly and personally hurt by Corbyn's defeat - and blame Starmer for it.

Take, for example, journalist and commentator Peter Osborne (not always a friend of the left), who writes that he hopes Feinstein will stand "for the sake of British politics, and public decency". Yuk. In a long article, he gushes about Feinstein and complains about

Starmer's brand of cynicism, which leaves a bad taste in the mouth. In 2020, he ran a campaign for the Labour leadership that was fundamentally dishonest. Needing to gain the support of the party's leftwing membership, he presented a pitch which was entirely at variance with the way he subsequently ran the party. All the indications are that this was done quite deliberately.⁸

This reflects in a slightly more eloquent way the personally hurt demeanour of many disappointed Corbynites, who probably suffered under the delusion that Corbyn as prime minister would bring them some kind of 'socialism'. Leaving aside the fact that the ruling class would have done anything in its

power (and then some) to prevent that, Corbyn's programme had precious little to do with actual socialism. It is the illusionary attempt to manage capitalism on behalf of the workers. That has been done many times and we know the results: the Workers' Party in Brazil, Die Linke in Germany, Rifondazione Comunista in Italy; Syriza in Greece, etc - they all ended up attacking the working class and therefore causing demoralisation and demobilisation.

In reality, of course, the rot in the Labour left began very much from the head. Corbyn and his advisors played a huge role in their own defeat, by rolling over when the first false charges of anti-Semitism were made. Starmer did what pretty much any of Corbyn's successors would have done - he is no worse and no better than, say, Andy Burnham or Yvette Cooper. Yes, he lied a bit. But it was entirely obvious which way the wind was blowing. Anybody who actually believed that Starmer would continue Corbyn's programme deserves to feel disappointed for the rest of their life.

Starmer has one job and he has done it perfectly: to make the Labour Party ready to become, once again, a second eleven that capitalism can trust. A very important job too, considering the pathetic state of the Tories.

There is nothing wrong at all, of course, with challenging Starmer and

other bourgeois politicians at the ballot box. It can be very useful politically - particularly with the current genocidal war against the Palestinians - to stand on a principled political platform. The question is to what purpose and on what political platform.

Leaving aside the current unusual situation in Rochdale (where George Galloway has a real chance of winning the seat from Labour) and Islington (which will in all likelihood be contested by the 'independent' Jeremy Corbyn), in most areas socialists have pretty much zero chance of becoming MPs.

Which means, even on the most basic logic, that socialists should make use of elections to put forward a principled political programme - a vision of genuine socialism, in other words - in order to win over the working class and to build a viable political alternative ●

Notes

1. twitter.com/andrewfeinstein/status/1487411497454252033.
2. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Feinstein.
3. www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100092218000669.
4. ocisa.org.uk.
5. www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/starmerout.
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8. www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/uk-andrew-feinstein-starmer-challenge-politics-hope-rekindle.

Friday March 1 to Sunday March 3

Online Communist University

Spring 2024

Their wars and ours

Friday 7pm
Marxism and revolutionary defeatism
Speaker: Marc Mulholland

Saturday 12 noon
Iran and its proxies
Speaker: Yassamine Mather

Saturday 6pm
Two-state, one-state delusions
Speaker: Moshé Machover

Sunday 12 noon
History of imperialism in the Middle East
Speaker: Mike Macnair

Sunday 5pm
Marxism and just wars
Speaker: Jack Conrad

Organised by CPGB: communistparty.co.uk and
 Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk

UKRAINE

Notes on the war

After two years of battlefield carnage there is stalemate. Jack Conrad calls for the left to break from social-pacifism and centrism

Some basic principles. Communists have always condemned wars between countries as bloody, barbarous and brutal. Our attitude towards war is, however, fundamentally different from that of pacifists - not only the bourgeois variety, but also the socialist variety - who simply plead for peace.

We understand the inevitable connection between wars and the class struggle - that war cannot be abolished unless socialism is established. We also differ from pacifists, in that we view civil wars - ie, wars waged by an oppressed class against an oppressor class, by slaves against slaveholders, by serfs against feudal lords and by workers against the bourgeoisie - as "fully legitimate, progressive and necessary".¹

Communists, therefore, consider it essential to study each war historically (from the standpoint of Marxism) and take into account all class forces and interests involved. There have been many wars - despite all the horrors involved - which were fully justified and rightly command our deepest respect and sympathy: eg, the Spartacus uprising in ancient Italy, England's 1381 Peasant's Revolt, the Hussite wars in Bohemia, Toussaint Louverture's revolution in Haiti, etc.

With that in mind, more recently, we communists in Britain rightly considered the struggle conducted by the IRA in Ireland, the Mau Mau in Kenya and the National Liberation Front in South Yemen as 'just wars': we wanted the victory of the anti-colonial struggle and the defeat of the British empire. Of course, taking such a position does not necessitate uncritical support. Far from it.

In terms of historical materialism, the Dutch Revolt, Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth and certainly the 1688 Glorious Revolution marked the beginning of a new epoch: the rise and triumph of capitalism. From that time till the Paris Commune, one type of war could legitimately be called bourgeois-progressive: war to sweep away feudal remnants, war against foreign rule, war for national unity, war for capitalist development. That formed the *main* content and historical significance of wars such as those fought by the American Continental Congress, Jacobin and Napoleonic France, Simón Bolívar and Garibaldi's Redshirts. Naturally, revolutionary democrats such as Tom Paine, Lord George Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and, of course, the emerging working class movement, sided with those fighting for *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* abroad ... because at home that would rouse those below against aristocratic and bourgeois privilege.

Take 1861-65. Objectively the Yankee armies fought in the interests of industrial and banking capital - and, when the north finally overcame its constitutional squeamishness and got serious, there was state terrorism: eg, William Tecumseh Sherman's 'burn, loot and destroy' march through Georgia. True, with the defeat of the Confederates and Appomattox the black population in the south was freed from plantation servitude, but what really mattered for the northern bourgeoisie, was that the US gained real independence from Britain and would soon expand into the territories of the plain's Indians and emerge as a serious rival to Britain, when it came to industrial, financial and naval power.

Nonetheless, fully in that



Vladimir Putin: star turn at Moscow 'No to Nazism' rally

knowledge, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels did everything they could to ensure victory for the north. Under their guidance co-thinkers in the US actively helped get Abraham Lincoln elected in 1861 by skilfully mobilising the large German population; in London they rallied the First International to the northern cause and supported the Lancashire mill workers' boycott of southern cotton; their old friend and Communist League comrade, Joseph Weydemeyer, served as a lieutenant colonel in the Union army, along with many other heroic red 48er veterans.

However, contrary to the widespread myth, perhaps first coined by the rightwing Menshevik, Alexander Potresov, the Marx-Engels team did not advocate a choice between lesser evils as their political method. What they advocated was not replacing the 'reactionary' British global hegemon with the 'progressive' American alternative. That would just be rearranging the international hierarchy of exploitation. The same goes today with the 'reactionary' American hegemon and the 'progressive' Chinese alternative. No, the overriding aim of the Marx-Engels team always lay in promoting democratic revolution, winning universal suffrage and furthering the interests of the working class.

Aggression

Doubtless, there can be no possibility of establishing socialism prior to ending feudalism, slavery and national fragmentation. So, when writing about preferring victory for one particular country in the period of rising capitalism, Marx and Engels always had in mind creating the conditions needed for forming a working class - first in itself, then for itself.

That is certainly how they approached the *first stage* of the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian war. Though presided over by the reactionary-progressive Junker, Otto von Bismarck, it was for them a war of "self-defence" not so much on the part of Prussia, but of the newly united Germany. If the Prussians win, reasoned Marx, then the "centralisation of state power" in Germany would serve the "centralisation of the German working class".² Maybe, if the armies of Napoleon III had proved victorious at Sedan and thrown German unification into reverse, as Marx feared, that might have been the right assessment. But, in fact, it was Bismarck who cynically engineered the war and he went on to annex Alsace-Lorraine, extract huge indemnities and ready the German Reich to become the most aggressive, the most powerful imperialist state in Europe.

Nonetheless, whatever his initial misconceptions, Marx urged the First International to support the anti-war activities of its sections in France and Germany against their respective governments. That included explicitly endorsing August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht and their brave refusal to vote for war credits in the Reichstag.

As Vladimir Lenin and Gregory Zinoviev explain in their pamphlet *Socialism and war*, socialists are obliged to take advantage of wars between reactionary, oppressive powers to advance proletarian internationalism and, whenever possible, actively turn imperialist war into a "civil war against the governments and the bourgeoisie".³ That is what the Bolsheviks in Russia, the Bulgarian Narrows and the internationalist left tried to do with the outbreak of World War I in August 1914.

In any conflict between the great powers there will be propaganda campaigns to gain the moral high ground, with this or that side claiming to protect the rights of small nations, promote democracy, respect international treaties and that they are fighting to punish aggressors. Such justifications were, and still are, used by the capitalist media to con, deceive and fire people up into chauvinist indignation. That said, every war must be understood in its specific concreteness. Even an inter-imperialist war can become a *combined* war. World War II began as a more or less straightforward rerun of World War I. But, with continental Europe languishing under Nazi chains, with the Wehrmacht at the gates of Moscow, Leningrad and Stalingrad and a swelling determination amongst the masses to resist conquest, slavery and extermination, inter-imperialist war combined with *just wars* of national defence, national survival and national liberation - see Ernest Mandel's well-considered book *The meaning of the Second World War* (1986).

Note, we take it as axiomatic that imperialism corresponds to the highest stage of capitalism: ie, monopoly and the domination of finance capital, the carving up of the globe by a few great powers and, crucially, the export of capital. With the American century, the old colonial empires were dismantled and replaced by US hegemony over western Europe, Japan, the UK, etc. Imperialism took the form of the dollar, unequal alliances and a system of military bases: in a word, superimperialism. The Soviet Union and its bloc, plus China, was all that stood against total US domination. But, paradoxically, the existence of bureaucratic socialism in the east

allowed a cold war system in the west, whereby the US could incorporate much of the labour movement through anti-communism. In return the US facilitated the social democratic settlement and agreed to substantial concessions to the working class.

Continuation

"War is a mere continuation of policy by other [violent] means" - a celebrated dictum penned by Carl von Clausewitz.⁴ Marxists have quite rightly regarded this proposition - plus the understanding that foreign wars are the continuation of *domestic* policy - as providing the basis for assessing each and every war.

When it comes to the present conflict in Ukraine, we could go back to Kyivan Rus, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the expansion of tsarist Russia. But the best place to begin, for our purposes, is with the collapse of bureaucratic socialism in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe in 1989-91. From that point onwards the US state department was aggressively plotting and promoting its project for a new American century.

There was popular disenchantment with the dead end of bureaucratic socialism. There was also a burning desire from amongst a good section of the elite to go over to capitalism. They wanted to enjoy the legal security, the fabulous wealth and gilded life of the billionaire class in the west. State and party officials, plus the newly emergent mafia, grabbed whatever they could. Meanwhile, the masses were promised German living standards and Swedish levels of social security. What, in actual fact, they got was crashing living standards and grinding poverty. There was a counterrevolution within the counterrevolution. (The counterrevolution against the October 1917 revolution began with the first five-year plan and the birth of an unstable, freak, ectopic, social formation).

Under Boris Yeltsin, the Russian Federation faced the definite prospect of being reduced to a mere US neocolony. Shock therapy, as advised by Jeffrey Sachs and his Harvard boys, deindustrialised Russia and left it in thrall to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Hence, in desperation, the choice of Vladimir Putin - first as prime minister, then as Yeltsin's replacement as president.

The present war in Ukraine owes little, if anything, to Putin's mind, his megalomania, his 5'7" stature, etc. Psychobabble. No, we must understand Putin as the chosen representative of the KGB/FSB elite, which is set on restoring the great-power status of the post-Soviet Russian Federation. It is a *state* regime, in which the oligarchs occupy a subordinate, not a dominant, position (so it is no longer an oligarchy).

Economically, Russia is a decidedly second- or even third-rate power. Despite its near 150 million population, it ranks far behind Germany, France, the UK and Italy in GDP terms. But, primarily because of gas and oil production, Russia is able to maintain itself as a great military power. So a fossil-fuel, arms-industry complex, which because of "military Keynesianism", financed by soaring oil and gas exports, managed to grow economically last year and is expected to grow economically this year too.⁵ That in the face of western sanctions.

What were Putin's *declared* war aims? DeNazification of Ukraine is and was a nonsense. There are

outright Nazis in Ukraine and plenty of fascists too, not least the Banderites incorporated into its armed forces: eg, the Azov Battalion. But they hardly dominate the commanding heights of the army, the bureaucracy or the economy. And there are, of course, not a few fascists, red-brown nationalists and occult nutters on Putin's side too.⁶

Nor is the claim that Putin acted to save the Russian national minority in Ukraine from genocide in any way convincing. Yes, there was increased Ukrainian shelling along the line of control in the Donbas and discrimination against Russian speakers - even cases of savage persecution and murder. But talk of genocide in Ukraine has as much truth to it as talk of genocide against the Uyghur population in China.

Real aims

Then there is Putin's stuff about Ukraine not being a 'real' nation. Perhaps the original Slavic root of the term, 'Ukraine', meant 'borderlands' - interesting, but nothing more. Marxists will investigate the Norman origins of the Kievan and Muscovite Rus states, the religious-ideological influence of the Byzantine empire, the impact of the Mongol invasion, the expansionism of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Brest-Litovsk treaty, etc. However, what really matters, is not Putin's cod version of Russian history: rather what the mass of Ukrainians actually think *today* - and they surely think of themselves as fervently Ukrainian. That for us is what decides whether or not there is a Ukrainian nation - a historically constituted people, which occupies a common territory, speaks a common language and is united by a common economic life.

So what were and what are Putin's *real* war aims?

We take seriously enough the goal of "decommunisation", which, presumably, means rejecting the Bolshevik commitment to national self-determination and federalism that gave birth to the *modern* Ukraine. Instead of using salami tactics and slowly extending direct Russian power over the whole of Donetsk and Luhansk, establishing a Kharkiv people's republic, etc, Putin ordered a full-scale military invasion on February 24 2022. Whether that was intended to capture Kyiv and put in place a puppet regime, achieve the unity of all the peoples of medieval Rus by taking the entire country, or forcing negotiations which would end with a much diminished, neutral Ukraine and a Greater Russia, is an open question.

As the old saying goes, all initial military plans are abandoned with the "the first encounter with the enemy's main force" (Helmuth von Moltke⁷). So, whatever the original intentions, Putin now has his Greater Russia, but hardly a neutral Ukraine. Shorn of nearly a fifth of its territory, Ukraine is a heavily armed candidate member of an expanded Nato (with Finland and soon Sweden).

The final outcome will now be decided by who can most effectively sustain a people's war, produce the most military hardware (crucially artillery shells, missiles and drones) and who can keep their regime intact, despite battlefield reversals and huge losses in men and equipment.

Did we get things wrong when it came to the 'special military operation'? Yes, of course. But we have never claimed any unique

insight into Kremlin thinking. And, quite rightly, along with countless others, we do not trust the US and UK governments. Truth is the first casualty - even before the outbreak of war. No-one should forget the lies told about Saddam Hussein's 'weapons of mass destruction' in 2003 and how they would only take 45 minutes to reach Europe. How Muammar Gaddafi's army was about to slaughter the entire half-million population of Benghazi in 2011. Etc, etc. It is certainly right to have a sceptical attitude to establishment propaganda (even if it is true).

Pentagon lies

No less to the point, why did we doubt the claims coming from the Pentagon of an imminent full-scale Russian invasion? Because militarily, while it was quite conceivable that the Russian army could successfully drive all the way to Kyiv, we doubted that Ukraine would easily be taken or held. Ukraine 2022 was no Czechoslovakia 1968 or even Hungary 1956. If an analogy is to be drawn, it would be with Afghanistan 1979. Even then the Soviet Union had the Afghan government, army and ruling party onside (well, that is after executing Hafizullah Amin and 97 other leading Khalq cadre). Hardly the case with Ukraine. Economically and socially it is much more advanced than Afghanistan, but the mass of the population - the 18% Russian minority aside - still seems resolved to resist the invading army.

Surely Putin's generals will have told him what to have expected, and that explains why we thought - and still think - that a full-scale invasion risked creating a quagmire and potentially a regime crisis in Moscow. So why did Putin give the go-ahead? We shall now proceed to discuss that question by once again looking at Ukraine's place in US grand strategy.

Grand strategy

Ever since the February 2014 Maidan coup successfully overthrew an elected president (the 'neutral' Viktor Yanukovich) and installed a pro-western regime, Ukraine has been firmly placed in the American orbit. Constitutionally Ukraine is now committed to Nato and the European Union. Through a membership action plan it is an associate member of Nato, is armed by Nato and, in effect, acts as a Nato proxy. But, *quid pro quo*, as a result of the Maidan coup there were widespread disturbances in the Russian-inhabited south and east of Ukraine, and the Kremlin swiftly moved to annex Crimea and back the Donetsk and Luhansk breakaways.

Levering Ukraine into the so-called 'democratic' western camp neatly fitted into a US grand strategy that can be dated back to Jimmy Carter and his 1977-81 administration. In place of the cold war policy of 'containing communism' there came the doctrine of 'rollback', mapped out by his national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski. Ideologically this went hand-in-hand with 'human rights' and spreading 'democracy'. Not insignificantly, Brzezinski's famous book, *The great chessboard*, envisaged a "loosely confederated Russia - composed of a European Russia, a Siberian Republic and a Far Eastern Republic".⁸ In short, three pliant US neo-colonies.

What Carter began, Ronald Reagan completed. After the 1989-91 collapse, both Nato and the EU were pushed further and further to the east, all the way to the borders of Russia itself. Joe Biden's flat rejection of Putin's call for a Nato reset and the Finlandisation of Ukraine doubtless made up Putin's mind about staging a full-scale invasion. So did warnings that any Russian military actions on Ukrainian territory would trigger crippling western sanctions - after all, Russia was already in occupation

of Crimea and backed the Donetsk and Luhansk semi-states. In effect Putin was given an impossible choice. Either humiliatingly withdraw Russian forces from all of Ukraine or face sanctions. Boxed in, Putin went for broke.

However, in terms of grand strategy, February 24 played directly into US hands ... championing Ukraine should certainly be seen as a continuation of Carter's rollback doctrine. Ukraine serves as the equivalent of 'poor little Belgium' or 'plucky little Serbia' in World War I. Not only can the warmongers, Biden, Harris, Blinken, Stoltenberg, Von der Leyen and Sunak, put themselves at the forefront of widespread moral outrage over Ukraine (part real, part manufactured). At a stroke, the US made Italy, France and crucially Germany dependent on oil and gas supplies, over which it, the US, exercises ultimate control. Any idea of a Franco-German united Europe vanished with February 24 and the subsequent sabotage of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 Baltic pipelines in September 2022 (perpetrated by whom is pretty obvious, but supposedly remains under 'investigation').

We cannot but take on board the fall of Bakhmut, the failure of Zelensky's 2023 summer offensive, the 250,000 estimated Ukrainian casualties and now the withdrawal from Avdiivka. However, none of that alters the military stalemate. Far from standing on the cusp of victory, Russia still finds itself bogged down in a gruelling war of attrition. True, with Joe Biden's failure to get his \$60 billion package for Ukraine through Congress and the prospect of a second term for Donald Trump, things may radically change.

The newly appointed Ukrainian commander-in-chief, colonel general Oleksandr Syrskyi, protests that, with US supplies blocked, Russia has a 10:1 advantage, when it comes to artillery shells. If that is the case, such a grossly unequal ratio really matters on the battlefield. Neither strategic nor tactical *advance* is possible without massive artillery bombardments. Even tactical *defence* is problematic without strong artillery support. That explains, says Syrskyi, the commander in Bakhmut, who was prepared to sacrifice countless men to hold this strategically *unimportant* town, why he ordered the evacuation of Avdiivka. Of course, all this might be part of an elaborate ruse designed to nudge the US Congress into agreeing Biden's package.

It should also be added that, despite Trump's boast of being able to arrive at a settlement in Ukraine within 48 hours, that might possibly not be the case. If he is elected in November, if he is not stopped by the avalanche of civil and criminal legal cases, or a Democrat-army-deep state coup, he could still decide to continue the proxy war in Ukraine as part of the drive to block America's only full-spectrum challenger for world hegemony: ie, the People's Republic of China. After all, with the 'no limits' alliance, Putin has effectively constituted Russia as China's Austria-Hungry. Either way, the US project of rebooting its imperial hegemony remains one of the few bipartisan areas of agreement in Washington DC.

Britain's left

Let us now turn to the main opportunist currents in Britain. They can usefully be classified under four broad headings.

Firstly, a very marginal, pro-Russian left. Improbably, they picture Putin's regime as anti-imperialist. Perhaps the most prominent example of this version of the anti-imperialism of fools is George Galloway and his Workers Party of Britain - now amicably divorced from the Brarite CPGB (Marxist-Leninist). Others in that camp include the New Communist Party and, presumably,

the equally near moribund Socialist Labour Party (still formally led by that sad ghost from the past, Arthur Scargill). There are various micro-group Trotskyite imitators of this bonkers line, including groups of one, but they need not concern us any further here.

Secondly, we have the out-and-out social-imperialists. By that designation we refer not to Sir Keir and his front-bench team, nor the massed ranks of the Parliamentary Labour Party. There is nothing 'social', nothing 'socialist', about them or their politics. They are Blue Labour Brit nats and openly pro-imperialist, pro-capitalist and pro-market. Indeed Keir Starmer and David Lammy have been doing their utmost to be just as bellicose as Rishi Sunak and David Cameron over Ukraine (ie, both front benches echo the Biden administration).

No, we refer to those who hide their pro-imperialism behind socialist phrases and excuses and even references to Marxism. Hence Chris Ford's Ukraine Solidarity Campaign (USC) with its "murky" origins in CIA cold war ops in eastern Europe.⁹ Under its blue and yellow umbrella we find, predictably, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty: an organisation that has long acted as a Trotskyoid sub-department for the Foreign Office. Other affiliates include endangered species such as Anticapitalist Resistance and, digging down further into the muck and grime, we discover archaeological remains like the National Union of Mineworkers (2023 membership = 82), *Chartist* magazine (last print issue: October 2023) and the Labour Representation Committee (no activity on its website since July 2023). For what it is worth, the USC will be marching - shuffling might be a better description - this Saturday, February 24, going from London's Marble Arch to Trafalgar Square. There the league of lost hope will hold a vigil in the name of standing with Ukraine and upholding the so-called principle of territorial integrity.

Under the cover of defending 'brave little Ukraine', they have, in fact, gone over to the bourgeois establishment. Logically that leads to calls for a "stronger, not a weaker, Nato" (Eric Lee in the AWL's *Solidarity*).¹⁰ Such social-imperialists correspondingly demand *real* sanctions on Russia, *increased* arms spending and *extending* Nato. That should mean any honest socialist - even opponents of wage cuts and austerity - not touching the USC with the proverbial barge-pole ... and, of course, that is exactly what has happened.

Thirdly, there are the much more influential social-pacifists, branded as "fifth columnists" and "Putin apologists" by the Labour front bench. Stop the War Coalition, Counterfire, the *Morning Star*, the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, Momentum, etc champion diplomacy, the Minsk accords, international law and the notion that there can be peace while capitalism survives. Plaintive calls for a Nato reset combine with plaintive calls for Ukrainian self-determination and territorial integrity.

The cowardice of the 11 'left' Labour MPs should never be forgotten. Diane Abbott, John McDonnell, Richard Burgon, Ian Lavery, Beth Winter, Sarah Sultana, Bell Ribeiro-Addy, Apsara Begum, Mick Whitley, Tahir Ali and Ian Mearns all signed up to STWC's 'Self-determination for the Ukrainian people' plus respect for Russia's 'legitimate security concerns' statement.¹¹ But they immediately withdrew their names after nothing more than being threatened by Sir Keir with the loss of the Labour whip.

They put unity with the pro-imperialist right and their silly little careers above the principles they claim to hold dear. Instead of defying Sir Keir, organising a long overdue fightback in Labour's ranks and pledging to stand in the

next general election as unofficial Labour candidates, they pathetically collapsed. Proving it, many of them eagerly rushed to condemn Putin's invasion and display their state loyalty in the House of Commons ... not that this saved Diane Abbott or Kate Osamor. So, whereas August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht defiantly opposed the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 and were willing to serve two years of *Festungshaft* ('imprisonment in a fortress'), we had a classic display of opportunist spinelessness. Condemning Sir Keir because of his servile tailing of US foreign policy is right, but really misses the point. He wants Labour accepted as a trustworthy alternative government by the US state department. It is the cowardly 11 who really deserve our contempt.

John McDonnell needs special mention here. Contradictorily he has a foot in both the USC and StWC. Apart from political incoherence, the explanation probably lies in his skewed identification with Irish reunification. Chris Ford too, but with the addition of Scottish separatism. Yet, though they see Ukraine through the distorting lens of petty nationalism, they both end up doing the work of Nato and the US global hegemon. Horrible.

Fourthly, there is what we might call the more principled left. We shall just mention the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the Socialist Workers Party here (though there are more than a few others). More principled, because they, SPEW and the SWP, do link the question of peace with the struggle for socialism. But 'more principled' does not mean *consistently* principled. For example, SPEW calls for a pre-1989-91 Nato reset but, strangely, not the abolition of Nato itself. Then there is the SWP. Its leader, Alex Callinicos, rightly points a critical finger at the cowardly Labour 11 MPs, attacks Nato expansionism and candidly admits that the left is pitifully weak and is in no position to do much in the way of meaningful action. Good.

Naturally, comrade Callinicos explains the Ukraine conflict as being down to imperialism. However, by this he means nothing more than the "rivalry of states". If that was the case, then we have had imperialism since the rise of cities such as Sumer, Kish, Uruk, Ur and Larsa in the 4th millennium BCE. True, there was imperial Rome, imperial China, etc, but in the 20th century Marxists, as noted above, give the term 'imperialism' a much narrower, specific, definition.

The problem for comrade Callinicos arises, of course, from the insistence that, with the first five-year plan, the Soviet Union saw the birth of what the SWP's founder-leader, Tony Cliff, called 'bureaucratic state capitalism'. Not that capitalism operated within the borders of the Soviet Union, but rivalry with outside powers imposed the compulsion to accumulate *capital* for the sake of accumulation and to behave in an imperialist manner abroad. According to Cliff, external, not internal, contradictions provided the system's laws of motion.

Hobbled by this rotten theory, the SWP could not admit that something fundamental happened in 1991. History did nothing more than "move sideways" (Chris Harman).¹² The Soviet Union was imperialist, so Putin's Russian Federation must be too - despite the fact that, characteristically, what its oligarchs exported was not capital - ie, self-expanding value - but money, which is used to purchase luxuries: properties in Manhattan's Upper East Side or London's Mayfair, Hampstead and Highgate ... that and rare art works, superyachts and football clubs.

But the real giveaway, when it comes to comrade Callinicos, is his

centrism, his conciliationism with the social-pacifists and social-imperialists. The SWP does everything it can to get the good and the great in the official labour movement to share its platforms. Not with a view to honest, no-holds barred debate - that would be a welcome change. On the contrary, the SWP is committed to operating through what it calls 'united fronts'. Once it was the Anti-Nazi League, Stop the War Coalition and Respect; now it is Stand Up to Racism, which in its own words is committed to the "fight for unity over division" and marking UN Anti-Racism Day on March 16 alongside the TUC and a list of approved luminaries. They will, of course, be allowed to parade their opposition to racism, the far right and the Tory government from the stage and go unchallenged, when it comes to peddling illusions in the UN and international law, failure to oppose the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt, their commitment to the UK constitution and support for Nato's proxy war in Ukraine.

Defeatism

We all know that the Bolsheviks distinguished themselves not merely by condemning the inter-imperialist war that broke out in August 1914. They went much further than platonically calling for 'peace' (Keir Hardie) or even 'neither victory nor defeat' (Trotsky). No, they stood by the Second International's call to turn imperialist war into a struggle for socialism: towards that end they adopted a defeatist position. The defeat of one's 'own' side "must facilitate its overthrow".¹³

A thoroughly realistic strategy. The advanced section of the working class in Europe was deeply imbued with Marxist ideas and there were historically established mass parties. True, most of the MPs, trade union officials and tops of the apparatus had gone from opportunism to full-blown social-imperialism. But, once the reality of the war dawned, the principled left wing would go from being a minority to a majority and could take full advantage of the turmoil caused by the war. Revolution was a real prospect.

We cannot hold out such a perspective. Today, across the whole of the planet, there is not a single workers' party worthy of that name. There are plenty of little groups that call themselves parties, but no actual party. We in the CPGB are proud to have the name of a party, but there "exists no real Communist Party" (*Weekly Worker* 'What we fight for'). By 'Communist Party' we mean, part - a mass part, the advanced part - of the working class.

So, when it comes to the Ukraine war and the danger of it spilling out into a wider European and global conflict, we can only adopt a *moral* stance for the moment. We are still more in the position of August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht in 1870 than Vladimir Lenin and Gregory Zinoviev in 1914. Nonetheless, it is vital that we maintain our stand and that is exactly what we shall do ●

Notes

1. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 21, Moscow 1977, p300.
2. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 44, New York 1989, p3.
3. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 21, Moscow 1977, p316.
4. A Rapoport (ed) *Clausewitz on war* Harmondsworth 1976, p119.
5. *Financial Times* February 2 2024.
6. E Griffiths *Aleksandr Prokhanov and post-Soviet esotericism* Oxford 2023.
7. quoteinvestigator.com/2021/05/04/no-plan.
8. Z Brzezinski *The grand chessboard: American primacy and its geostrategic imperatives* New York 1997, p202.
9. P Houston, 'A toxic operation' *Weekly Worker* March 24 2022 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1388/a-toxic-operation).
10. *Solidarity* February 16 2022.
11. www.stopwar.org.uk/article/list-of-signatories-stop-the-war-statement-on-the-crisis-over-ukraine.
12. C Harman, 'The storm breaks' *International Socialism* spring 1990.
13. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 21, Moscow 1977, p312.

RUSSIA

Navalny's sticky end

Paul Demarty looks at the death of a persistent critic and irritant to Vladimir Putin and the FSB regime ... and a hero of the west, who showed undoubted courage in the face of cruel persecution

We were already going through a rather Russia-heavy news cycle last week - what with the Tucker Carlson interview of Vladimir Putin, the defenestration of Valerii Zaluzhnyi from the Ukrainian army's top job, and the fall of the Donetsk city, Avdiivka. And then Alexei Anatolyevich Navalny was reported dead on February 16.

Navalny was a long-time political opponent of Putin, from a roughly liberal and definitely pro-western point of view. Though a thorough examination of his political record must leave communists sceptical of him, you cannot deny his courage. He was a participant in several waves of anti-government protests, and repeatedly jailed for various technical breaches of Russia's burdensome public order laws. He suffered a chemical attack with a caustic chemical that left him mostly blind in one eye. Later poisoned with a Novichok nerve agent, he was lucky to survive.

Finally, in 2021, he was arrested upon his return to Russia on charges of corruption and money-laundering, of which he had been convicted years earlier. A suspended sentence was suddenly converted into a custodial one, and in due course he was packed off to a series of increasingly inhospitable penal colonies. His health is well known to have deteriorated over this period and, while no reliable determination can be made at present as to the specific cause of his death, it seems reasonable to place the blame on Putin and the securocrat regime, who have - in the most 'innocent' possible version of events - hounded him into an early grave.

This is so obvious that, for once, it is genuinely difficult to find people spinning elaborate theories that make out it is anyone else's fault. The Russian state's communications on this have been bland and bureaucratic. Western far-right admirers of the Putin regime are keeping a discreet silence. Those misguided leftists who suppose that principled disloyalty to one's own state entails running cover for its state's nominated adversaries have likewise chosen instead to highlight the west's hypocrisy - as well they should.

Leave alone

We will return to that later. The death of this man, however, gives us a certain opportunity to survey the state of the Putin regime. Though he was never much more than an irritant in electoral terms, even allowing for the ludicrous abuses that undoubtedly attend elections in Russia, the Putin regime seemed unable to leave him alone. It tossed him into jail; it (in all likelihood) concocted an elaborate set of fraud charges against him and made them stick; it poisoned him; it brought the fraud charges back from the dead and threw him into a series of grim penal colonies. Why?

The obvious answer is that he was the chosen avatar of the United States and its various more-or-less distant agencies in global affairs - from the secret state to coopted arms of civil society - NGOs, human rights courts and Nobel committees. Despite the hysteria of the Trump-deranged liberal media in the US, Russia has no comparable machinery. The crudity of its methods - nerve



Alexei Navalny in 2013: on trial again and again

agents and barely plausible lawfare - follows from this weakness.

Putin is generally credited with steadying the Russian ship of state after the disasters of the 1990s. Compared to those years, that much at least must be conceded to him. The bonanza of shock-therapy privatisations made a few well-connected men spectacularly rich, with some of that money accruing to the mobsters who dealt with various little obstacles to this process. It is not clear that any president could have made a success out of that - even if he had sent Jeffrey Sachs and friends packing. Boris Yeltsin's public collapse into dipsomania, however, made the whole process especially humiliating for the average Russian.

Upon inheriting the top job, and backed by a largely-intact Soviet-era security state, Putin acted swiftly to stabilise matters. He attacked the class of oligarchs, throwing the book at some *pour encourager les autres*. Those who were loyal could enjoy their fortunes in peace; those who played politics would find themselves in the dock for crimes which, in fairness, they had almost certainly actually committed.

Putin's succession was initially welcomed by the west, which had cultivated him to some extent: he was, at least, a cynical operator with whom they could do business. He even asked to join Nato (but was refused). Yet his very *success* in stabilising the home front was its own kind of problem. The aim of many in American foreign policy circles - more than ever, under the triumphant neocons of George W Bush's first term - was a weakened and ideally further fragmented Russia.

In 2008, Nato's Bucharest conference proposed to invite Ukraine and Georgia into the club.

This was a bridge too far for the Russians, who took advantage of a separatist conflict in Georgia to support two breakaway republics, thus creating a border dispute that prevented Georgia from joining Nato by default. This dirty work done, Putin stepped down in favour of the more emollient Dmitry Medvedev, among whose gestures of goodwill to the west was Russia's decision to allow a UN security council resolution in favour of a no-fly zone over Libya to pass in 2011. But, when this 'no-fly zone' became a straightforward Nato regime-change operation, an infuriated Putin decided to take back the top job.

It was that year that Navalny was propelled to international fame - the exact moment that the breach between the Russian securocracy and the US world order became irreparable. Since then, Russia has defended its perceived security interests both by revenge attacks against individuals - Navalny, but also notoriously the spy, Sergei Skripal, who was poisoned in Salisbury in 2018 - and by military means, as in its intervention in the Syrian civil war and, of course, the whole saga of Ukraine. It was a bad time to be the figurehead for a potential colour revolution. The more he was lionised by the west, the more inclined the Russian state was to make an example of him.

Here is, perhaps, the time to look at Navalny's politics, such as they were. His campaign against the dominance of Putin's United Russia party was partly one of exposing corruption, of which - despite the domestication of the oligarchs - there continued to be a great deal. He also denounced interference in elections, and made the right sort of west-friendly noises about the "rule of law", etc. So far as all that went,

he seemed a fairly typical colour-revolution liberal. Yet he was also a stringent nationalist, occasionally given to xenophobic rhetoric that would be quite unacceptable to his backers in the west, comparing migrants from the south Caucasus to cockroaches and implying that the right to bear arms was essential for 'defence' against them.

Hypocrisy

These things are hardly incompatible in Russia, of course, since it is not dedicated to a legitimating ideology of liberal human rights. (Perhaps the west will not be for much longer either.) They produce some cognitive dissonance among those for whom the Putin regime is the nerve centre of the global authoritarian right (or is it Hungary nowadays?). Some, like Amnesty International, felt compelled to distance themselves from him when his anti-migrant rhetoric was publicised (though they of course backed him when he was imprisoned in 2021). Many chose to pass over it in silence. In that respect, Navalny served as a sort of training exercise for the mental contortions that would later be necessary when Putin started his 'special military operation' in Ukraine, and the "defenders of freedom and democracy" there included many thousands of outright neo-Nazis and Banderite fascists.

It is this sort of thing people denounce when they speak of western hypocrisy over Navalny. He has a record of rhetoric at least as malignant as Donald Trump's - so why is Trump the great Satan, and Navalny a brave freedom fighter? There are more serious comparisons. All sections of the Russian anti-war movement continue to suffer. For example, Boris Kagarlitsky, a fairly well known Marxist intellectual, has recently been jailed for five years (longer than Navalny got!), to

more or less no publicity outside of leftwing circles - surprise, surprise.

The most embarrassing comparison is, however, with the case of a certain Julian Assange, who is imminently - barring a spectacular loss of nerve on the part of the British state - to be extradited to the USA, to face charges still more grotesquely unjust than those hurled at Navalny. As I write, his final hearing, at which he seeks leave to appeal, is taking place at the high court; if he is turned down, only a rapid intervention from the European Court of Human Rights will save him from extradition.

The contrast between the treatment of these two men could not be more obvious, and supporters of Assange have not been shy of making that point. Moreover, at least fraud *should* be illegal, however dubious the charges against Navalny. The same could not be said of probably most of the vast range of activities implicitly criminalised under the Espionage Act. Assange's ordeal, when it has not been passed over in silence, has been *cheered on* by the same *bien-pensant* liberals so affronted by the treatment of Navalny.

Is this hypocrisy in the strict sense? Yes, in the case of many particular individuals, no doubt. As a matter of *policy*, of course, it is no such thing: it is perfectly consistent. So far as America is concerned, Assange is a foreign agent, because his habit of embarrassing Uncle Sam really does rebound to the benefit of America's enemies. Navalny played the same role *for the west*, albeit on a smaller scale. There is no inconsistency at this level - we punish enemies and avenge friends. Putin understands well enough, as was clear enough from the Carlson interview.

As the Baltimore hoodlums of *The Wire* US TV series always put it, "It's all in the game" ●

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Fighting fund

Get us there!

In contrast to the rather meagre £252 that came our way the previous week, in the last seven days no less than £973 (!) has been received by the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund. Just what the doctor ordered!

Regular readers of this column will know that week three of each month is almost always the most rewarding - mainly because that is when the most generous of those monthly standing orders land in our account. But this time it's been better than I ever remember, with no fewer than five *three-figure* sums arriving. Huge thanks go to comrades KB, GB, PB, PM and SK.

On top of that, other standing orders/bank transfers came from MM (£75), AN (£50), TR (£40), OG (£24), DR (£20) and SS (£15). Can I point out that comrade AN from the list above is a committed and loyal member of a different organisation (not the CPGB), but he clearly appreciates the *Weekly Worker's* policy of open debate, which is particularly reflected in our letters pages.

Finally, comrade IY donated £18 via PayPal, while comrade Hassan handed his usual fiver to one of our team.

Anyway, that fantastic £973 has taken our running total for February up to £1,634 towards our £2,250 monthly target. In other words, we still need another £616 in the last week and a day (thankfully 2024 is a leap year, which is where that extra day comes from!).

But wouldn't it be good if I could confirm on Wednesday February 28 (when this column will be written next week) that we have already reached that milestone? Please do your best to help us arrive at that much needed target! Go to the web address below if you want more details of how to do it ●

Robbie Rix

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

USA

Attacks at every level

Trump faces legal battles in local, state and federal courts. But Democratic attempts to derail his presidential bid may well backfire, reckons Daniel Lazare

The Democratic judicial assault on Donald Trump reached a new pitch of intensity with last week's \$355 million judgment for business fraud.

The decision is bizarre, bonkers, over the top - and therefore in keeping with the chaotic nature of the anti-Trump offensive. If the United States were a conventional centralised state, the ruling party might have opted for a neat and simple legal strategy aimed at cutting off an opponent at the knees. But, since it is a sprawling federation with one foot in the 18th century and another in the 21st, they have opted for something more complex - a swarm attack on multiple local, state and federal levels.

The results are mixed. Last month's order requiring Trump to pay advice columnist E Jean Carroll \$83.3 million for defamation was a win. But what should have been a strong case based on Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 vote in Georgia is now faltering, because an elected local prosecutor has been caught funnelling official business to a boyfriend, who then treated her to lavish vacations in the Caribbean and California wine country. Atlanta prosecutor Fan Willis, a Democrat, tried to brazen it out at a televised hearing last week. "You think I'm on trial," she said. But then, pointing at the defence attorneys, she added: "These people are on trial for trying to steal an election in 2020."

It did not work, since the arrangement was obviously a kickback. The upshot is that the election-interference case will almost certainly be delayed until after the coming presidential election, at which point it will no longer matter, since Trump, if elected, will have multiple means of stopping it in its tracks.

In New York, another Democrat is planning to go to trial next month with a case based on \$130,000 in hush money paid to porn star Stormy Daniels in the closing days of the 2016 election. But, while certainly embarrassing from Trump's point of view, the prosecution is a long shot, since Manhattan district attorney Alvin Bragg - a Democrat who ran for office on a 'Get Trump' platform - is seeking to prove that the payoff violated federal election laws, because it amounted to a surreptitious campaign expenditure that Trump failed to acknowledge. This is a stretch, and the fact that federal prosecutors passed on the same case in 2019, even though it was in their bailiwick, makes it even more dubious.

Then there is the January 6 case that a federal prosecutor named Jack Smith is pursuing. While the case seems strong, it is in trouble too. One reason is 'double jeopardy'. Since the US Senate acquitted Trump in his January 2021 impeachment trial of "high crimes and misdemeanours" related to the Capitol Hill insurrection, how can federal authorities prosecute him again for essentially the same offence?

The other reason the January 6 case is encountering turbulence is presidential immunity - the question of whether Trump can be held criminally liable for acts committed in office. Liberals cheered when a federal appeals court struck down Trump's immunity claim two weeks ago in Washington. But there is a problem: if Trump is liable, then other presidents - some beloved of liberals - will be liable too.

One is Barack Obama, who ordered



Donald Trump in 1985 and his property empire dreams

a drone strike in Yemen that killed Anwar al-Awlaki, an al Qa'eda leader who was also a US citizen, in 2011. Two weeks later, Obama ordered a second strike that killed al-Awlaki's 16-year-old son.

Considering that there was no US judicial determination that either al-Awlaki was guilty of a crime, should Obama stand trial for what was little more than an official assassination? The same goes for George W Bush, who sent thousands of US citizens to invade Iraq on phony pretences in 2003. Since some were killed or injured, should he stand trial? How about Bill Clinton? He bombed a Sudanese pharmaceutical factory in 1998 for reasons that Washington subsequently admitted were false. Since the operation killed one person and wounded 11, is he liable as well?

Socialists will answer yes, absolutely - let's hold them all to account. But the US Supreme Court is not a socialist body, alas, but a thoroughly bourgeois panel concerned with the smooth operation of the presidency as delineated in article II of the US constitution, drafted in 1787. If it takes a kinder view of Trump's immunity claim as a consequence, Smith's January 6 case may bite the dust.

Civil fraud?

So Dems are advancing on one front, stalled on another and falling back on a third. (If this sounds a bit like Ukraine, it is not surprising, since, legal or military, both wars flow out of the same neocon impulse.) Still, nothing compares to the sheer silliness that has unfolded in a Lower Manhattan courtroom since October.

The case concerns whether Trump

him as "an illegitimate president" and told supporters, "We've got to get ready to agitate and irritate until victory is won and, more importantly, until Trump is defeated."

"We will all rise up and resist this man," added the woman who is now shocked - shocked! - that anyone dares question her neutrality.²

Then there is the case itself. Amazingly, James has charged Trump with fraud, while conceding at the same time that no-one was defrauded. Indeed, the trial featured testimony by Deutsche Bank that the organisation was happy to do business with Trump, because the money it lent him generated returns that grew from \$13,000 to \$6 million in just two years.

"We are whale hunting," a Deutsche Bank official named Rosemary Vrablic told colleagues in November 2011. In financial speak, that means that Trump was a big-money client, whom the bank would be happy to land. Anshu Jain, Deutsche Bank's co-chairman, suggested "key asks" to be put to Trump. "Obtain more deposits and investment management assets" was one. Another was: "Strategically discuss leveraging Mr Trump's personal and professional network within the real estate industry in NY." A year later, a bank official took Trump to lunch to thank him for his business and to "ask whether we can work on other opportunities", according to an internal document entered as evidence.³

To be sure, Trump is a showman who routinely puffs up the value of his properties. In 2006, he testified in an earlier case that his net worth fluctuates "with markets and with attitudes and with feelings, even my own feelings". If he is happy, then he is rich; if he is depressed, then he is a little less so. But, given corporate stocks that may be 100% overvalued based on traditional price-earnings ratios, Trump is hardly the only capitalist prone to exaggeration.⁴ So what are the courts going to do - confiscate the entire New York Stock Exchange?

Besides, Deutsche Bank officials testified that they were careful to verify Trump's claims rather than take him at his word. They were satisfied as a result, Trump was satisfied, and everyone else involved was satisfied too. The law that James based her case on is generally used to protect consumers, investors and small businesses from scams, price-gouging and other predatory practices. It is designed to help "people who can't protect themselves", Syracuse University law professor Gregory Germain told Reuters. "Here we're dealing with very sophisticated lenders who are fully capable of protecting themselves and haven't asked the attorney general for help."⁵

Yet James is giving it regardless. Like prostitution or drugs, the result is a victimless crime, in which the various participants are content, even if legal authorities are not. Trump has an estimated \$600 million in cash assets and a total net worth between \$2.6 and \$3.1 billion, so there is no danger of him going under.⁶ If he appeals, however, the judgment could cause problems for his organisation, since he will likely have to obtain a bond guaranteeing payment at some future date. This could ensnare him in further litigation, as bonding companies scrutinise his credit history and James uses the process to harass him at every turn.

But even if the Democrats cannot knock Trump out, their goal is to tie him down Gulliver-style so he cannot compete in November. But it is unlikely to go so smoothly. The day after last week's verdict, Trump was in tip-top form at an indoor campaign rally in Waterford, Michigan, where thousands lined up for hours in the bitter cold to hear him speak.

Meat and potatoes

He began by denouncing "the weaponisation of this horrible legal system that has developed around us". He went on: "The decision yesterday in New York ... was a lawless and unconstitutional atrocity that sets fire to our laws like no-one has ever seen in this country before. That happens in banana republics. It doesn't happen in this country."

But then it was on to other topics - unfair competition from Mexico, environmentalism, and electric vehicles that only go 93 miles before needing to be recharged, according to Trump, but which the Biden administration is pushing regardless. Then came the real meat and potatoes in the form of an issue animating the ultra-right across the globe: immigration.

Illegal immigrants "are going to work for one-third the price", Trump told an audience packed with auto workers and others in the manufacturing sector. Making a play for traditional Democratic constituencies, he warned that black and Hispanic union members "will be losing their jobs by the millions [because] these people are going to work for nothing, they're going to work for very small amounts of money. You're going to lose your jobs - it's so sad." Next up was migrant crime - a surge that has so far failed to show up in any of the usual crime statistics:

Your local sheriff has recently stated that organised squads of illegal alien gang members are hiding in the trees and breaking into rural and suburban Michigan, into your homes after dark, plundering them for jewellery, purses, electronics, cash, watches, and anything else they can get their hands on.⁷

The bottom line is that Democrats are harassing the people; they are taking away their jobs and income; they are bringing dangerous aliens into their midst; and they are misusing the courts in order to bring down the people's defender - Trump. It is a powerful message that may well mean victory in November.

Unfortunately, political prosecutions like last week's \$355 million judgment in New York transparently render all this more persuasive, rather than less ●

Notes

1. truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/111733975716840979.
2. twitter.com/TheCCShowcast/status/1758630827968057694.
3. www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/deutsche-bank-was-keen-to-land-a-whale-of-a-client-in-trump-documents-at-civil-fraud-trial-show.
4. www.investingdaily.com/117499/cape-fear-the-shiller-p-e-warns-that-stocks-are-overvalued.
5. www.reuters.com/legal/trumps-civil-fraud-verdict-appeal-may-hinge-no-victims-defense-2024-02-16.
6. www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2024/02/16/trump-verdict-civil-fraud-trial-2/.
7. www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkC6_oJ4Vk.

STRATEGY

Deal with the arguments

The left needs to stop tailing spontaneity and start thinking strategically. **Mike Macnair** takes issue with Steve Bloom's canonisation of Luxemburg and criticisms of democratic republicanism

My short book (or long pamphlet), *Revolutionary strategy*, was published in 2008; it was based on a long series of articles in this paper, published between February 16 and June 14 2006, which responded to a debate on revolutionary strategy in the French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire and the intervention in this debate by Alex Callinicos of the Socialist Workers Party.

The book did not make much short-term impact: it was reviewed by David Broder on the *The Commune* blog (now mothballed),¹ and by Dave Esterson on the now defunct *Permanent Revolution* site.² It was critiqued by John Robinson (in this paper) from the standpoint of the Japan Revolutionary Communist League (Kakumaru)³ and by Paul Cockshott on his website and in this paper. I responded to all⁴ and I think these exchanges largely raised significant issues, and added some additional clarity to what I was saying.

The larger left groups did not respond: they have an established policy of ignoring the arguments of other groups that they are not immediately 'courting'. They especially ignore the arguments of smaller groups and of minorities within their own groups; but not these exclusively - the larger groups (SWP, the *Morning Star's* CPB and the Socialist Party in England and Wales) tend to ignore each other's arguments in publications.⁵ The effect is the dumbing-down of the general membership: because it is not worth addressing substantive disagreements except a caricature of the views of the Labour right, the group's own positive views tend more and more to become mere simplified dogma, coupled with a sort of liberalism *enragé* that tailends whatever ideas happen to be fashionable (in *The Guardian* and its equivalents).

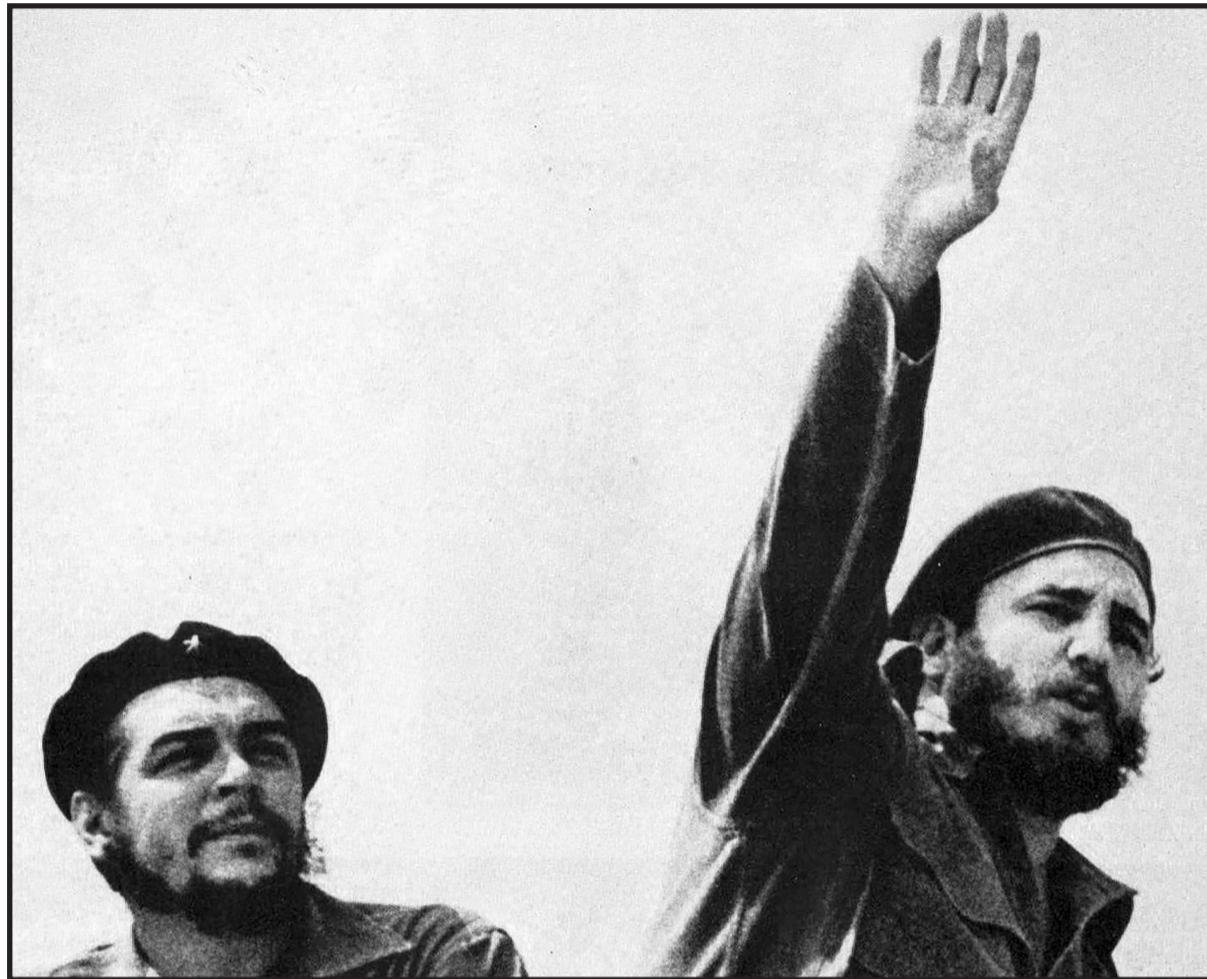
Subsequently, there has been a significant growth of interest in the ideas of *Revolutionary strategy*, at least outside the British Isles. It has been used as a point of reference by (among others) the Communistisch Platform in the Netherlands and the Marxist Unity Group in the USA, while the broader US *Cosmonaut* site, with which MUG is associated, has carried some criticisms as well. A particular recent example is Steve Bloom's December 22 2023 criticism of the weight given by MUG authors to democratic republicanism, as a form of "schematism".⁶ Arguments influenced by the book have also been offered on the German *Communist* blog, and on February 10 2024 it carried a fairly substantial, explicitly 'anti-partyist' critique by Robert Schlosser of aspects of the book's arguments.⁷

I therefore think it is worthwhile to write responses to Bloom's and Schlosser's arguments. Perhaps these will also raise important points and lead to increased clarity. This article will address comrade Bloom's arguments; a following article will address comrade Schlosser's.

Bloom

Steve Bloom's argument against democratic republicanism as a central political objective of Marxists is *ipso facto* an argument against ideas I have maintained in the book (and elsewhere), but he does not actually engage with the book or its arguments.

He refers to these only indirectly through a footnote reference to a



Fidel Castro and Che Guevara in 1962: not our road to socialism

contribution in discussion at the MUG congress, where he supports his position by reference to his agreement with Rosa Luxemburg, commenting:

I decided it was best to formulate the content of my article as a positive reference to Luxemburg rather than as a negative reference to something said by Macnair - which I am unable to check or document. But I do think it's important to highlight, for readers of *Cosmonaut*, the fact that this seems to be an area of disagreement, at least between Macnair and me.

There should, in fact, be no difficulty in checking or documenting my position on the 'area of disagreement', since Googling 'Mike Macnair Luxemburg' produces as the *first* hit my 2012 article on Luxemburg, which in turn contains references to the arguments in *Revolutionary strategy* and elsewhere.⁸

Comrade Bloom's non-engagement with *Revolutionary strategy* is reflected in his core argument that democratic republicanism is a 'schema' of the imagined form of a proletarian revolutionary process. This is based on the ideas of his youth, and of my own, in the 'official' or 'Unified Secretariat' Fourth International (USFI) of 1963-1990.⁹ The USFI was created by a regroupment of two Trotskyist tendencies in 1963 round the common position, expressed in comrade Bloom's article, that the Cuban revolution demonstrated that the arguments of Trotskyism had turned into a sectarian schema, and that the essential task of the FI was to be 'with' the Cuban 'revolutionaries of action': a policy that led the FI to avoid open defence of the Cuban Trotskyists when they were prosecuted for attempting to publish Trotsky's *The revolution betrayed*.

In the 1960s this 'non-schematism' produced disastrous partial tailing of

Che Guevara's version of 'prolonged people's war' in Latin America, and less catastrophic 'minority violence' attempts in Europe. This background body of ideas took the French Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire into the forefront of the student movement of 1967-68 and of the Paris *événements* of May 1968, and May 68 led in turn to a theorisation of revolution in Europe in terms of the *necessary* stage of dual power and the creation of workers' councils.¹⁰

The US SWP dissented, advocating an orientation round 'democratic rights' that was closer to that of the Communist Party USA - an approach also adopted in Latin America by the Argentinian Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores led by Nahuel Moreno, which allied with the SWP. In 1974-77 in Portugal the 'strategy of dual power' led the USFI majority group to tail the Portuguese Communist Party, while the pro-PST group tailed the Portuguese Socialist Party. Neither could have real political impact. Meanwhile, in 1976 a military coup overthrew the Argentinian constitutional regime, destroying the PST's perspectives; and in 1979 revolutions in Iran and Nicaragua destroyed the SWP's strategic conceptions.

Arising out of these failures came the US SWP's turn to an organisationally sectarian form of 'official' communism, which comrade Bloom opposed; and in the 1980s, the FI majority's (after 1990, just 'FI's') turn to building "parties not programmatically delimited between reform and revolution", which continues to the present day.

This FI policy has displayed a remarkably consistent lack of success. The 'non-sectarianism' of FI organisations and militants has led to them playing the role of left flank guards for 'official lefts' of one sort or another, against 'sectarian' (meaning more critical) groups; and the 'official lefts' go on to betray the FI groups,

once their services against 'sectarian' lefts are no longer needed. This failure happened most spectacularly in the Brazilian Workers Party and in Italy in Rifondazione Comunista, but much more widely - in Podemos in Spain, for example; and *repeatedly* in various broad-front projects in Britain.

Comrade Bloom argues:

... scientific socialists do not rely solely or even primarily on our own theories - not even the theories of thinkers with the stature of Marx and Engels - in determining how we should understand and orient ourselves to the world around us. Just like scientists in any field we compare our theories to the actual experiences we have with whatever realities we are theorising about and trying to influence, understanding full well as materialists that experience trumps theory, whenever there is a conflict. We therefore always need to be adjusting our theories based on our experience.

The problem with this argument is not its underlying principle that theories have to be tested against empirical evidence. It is that the disproof by empirical evidence of 'classical Trotskyism' *stops with* the Cuban revolution and goes no further.

In scientific reason, prior theories are disproved by adverse evidence *to the extent that a superior theory that explains the data with equal or greater economy of explanatory structures is produced*.¹¹ But 'anti-schematism' actually *refuses* to attempt to construct an alternative theory. It operates to deny the possibility of future experimental testing of theories.

The consequence is that anti-schematism itself becomes an untestable or 'unfalsifiable' claim. The FI can move as dedicated followers of fashion from Guevarism to 'organs of dual power' and the 'new mass vanguard', to the Eurocommunist

ideas of the *Theses on socialist democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat*, to the imagination that Gorbachev and Yeltsin represent a leftwards movement, to 'parties not delimited between reform and revolution', to 'eco-socialism' ... without ever being required to critically reassess their past, because to do so would be 'schematism'.

The book *Revolutionary strategy* began with the critique of FI politics. It is, as a book, directed to the larger critique of the forced choice allegedly posed to the left between broad-left or popular-front coalitionism, on the one hand, and variants of the mass strike strategy, associated with the 'revolutionary party' as a bureaucratic-centralist sect, on the other.

The FI's 'non-sectarianism' in fact entails *both*: coalitionism through the broad front and alliance with the 'official lefts' against their 'sectarian' critics, *and* the bureaucratic-centralist sect in the form of the FI's own organisations. Witness, recently, the split of the French Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste in December 2022, when the FI people lost their majority control of the party.¹²

Comrade Bloom polemicalises against a *part* of the argument of *Revolutionary strategy* - that we should use the old Marx and Engels idea of the 'democratic republic' rather than promoting a 'strategy of dual power' - without actually engaging with the arguments of the book. These are not, contrary to comrade Bloom, simply going back to pre-1917 ideas. They are based on a negative judgment of the fate of the left, and of a succession of potential 'revolutionary crises', in the last 50 years.

The starting point of the book's argument, in fact is that the defects of unfettered capitalism in the early 21st century are producing not a strengthening of the left, but increasing ascendancy of the nationalist/traditionalist right (pp5-10). The evolution of politics since 2008 has quite plainly confirmed this judgment. My central *explanation* of the phenomenon (pp10-19) is that the left today remains in the shadow of the bureaucratic 'socialist' regimes and of their failure, or, in the cases of China and Vietnam, their evolution towards openly capitalist regimes. It is quite clear that Cuba under Raul Castro and now Miguel Díaz-Canel has been driven towards a 'Chinese' policy in this respect.

From this point of view it is in my opinion clear that the 'sectarian' opponents of the USFI in 1963 (Healy, Lambert, Robertson, Wohlforth, etc), and the 'official communists' and Maoists, were both right (as against the USFI) in understanding that what was involved in Cuba was an *extension* of the 'socialist bloc', creating a regime of the same type, albeit a bit 'softer' than the USSR (as was also true of Yugoslavia): not a 'third way'. The fact that the 'sectarian Trotskyists' did not positively solve the theoretical problem this posed for 'orthodox Trotskyism' does not affect this. Hence, comrade Bloom's USFI argument falls to the ground: the various roads to the extension of the 'socialist bloc' led not to the dictatorship of the proletariat (working class rule), but to a blind alley necessarily ending in capitalist restoration.

In my view, this problem requires of today's left a more systematic re-analysis of where the left comes

from, and what should be retained and what discarded in the politics of the three Internationals, as well as the various failed attempts to construct a fourth. The question of democratic republicanism versus the idea that the question of workers' power can be posed simply through Russian soviets, German or Austrian *Räte*, and so on, is for me a part of this argument.

Republican

Democratic republicanism is, in my view, not a particular constitutional scheme, but a set of *principles*. These are in the first place *republican* - that is, founded on the principle of liberty as non-domination - as opposed both to monarchy and other natural-hierarchy ideas, and to the liberal principle of liberty as non-interference. That is, we stand for the idea that no-one should be permanently in a position of authority and no-one permanently in a position of subordination. They are, secondly, *democratic*: that is, unlike classic republicanism, they do not offer republicanism only for 'economically independent' small-farmer or artisan patriarchy, but insist on the inclusion of wage-workers, women and so on.¹³

These principles are essential to socialism as such, and indeed to fully developed communism - the free association of the producers. The reason is that socialism and communism require of us humans that we take conscious, collective decisions about our productive activities, as opposed to roughly coordinating them through money and markets plus states. Under a non-republican regime, the members of the 'elite' are driven to falsify economic information in the interests of gaining or keeping their jobs, and the result is 'garbage in, garbage out' in planning. Under a non-democratic regime the excluded are driven to resist, whether at the level of rioting (eg, those without the vote in pre-20th century England) or just of endemic passive-resistance go-slow (which affected the working class and the peasantry in all the bureaucratic 'socialist' regimes).

They are also actually needed for the self-organisation of the working class under capitalism. The reason is that liberalism and liberal-designed constitutions for workers' organisations deliver power to the *capitalist class* through the usual mechanisms of capitalist control of advertising-funded media, judicial corruption through the 'free market in legal services', and ordinary bribery. This is as much true of the Labour Party or trade union constitutions with liberal designs as it is of the general constitutional designs of the so-called "western democracies". Meanwhile, forms of managerialist Bonapartism - bureaucratic centralism, and so on - in workers' organisations tend to demobilise the members by blocking them from local and sectoral creativity. The result is organisations of imposing size, but actually hollowed out at the base (and as a result tending to decline in actual size). This is all too visible in the fate of the western labour movements in the last 50 years.

The consequence of this analysis is that comrade Bloom is just plain wrong to argue that "Soviet power in Russia leapt over the stage of the 'democratic republic'". The soviets could be an instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat to the extent that they functioned as *democratic-republican institutions*. (It has to be said that they actually expressed a worker-peasant alliance, because the proletariat was too small a class to take power on its own without an alliance with the peasantry.)

In a series of steps, however, the Bolsheviks-RCP-CPSU stripped the soviets of this character: first by rigging soviet elections in spring-summer 1918 to force through the treaty of Brest-Litovsk against the will of the clear majority; next by *theorising* this,

through the idea that the proletariat is necessarily *represented* by the party as a minority, at the Second Congress of Comintern; next by bans on soviet parties; then in 1921 by banning factions in the RCP; finally by actually *implementing* the ban on factions by a double police coup - first against the 'left' in late 1927, then against the 'right' in early 1929.

The end result is that the proletariat as a class, far from being the power of last resort (dictatorship of the proletariat), is wholly excluded from political power, and ends up actually *quasi-enslaved* to the factory managers by way of the system of internal passports and the attachment of housing and welfare rights to jobs. The regime becomes a form of Bonapartism. There were still formally soviets, and they still *originated* as workers' organisations. But this origin was at the end of the day insignificant.

A second negative aspect is given by the career of the 1918-19 German and Austrian *Räte* - workers' organisations thrown up in struggle, but, by deciding to exclude political parties, in practice dominated by the rightwing SPD-Majority in Germany, by the SPÖ in Austria, through their trade union cadre. This pattern is actually the *dominant* pattern of the history half-expressed in comrade Bloom's claim that "it's common for popular assemblies to arise that can already begin to act as alternative governing institutions". Yes, indeed, such bodies do commonly arise. But it is only momentarily, if at all, that they escape from the dominance of the major political parties.

The other side of the coin is that we can propagandise and agitate for democratic-republican principles without having to wait for mass-strike conditions to arise to pose the issue of soviet-type bodies. We can do so in the state by continuously exposing the undemocratic (plutocratic) character of the liberal or Bonapartist constitutional orders, and raising issues of democratic-republican principle (against monarchy, presidentialism, the judicial power, and so on and so on). We can do so in the workers' movement by campaigning both against forms of liberal constitutionalism and forms of managerialism/Bonapartism.

The effect of doing so is probably not going to be short-term victories, but to spread the idea as widely as possible that what the bribe-taking media call 'democracy' is not democracy at all, and thereby undermine the political legitimacy of the constitutional order. This, in turn, *promotes* solidarity in concrete class struggles against the media, the judiciary and police, and the political institutions - and in the long run tends to create the conditions in which the rank and file of the armed forces cease to obey orders and the regime can be overthrown. But this *tactical* use of democratic republicanism is utterly secondary to its use in grasping the *concept* of the dictatorship of the proletariat and assisting in explaining what went wrong in the USSR and its satellites and imitators. (*Assisting* in explaining - I do not suggest that it is a complete explanation. In particular, my own view - *not* a CPGB common position - is that the Bonapartist character of the Soviet regime expresses fundamental characteristics of the peasantry as a class.)

Alternatives

Comrade Bloom ends his article by calling on the MUG comrades to take more seriously alternatives to aiming for a party based on a maximum-minimum programme that has democratic-republican ideas at the core of the minimum programme. These alternatives are prolonged people's war (he does not use the terminology, but calls it the "direct military conquest of power"), as in the Chinese and Cuban revolutions;

and the strategy of dual power, which he bases on Rosa Luxemburg's *The mass strike*. He does not significantly explore the strategy of prolonged people's war, but gives more space to the "strategy of dual power". This is fairly clearly his preferred approach, and this is reflected in his argument earlier in the article that

every case study we have where the call for a new constitution has found a meaningful echo among masses of people involves a tangible social crisis stimulated by some other issue - war, economic crash, military or other dictatorship, struggle of an oppressed people, etc ...

The primary programmatic elements that a revolutionary current needs to be focused on if it wants to influence an upsurge of this kind will be those which directly address the injustices that are driving the social crisis itself, whatever they happen to be. The demand for a new constitution is appropriate, even essential, in this context. But it has to be subordinate to, and derived from, all the rest.

This is not a novelty. It was the argument of Mikhail Bakunin in his 1869 critique of the Eisenach programme, that

All the German socialists believe that the political revolution must precede the social revolution. This is a fatal error. For any revolution made before a social revolution will necessarily be a bourgeois revolution ...¹⁴

It was part of the argument of Bakunist-turned-possibilist Paul Brousse against the 'minimum programme' drafted by Marx and others in 1880 and adopted by the Parti Ouvrier Français. It was, as Lars T Lih has shown in *Lenin rediscovered*, at the core of the arguments of the 'Economists' against the *Iskra* tendency in the Russian movement in 1902.

The issue is, again, one of testability. Here it is not just the Mandelite FI which has repeatedly failed with this policy. It has been shared across the far left, including 'official communists' and Maoists. Among other problems is the issue of identifying *what* are the relevant "injustices that are driving the social crisis itself". The result is in the first place tailism. The movement of the masses absolutely normally begins in places unexpected by the organised left. Hence, rewriting the platform to focus on the specific injustices that have triggered the most recent mass movement necessarily produces *following* the mass movement.

It is in the second place unavoidable to give central priority to tactical judgments of where the masses are going or about to go. This, in turn, entails cults like those of Tony Cliff's, or Jack Barnes's, political 'nose'. And, because it makes analysis of the conjuncture and tactics central to politics, it makes every serious difference about these issues into a split issue. Here the problem affects open anarchists just as much as 'New Left' Trotskyists.

At this point we return to where we began. Comrade Bloom's reliance on Luxemburg's *The mass strike* - in relation to which he referred to one of my casual remarks rather than my published arguments - is actually a commitment to the misconceptions of the post-1956 'New Left', derived by plucking one of Luxemburg's weaker works out of its larger context and canonising it. A more direct engagement with my arguments against this strategic line *might* be more productive ●

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Notes

1. thecommune.wordpress.com/2008/08/29/revolutionary-strategy. This includes extensive exchanges - part being my responses to Broder and other contributors.
2. For some reason the relevant issue of *Permanent Revolution* (No11 or No12) with Esterson's critique and my response to it is not online at www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/permanent-revolution-group/index.htm. However, since Esterson's argument was merely the Trotskyist equivalent of 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells' (selective quotation plus synthetic indignation) this is not a great loss.
3. 'Succumbing to reformism' *Weekly Worker* October 30 2008 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/743/succumbing-to-reformism); my response: 'Sects, states and soviets' November 27 2008 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/747/sects-states-and-soviets), and 'Against philosopher kings', December 11 2008 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/749/against-philosopher-kings).
4. P Cockshott, 'Democracy or oligarchy?' *Weekly Worker* October 8 2009 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/788/democracy-or-oligarchy). A slightly variant version is printed in P Cockshott and D Zachariah *Arguments for socialism* chapter 13; my response: 'Socialism is a form of class struggle' *Weekly Worker* June 24 2010 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/823/socialism-is-a-form-of-class-struggle) and 'Representation, not referendums' July 1 2010 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/824/representation-not-referendums). This was followed by a letter from comrade Cockshott (July 1) and a further response from me, 'Transition and abundance' September 2 2010 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/831/transition-and-abundance).
5. I am uncertain how far this is merely a British peculiarity. My *impression* is that it is, but comrades from elsewhere may be able to correct me on this. For what it is worth, my *impression* is also that it came out of the Cliffite tradition (at the moment at which they banned 'permanent factions', purged their oppositions in the early-mid 1970s and took the 'party turn', creating the SWP in 1977) and then spread to other groups.
6. Communistisch Platform: communismen.nl/leeslijst; MUG: www.marxistunity.com/cadre-curriculum: *Cosmonaut*: cosmonautmag.com/2023/08/marxist-clarity-in-times-of-confusion-and-despair; critics include G Shaeffer (cosmonautmag.com/2021/06/democracy-and-socialism-the-two-edges-of-marxism-knife). For Bloom, see cosmonautmag.com/2023/12/the-struggle-for-a-democratic-socialist-republic-and-the-dictatorship-of-the-proletariat. There is a continuing exchange in *Cosmonaut*.
7. communaut.org/. Earlier material is translated at www.angryworkers.org/2022/02/10/the-organisation-debate-communaut; www.angryworkers.org/2024/01/31/dilemma-with-no-way-out.
8. 'Her life and her legacy' *Weekly Worker* August 16 2012 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/927/her-life-and-her-legacy). Note 12 there refers to *Revolutionary strategy* (2008), chapter 2. See also 'Spontaneity and Marxist theory' *Weekly Worker* September 6 2007 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/687/spontaneity-and-marxist-theory), 'Leading workers by the nose', September 13 2007 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/688/leading-workers-by-the-nose), and 'Anarchist origins of general strike slogan', March 17 2011 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/857/anarchist-origins-of-the-general-strike-slogan).
9. I was a member of the British section of the FI from 1974 to the early 1990s. I do not know when Steve joined the US Socialist Workers Party, which was formally a 'sympathising group' of the FI because of the US Voorhis Act, but he was a leader of the pro-FI opposition to the US SWP's 1980s turn to left 'official' communism, and after they were purged, of the 'Fourth Internationalist Tendency'.
10. *The building of revolutionary parties in capitalist Europe in International Internal Discussion Bulletin* Vol 9, No5, November 1972 (www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/iidb-1972-76/index.htm). Comrade Bloom imagines that this post-1968 scheme was the one overthrown by the Cuban revolution: "A significant part of the Trotskyist movement, the tradition in which I learned my Marxism, held tightly to the 'dual power' model as a schema, and this tended to disorient our thinking when confronted with events like the Chinese and Cuban revolutions." In reality, the SWP of the late 1950s and early 1960s was engaged in intervention in the beginnings of the US 'New Left'.
11. See, for instance, R Bhaskar *A realist theory of science* London 1975.
12. Statements from both sides are translated at fourth.international/en/europe/491.
13. Eg, 'Republicanism and Marxism', May 29 2003 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/482/republicanism-and-marxism). There is a good deal more literature on the civic republicanism of Marx and Engels published since then, wholly independent of my arguments - most recently Bruno Leipold's forthcoming *Citizen Marx*. See also communistuniversity.uk/individual-liberty-and-class-power.
14. libcom.org/article/critique-german-social-democratic-program-mikhail-bakunin.

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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weekly Worker

It is not
because of
anti-Semitism
- stupid

Sentiments have steadily shifted

There is a massive gulf over Gaza between the servile political class and the majority of the British population, writes **Eddie Ford**

Yes, as readers will know, there was another huge pro-Palestinian demonstration at the weekend in central London of between 200,000 and 250,000 - roughly the same size as the previous one. This was the ninth such demonstration opposing the Israeli genocidal assault against the Gazan people and calling for an immediate ceasefire, just as the leader of his majesty's extremely loyal opposition, Sir Keir Starmer, was trying to contain what could have been the biggest rebellion against his leadership over this very issue in the House of Commons.

Now, if we were to believe the media and what you could call the British political class - or the elite if you prefer - these massive demonstrations in central London represent the views of a highly motivated and politicised minority (which, if it were true, would be no bad thing, as far as communists are concerned, as that is normally what happens). Of course, if you are Suella Braverman - eager as she is to replace Rishi Sunak when he falls on his sword after the expected resounding general election defeat - they are just anti-Semitic 'hate marches' that ought to be banned - but this is obviously madness, a complete disconnect from reality. However, very pleasingly, a recent YouGov poll of British attitudes to the Israel-Gaza war clearly shows just the opposite - that the demonstrations in London and elsewhere across the country, actually represent the *majority* of the UK population. A tip of the iceberg of public opinion.

Every grade

So what we had with YouGov was a weighted sample of 2,092 adults from every 'social grade' of both sexes, across all the age bands, throughout the entire country, that was conducted between February 12 and 13.¹ In turn, this poll had been tracking since mid-November the views of samples from seven western European nations - including Britain obviously - in the aftermath of the October 7 Hamas attack and the Israeli military response.² These provided a very detailed exploration of fundamental attitudes to the conflict, including whether Europeans can understand the 'mindset' of its participants and where their initial 'sympathies' lie. For example (and not too astonishing in many respects), the most pro-Israeli country is Germany, where 29% say they sympathise more with them than the Palestinians (12%). Nevertheless, as it turns out, this represented a significant nine-point drop for Israel since October - being part of a general trend across the countries surveyed, which is hardly surprising, as the immediate period after the Hamas attacks was always likely to be the high watermark. Spain proved to be the most pro-Palestinian country, with 27% sympathising with that side more, compared to 19% for Israel.

Anyway, what was particularly striking about the poll of British



Mass pro-Palestine demonstrations fully reflect mass public opinion

attitudes to the conflict, was the massive gulf between the mass of the British population and the political class - something that can only delight communists and progressives, or anyone with genuine humanitarian sentiments for that matter.

Indeed, this was a surprising result if you remember the Iraq war - opinion polls then showed that you can fool some of the people some of the time. Indeed, in regular times - by one means or another - you can fool *most* of the people *most* of the time. That was certainly true with Iraq, despite the huge demonstrations against the war, with the majority of people still believing the lies of Tony Blair, George Bush and all the rest of them with their dodgy dossiers - WMDs ready to be launched within 45 minutes, and all the rest of the crap.

But that is not the case now, with the ruling class losing the propaganda war as the Gaza conflict goes from one horror to another - Israel issuing an ultimatum on Sunday saying it will begin a ground offensive against Rafah if the hostages are not released by Ramadan, which starts on March 10. A prospect too terrible to contemplate, as the underlining logic is genocidal - therefore expect pro-Israeli opinion to plummet further.

In a snapshot, the three central questions posed by YouGov were: Do you support or oppose the continuation of Israeli military action? Should there be negotiations with Hamas? Was Israel justified in its military response to October 7?

Regarding the first question, those in November who supported Israel

and thought its attacks should continue was 19% - now that is down to 13%. As for those who disagreed, that was at first 59%, but is now 66%. In other words, 66% of those in the YouGov poll go along with the main slogan of the Stop the War Coalition, Muslim Association of Britain, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, etc - that is, for an immediate ceasefire. Something doggedly opposed by Keir Starmer, Rishi Sunak and the so-called political class, representing a small minority of the British population, even if the Labour leader was playing with words, when it comes to his amendment to the SNP's parliamentary motion bluntly calling for an immediate ceasefire.

With the second question about negotiating with Hamas, we are constantly told by the political class that you cannot do that - every time Hamas is mentioned in the BBC news we are reminded that it is designated a "terrorist" organisation by many countries, including the UK. Well, back in November, 61% thought it would be sensible to negotiate with Hamas - now it is up to 66%. The figure for those opposing negotiations used to be 16%, and now it is down to 11%.

Then we come to the third question, which was a bit more ambiguous, the exact wording being, "Do you think Israel's attack on Gaza from October onwards is or is not justified?" That seems to have remained more or less unchanged, albeit slightly upward, meaning 44% used to think that Israel's response was unjustified - now it is one point higher at 45%. Equally, 29% thought that Israel was justified

in its actions, but now that has gone down to 24%.

Obviously, with this question and the others, we have to factor in a relatively large amount of 'don't knows'.

Some of the other questions in the YouGov poll are worth a quick look. When asked which side they sympathise with, the British population are now more likely to answer "the Palestinian side" than they were before the conflict began. Hence in the latest poll, 28% say they sympathise most with the Palestinians, compared to 23% in YouGov's pre-conflict poll in May 2023 and 15% immediately following the Hamas attacks in Israel.

Interestingly, this is matched by a decrease in the number of people saying that they sympathise with "both sides equally" - now 22% compared to 31% in late November. The number siding most with the Israelis remains largely unchanged, at 16% compared to 18% in November. The number saying they sympathise with the Israelis "a great deal" has fallen seven points since November to 18%, matched by a five-point increase in "Don't sympathise at all".

Then we have the question, "Do you think that Israel does or does not try to minimise harm to civilians when it makes strikes in Gaza?" In November, 48% thought that Israel does *not* try to minimise such harm, and now it is 50%. Meanwhile, the number of people who think that Hamas uses civilians as "human shields" has gone down from 60% to 54%.

Thus, on nearly all measures,

public sympathy for the Israeli side in the current conflict has fallen since November - a trend we can expect to continue over the coming weeks and months. The Suella Bravermans, Tracy-Ann Obermans and Maureen Lipmans of this world might attribute that to endemic English anti-Semitism, or the strange notion that anti-Semitism is "the new rock and roll" for disaffected young people, but for most people it is because what is happening in Gaza - stupid.³

Also, among the UK population - perhaps strangely enough - a belief that a permanent peace deal within the decade is possible has ticked up five points to 32%, which almost contradicts what we are seeing on the news every day. Nevertheless, more still at 39% think a permanent peace deal within 10 years "is not realistically prospect" - although this has gone down from 45%.

You could describe all this as revealing a general pacifistic or anti-war feeling - though you can get suspended from the Labour Party if you express this sentiment in a way that the party leadership finds "deeply offensive". Andy McDonald, the MP for Middleborough, discovered this to his cost when he told the massive crowd at the October 28 anti-war/pro-Palestinian demonstrations in London that we cannot have justice "until all people, Israelis and Palestinians, between the river and the sea, can live in peaceful liberty".

Resolutions

Anyhow, as revealed by YouGov, there has been no change in attitudes towards any of the potential resolutions for the conflict that the sample population was asked about. Two thirds of Britons (65%) say they support a two-state solution, where independent Israeli and Palestinian states exist alongside each other. By contrast, only 24% support a one-state solution, within which both Israelis and Palestinians would live with equal rights. But very few support the status quo (8%) - or expelling one side or the other from the region (5%-6%), which is very good to hear.

Since October 7 we have had a never-ending torrent of propaganda, with an almost supernatural image of Hamas just coming out of nowhere and attacking Israeli civilians, kidnapping people, even beheading babies - until that lie got too difficult to sustain.

Gratifyingly, however, the YouGov poll demonstrates that the political class and its media did not fool most of the people most of the time, let alone all of the time - it is now fooling fewer and fewer people for any of the time ●

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Notes

1. ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/YouGov_-_Israel_Palestine_13_Feb_2024.pdf
2. ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/YouGov_Eurotrack_-_Israel_Palestine_Nov_Dec_2023.pdf
3. lbc.co.uk/news/maureen-lipman-antisemitism.