

weekly WORKER



Ten thousand years of sorrow:
Greek warriors, Christian
theology and the origins of war

- Letters and debate
- Selective Diane Abbott
- Kate Middleton fakery
- Palestine debate

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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Socialist Appeal's
'communist turn'
in perspective

LETTERS



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

National question

In his interesting talk on 'Marxism and revolutionary defeatism' at the recent Communist University, Marc Mulholland correctly identified the right of national self-determination as *relative* - not a right that trumps all other collective rights. However, he seems to miss the point that self-determination can be exercised for *unity* - not always for independence or secession.

Of more concern, he develops the idea for a "moral right" of national revolution that exists "regardless of how much time has passed", as opposed to what he calls the "abstract" national self-determination based on "Stalin's checklist" (historically constituted, stable community, common language, territory, economic life, psychological makeup as common culture). But it is in fact his approach that is abstract, while the "Stalin checklist" is far more materialistic.

To back his position up he says: "You can't just change the boundaries of a state by force, violence or subversion. Therefore, socialists accept the legal position that the occupied territories are illegitimate Israeli entities *regardless of how much time has passed* and regardless of any ethnic changes since they were seized. You can't create a new right of national self-determination by creating a new national people" (emphasis added).

This is a completely idealistic and ahistorical approach to the national question. Applying a "moral right" to revolution "regardless of how much time has passed" is a nonsense.

New ethnic, clan and national groupings have been created by force, violence and subversion since the dawn of time. Even in the modern era, 'illegal' and 'immoral' settler-colonial nations have been formed throughout Latin and North America, Australia, New Zealand. These

have become historically constituted nations in a material sense - and they certainly were not democratically nor morally constituted. They were largely based on acts of genocide.

Our approach to the national question is political, concrete and, fundamentally, based on human beings, not borders nor timeless morality. This doesn't mean that Israel annexing parts of Gaza, ethnically cleansing it and flooding the territory with settlers would make it part of Israel. On the contrary. But we must be concrete and political, not create ahistorical and moralistic frameworks. Otherwise, we would need to call for the expulsion of Europeans from the Americas to reconstitute the 'moral right' of the native American tribes.

While some might advocate this, it is not a socialist approach for a just and democratic solution to national questions.

Martin Greenfield
Australia

Absolute farce

What an absolute farce that we have a Conservative government making new definitions of 'extremism' - bringing in what people tweet and/or what they chant whilst protesting on the streets. At the same time they are selling arms to repressive regimes across the world and have actually recently joined the US in a bombing campaign. You couldn't make it up!

There are people now residing in British prisons for selling stickers, but, I can't imagine any slogan on a sticker that comes anywhere close to the extremism now taking place in Gaza, which the British government seems in no hurry to neutralise. In fact, even having a debate in the House of Commons seems beyond the realms of decency for large swathes of the members of parliament, but they are happy selling arms to states across the world that are blowing human beings to bits - or supposedly will at some future date use the arms acquired from British firms to do that.

Is it not true that people are being blown to bits now in Yemen and that the British government

is supporting Saudi Arabia in a conflict where that is happening? And this form of extremism - if we can stretch the meaning of the term to include 'blowing human beings to bits' - seems to be not a problem for mainstream thinking. The government could be suffering from what's called 'cognitive dissonance', but that would be giving it a distinction approaching respectability - ironically a better term would be 'extremist'.

The government seems more reluctant to displease the arms manufacturers and their shareholders rather than protecting innocent lives here and abroad and actually making inroads into banning war. Imagine that - a British government intent on banning war!

But it's these very convictions which are labelled 'extremist'. As I said before, you couldn't make it up.

Louis Shawcross
Co Down

Evidence

Last week Gerry Downing (or is it Dowding?) had a long and barely comprehensible letter ranging over a multitude of subjects (March 14). He started by telling us that a previous letter regarding Tommy Robinson should not have been published because he (Tommy) is a fascist.

Perhaps, just as a nice change, Downing might wish to provide some evidence for this accusation more definitive than his own assertions.

Ted Talbot
email

Kick Elbit out

Activists have submitted evidence of an action taken at Somerset council, where they covered the building in red paint, bloody hand-prints and spray-painted messages, which read "Elbit out" and "Evict Elbit".

Somerset council are the landlords of Aztec West 600, the headquarters of Elbit Systems UK. Elbit is owned by Israel's largest weapons firm, who market their weaponry as "battle-tested" after they're developed through assaults on the Palestinian people.

The Israeli weapons-maker manufactures 85% of Israel's military drone fleet and land-based equipment, as well as missiles, bombs and bullets. Elbit's CEO, Bazhalel Machlis, boasted of how the Israeli military has thanked the company for their "crucial" services during the ongoing genocide in Gaza - since October 7, Israel has killed over 31,000 Palestinians, injured over 73,000 and displaced the vast majority of Gazans.

On two previous occasions, Somerset residents have disrupted council meetings, urging immediate action to be taken and for Elbit's lease to be terminated. Amidst financial issues, the council has made plans to sell all of their commercial properties. However, residents have repeatedly emphasised that selling the property doesn't absolve the council of their responsibility, and before any sale takes place the council must evict Elbit.

As the council has not yet taken such action, they remain on Palestine Action's database of institutions and companies who profit from and enable Israel's weapons trade.

The local group said: "By taking Elbit's money, our council have Palestinian blood on their hands. By default, they've made the whole county of Somerset complicit in the ongoing genocide in Gaza. We refuse to stand by whilst the council continue to ignore our requests to evict Elbit. For the Palestinian people at the other end of Elbit's weapons, we will continue to take action until the council kick Elbit out of Aztec West 600."

Palestine Action
email

Israel and BDS

The Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement has launched an ambitious global '#BoycottIntel' campaign targeting the US chipmaking giant, INTC, due to its decision in December to invest \$25 billion in Israel despite its ongoing genocide in Gaza. The International Court of Justice in January decided that Israel is plausibly committing crimes in Gaza that violate the genocide convention.

Our campaign calls for a boycott of computers with Intel chips, and it urges investors to divest from Intel stock and major institutions to exclude this "manufacturer of apartheid chips" from tenders. Intel has been aiding and abetting Israel's apartheid for decades, and now it is directly feeding its war chest, while it continues its unspeakable genocide against 2.3 million Palestinians in the occupied and besieged Gaza Strip. Intel is complicit in Israel's genocide and its underlying system of apartheid. Intel's MO seems to be, 'Make apartheid great again!'

Since Israel launched its war on Gaza last October, its economy has shrunk by a whopping 20%. On February 9, Moody's downgraded Israel's credit rating, for the first time in the state's history, lowering its outlook to 'negative'. Days later, Moody's downgraded the deposit ratings of Israel's five largest banks.

This follows major economic setbacks for Israel throughout 2023. International investment in Israel's once thriving hi-tech sector, for instance, plummeted in 2023 by 74%. Well before October, recognising this downward trend and the exceptionally high risk of investing in Israel at a time of 'armed conflict', some large Israeli and US companies moved operations outside Israel and cut investments in it. More recently, Tower, an Israeli chipmaking company that Intel has tried (and failed) to acquire, announced that it "will not build a new chip factory in Israel", opting for investing in India instead.

Ethical responsibility and international law aside, by insisting on investing tens of billions of dollars in Israel, a 'war zone' only miles away from occupied Gaza, Intel is putting its leaders' fanatic ideological commitment to Israel over financial and fiduciary responsibility. Why else would Intel freeze plans to expand its chipmaking manufacturing in Ohio, while throwing those billions into Israel, a state committing genocide?

We call for a global boycott of Intel, for divesting from it, and for excluding it from tenders until it drops its bloody investment in genocidal Israel.

BDS Movement
email

Fighting fund

Up your game

As I predicted in the last issue of the *Weekly Worker*, our fighting fund running total shot up this week - the third week of the month is when we receive those substantial standing orders.

And I'm pleased to say that March has proved to be no exception, with no less than four *three-figure* donations coming our way. The usual thanks go to GB, KB, PM and SK.

On top of that we received the following SOs/bank transfers: £75 from MM, £40 (TR), £24 (OG), £20 (from both GS and DR), £15 (SS) and £12 (SA). Finally MZ from Italy made his usual monthly £20 contribution via PayPal.

Well, all that came to £782 - not bad for just seven days! And it took the running total for March up to £1,834 towards our

£2,250 target. In other words, we need another £416, with, as I write, 11 days still remaining.

That's easily within reach then, but I'll tell you what - it would really help if we could go shooting well past that target. Over recent weeks I've been reporting the increased costs we're now facing - and we still haven't got a regular replacement printer.

Either way, we definitely have to raise more money - which is where our readers and supporters come in! Please up your game if you possibly can! ●

Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are name: Weekly Worker
sort code: 30-99-64
account number: 00744310

To make a donation or set up a regular payment visit weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate

Online Communist Forum



Sunday March 24 5pm

Rwanda and small boats: 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/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain

LABOUR

Selective justice is no justice

John McDonnell has rightly called for her reinstatement. But, asks Eddie Ford, what about all the many others wrongly accused of anti-Semitism?

By now everyone will be familiar with Frank Hester's comments about Diane Abbott. The Tory mega-donor said (five years ago) that she made him "want to hate all black women and "she should be shot". Presumably, his remarks were purely hyperbolic, not an instruction. Nevertheless, they were highly unpleasant, reeking of misogyny and racism, even if the man has apologised - laughably claiming that his comment had "nothing to do with her gender nor colour of skin". Of course, there were demands that the Conservative Party return Hester's £15 million donations, but that was never going to happen - maybe they have spent it already in a near doomed attempt to prevent Sir Keir becoming prime minister.

In response to Hester's bile, which Abbott described as "frightening", some have called for her to be reinstated to the Parliamentary Labour Party, being both the first black woman ever elected to parliament and the longest-serving black MP, getting re-elected in every general election since 1987. As readers will recall, she had the whip withdrawn almost a year ago after writing a stupid letter to *The Observer*, saying that, while "many types of white people with points of difference, such as redheads, can experience this prejudice ... they are not all their lives subject to racism", going on to cite Jews, Irish and traveller people (April 23).

While she appeared to treat today's Romany gypsies and Irish travellers as just another type of white people, you can reasonably argue that in fact they are subject to overt racism by politicians, the media and the police - we are dealing with far more than mere prejudice. And by reducing racism to simply a question of skin colour, she was effectively proposing a hierarchy of racism, where being black trumps being Jewish or whatever, which is dumb.

Anyway, Abbott apologised for her comments, saying the letter was an initial draft sent by mistake, though according to the *Jewish Chronicle* the letter had been sent twice - but who believes anything they say? She has now been under "investigations" for 11 months - an absurd amount of time to simply reread a letter - making you draw the conclusion that the party leadership are just playing for time in a bid to prevent her standing as a Labour candidate in the forthcoming general election.

Unsurprisingly, as a black woman, she has received a large degree of support from many within the party. Harriet Harman, former Labour deputy leader, said she would be "sad" if Abbott's career ended without her being readmitted to the PLP. The current deputy leader, Angela Rayner, too "would like to see Diane back", but added that the party "has to follow its procedures".

But they involve a process deliberately designed to thwart natural justice. Otherwise how come it has taken so long to come to a decision? Ed Balls, hardly a natural ally, has also added his voice to those calling for Abbott to have the whip restored. "She was suspended from the PLP a year ago for saying something she probably shouldn't have said and she apologised for it," he said. "... following that apology, she should be supported and defended rather than left on her own, which is what's happening at the moment". We are informed by the *Morning Star* that "thousands" have signed petitions calling for her to be returned to the PLP. Good.

Of course, communists demand



Hardly the only victim

that Diane Abbott is restored to full membership and is allowed to stand in the next general election if her local party wants her to - everything we know about Hackney tells us the vast majority of party members in the constituency do want her to be their MP again, which should be their right. Yes, Abbott was stupid 11 months ago - so what? Whether her letter was a draft sent for publication by mistake or not, her sins are dwarfed by those committed by the Labour right and the vast majority of the PLP, who are pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist, pro-Nato and overwhelmingly pro-Israel - as it makes another step towards the genocide of the Gazan people, with Benjamin Netanyahu saying there is "no alternative" to a ground invasion of Rafah. Equally important, by calling for Abbott's reinstatement, we are defending the space - which admittedly is extremely limited to almost vanishing point - that still remains in the Labour Party where any sort of leftwing views can be expressed and debated.

Appeasement

Showing that Diane Abbott has not been "left on her own", as stated by Ed Balls, was last weekend's demonstration called by the TUC and the SWP's front, Stand up to Racism, to mark the UN's Anti-Racism Day - an event observed annually on the date when the police in Sharpeville, South Africa, opened fire and killed 69 people in 1960. Naturally both Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell were there, marching amongst banners declaring: "Racism is extremism", "Freedom is a constant struggle", "Say no to Islamophobia", "Stamp out anti-Semitism, yes to diversity", and so on.

Loud cheers broke out when McDonnell, who was shadow chancellor under Corbyn, made a fiery speech in "solidarity with my friend, my colleague, my comrade, Diane Abbott" - going on to lead those gathered in a chant of "No justice, no peace". He declared that Abbott is nobody's victim, but facing racism "day in, day out" from various sections "takes its toll, and I want to pay tribute to this woman, her bravery, courage, determination". These remarks echoed his earlier statement to the PA news agency: "... the reason people are mobilising in such large numbers is because we are seeing the rise of racism within our society again", adding that it was "disrespectful" that Abbott had not been allowed to speak in the House of Commons despite the

fact she was the focus of the debate around racism - something that "absolutely shocked" him.

McDonnell got an even bigger cheer when he told those assembled outside the home office: "If the Labour Party wants to be perceived as an anti-racist party, there is one simple step that can be done today, and that is Sir Keir Starmer restoring the whip to Diane Abbott."

Now, these are perfectly fine sentiments - as said above, she should be reinstated. But the difference we have with John McDonnell is not over that, obviously: rather, why has he come out in "solidarity" just with Diane Abbott ... and, for that matter, Jeremy Corbyn, but not the many others? After all, they are not the only ones who have suffered injustice or been monstrously slandered. What about Marc Wadsworth, Stan Keable, Tony Greenstein, Jackie Walker and the hundreds - indeed thousands - of others who have also been wrongly accused of anti-Semitism? Or, more exactly, were first accused of anti-Semitism and, when that would not stick - as it was transparently false - were then charged with the catch-all crime of "bringing the party into disrepute" - an act of monumental hypocrisy, as it was the accusers who were guilty of that very offence with their kangaroo courts, inquisitions and malicious fabrications.

Why has McDonnell not come out in "solidarity" with all of them and led a militant campaign to have them exonerated? Why have they been left on their own? Are they lesser human beings because they are not MPs? For the official Labour left, it does seem that there are two tiers of solidarity - some are more worthy than others. The real reason for this is not too hard to establish. The official 'lefts' in the shadow cabinet looked the other way when these comrades were being suspended and expelled - named and shamed for something they had not done - in an attempt to appease the right, even though it was never going to be appeased.

The Labour right was always going to demand more and more - an obvious fact of political life that Jeremy Corbyn seemingly never understood, to the point where we had Jennie Formby, the general secretary appointed under his leadership, boasting about how the party was "speeding up" investigations and expulsions for 'anti-Semitism', much to the great delight of the bourgeois media, which was running non-stop lurid stories about the anti-Jewish hatred that was supposedly rife in the Labour Party.

Yes, we need to be critical not only of Jeremy Corbyn - who has thoroughly exposed himself as a complete nincompoop - but also of John McDonnell, who is equally guilty of trying to appease the right by sacrificing former friends and allies. We should not be selective about who we are in solidarity with, because we are up against a big lie: a witch-hunt that actually puts senator Joe McCarthy to shame. After all, at least in the 1950s there was a Soviet Union and a Communist Party of the USA, and the communist parties were a real force in many parts of the world.

But the anti-Semitism campaign in the Labour Party was based on nothing - a big lie of Goebbels proportions. That cannot be said often enough, and the likes of McDonnell and Corbyn ought to be saying it and saying it out loud ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

ACTION

Ceasefire now - stop the genocide in Gaza

Saturday March 23: Day of action, with over 30 events nationwide. Demand the government ends its complicity in Israel's attacks, including an end to the arms trade with Israel. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Ceasefire now! defend the right to protest!

Monday March 25, 7pm: Public meeting, Chalkhill Community Centre, Chalkhill Road, Wembley Park, HA9. Discuss how to respond to government attacks on the movement and defend the right to protest. Speakers include Lindsey German and Andrew Feinstein. Organised by North West London Stop the War: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=795925235894388.

End Gaza genocide, defend the right to protest

Tuesday March 26, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Lost Society, 339 Battersea Park Road, London SW11. Speakers include Chris Nineham and Barnaby Raine. Organised by Battersea Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=795452622608316.

Eviction resistance

Thursday March 28, 6pm: Training session, Unison Office, 84 Bell Street, Glasgow G1. Landlords attempt to evict tenants so they can hike up the rent. When evictions are set to go ahead, well-organised community support can force the sheriff officers to turn around. Register to attend. Organised by Living Rent: www.livingrent.org/eviction_resistance_training_glasgow.

How capitalism ruined crypto and how to fix it

Thursday March 28, 6.30pm: Talk at Space4, 113-115 Fonthill Road, Finsbury Park, London N4. Joshua Dávila discusses his work and book *Blockchain radicals: how capitalism ruined crypto and how to fix it*, which shows how the technology can be used for more radical purposes. Tickets £5, refunded when you attend. Organised by Housmans Bookshop and Futures Podcast: housmans.com/events.

Socialism: utopian and scientific

Thursday March 28, 7pm: Online session in the fortnightly 'ABC of Marxism' course, presented by Ian Spencer. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

Ceasefire now - stop the genocide in Gaza

Saturday March 30, 12 noon: National demonstration, central London - details to be announced. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Stop bombing Gaza - stop bombing Yemen

Wednesday April 3, 5.45pm: Fringe meeting at NEU conference, Bayview Suite, International Centre, Exeter Road, Bournemouth BH2. Speakers include Daniel Kebede (NEU) and Lindsey German. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Communist culture club

Thursday April 4, 7pm: Fortnightly online culture meeting. Simon Hannah asks if *In time* is the most Marxist film ever; Matthew Jones on what to learn from Trotsky on fascism and Anne McShane on Palestinian poet and writer Mourid Barghouti. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

Merchants of death walking tour

Saturday April 6, 2pm: Assemble outside 25 Victoria Street, London SW1. Discover the arms companies in our midst that have facilitated the obscene punishment on Gaza's civilian population. Registration free. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: caat.org.uk/events/london-caat-merchants-of-death-tour.

The work and legacy of Raphael Samuel

Wednesday April 10, 6.30pm: Book event, Working Class Movement Library, 51 The Crescent, Salford M5. Editor John Merrick discusses the new collection of Raphael Samuel's work on 19th-century Britain, *Workshop of the world: essays in people's history*. Tickets free. Organised by Working Class Movement Library: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=801671655334712.

Five demands to build a real alternative

Saturday April 13, 10am: Conference, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. To discuss the challenges - and solutions - to the crises we face and how we build a real alternative. Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn and Fran Heathcote (PCS general secretary). Registration £11.50 (free). Organised by Peace and Justice Project: thecorbynproject.com/events.

Bargain books

Saturday April 13, 11am: Book sale, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Get your hands on Marxist classics, socialist histories and rare pamphlets. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/450.

A celebration of Pat Arrowsmith

Thursday April 18, 6pm: Public meeting, LSE Library, 10 Portugal Street, London WC2. A peace campaigner, an organiser of the first Aldermaston March in 1958 and an activist for Irish freedom. Speakers include Francie Molloy (Sinn Féin MP) and Lindsey German (Stop the War Coalition). Registration free. Organised by CND: cnduk.org/events.

CPGB wills

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

ROYALS

Doctoring the princess

Kate Middleton's photo fiasco casts an unflattering light on the relationship between the crown and the press, argues **Paul Demarty**

For a little while, the not-so-quality press has been captivated by the strange saga of a photograph.

Apparently taken on mothering Sunday, a couple of weeks ago, it shows a happy Kate *née* Middleton, smiling radiantly out from a huddle of her children. It is a rather touching portrait of the joys of family life, such that you might find on the social media profiles of one of the contemporary breed of 'tradwife' influencers, who pitch to their adoring public the joys of ensuring that the man of the house has a piping hot supper awaiting him, as he comes home from a hard day's work, with a quiverful of tiny feet pitter-pattering around the place.

Alas, like most of that particular stream of content, the photograph appears to be less than entirely authentic. You did not need to be a particularly talented amateur sleuth to spot the joins, the places where Photoshop had intervened to make the whole thing more uplifting and twee. Having been published by Associated Press and widely disseminated, it was rapidly withdrawn. Before long, the palace authorities had to admit it, and Kate – showing, in equal parts, dutifulness and folly – insisted that all the edits were made by her personally.

Certainly it seems not to be a terrifically *professional* job, so quickly was the ruse discovered. On past evidence, that does not mark it out as specifically the work of a princess, as opposed to the gormless idiots who seem to staff the royals' PR corps in great numbers. But, whoever the perpetrator is, there remains the question – *why?* There is, in certain recurring communications, the practice of the 'canary', which works like this: suppose you are a delivery company and you are forbidden by law from alerting your customers when their packages have been interfered with by the authorities. You can send out a monthly newsletter that includes the sentence, "No packages have been searched by the police this month." If it becomes untrue, you can simply not include the sentence (perhaps, depending on the wider legal environment). Did the palace think that, if there was *not* a cloying mothers' day picture, we would all assume she was dead?

Now that the edits have become public knowledge, of course, all manner of assumptions are flying about. This cannot merely be a matter of a few cosmetic tweaks to a photo – oh no! The theories multiply. The couple are about to get a divorce. William is abusive. Somebody, somewhere *is hiding something*.

All of which only makes the rather limited sense that it does because Kate is currently withdrawn from public life, following an abdominal operation in January. Nobody likes to hear the word 'operation' used in connection with a public figure with whom they have an unhealthy obsession. The reality of major abdominal surgery – familiar to those who have undergone it, or know people who have – is a fairly long recovery. When fitness coaches talk about your core strength, they are talking about precisely the bits that the surgeon has been rearranging; rather basic activities are difficult, and it is hardly unusual or alarming for the patient to take a long time to convalesce. Needless to say, you probably do not want to be bundled



Wedding dress: everything is posed, everything is for show

by three spunky children during that time. That ought to be a sufficient explanation; but the British appetite for royal gossip cannot possibly be sated by such meagre portions.

Depleted

The debacle comes at a difficult time for the royals, and also highlights the still tense relations between them and the press. So far as the family goes, they are presently rather depleted by health problems. King Charles has had his cancer diagnosis – we are told that it was caught early, but it is nonetheless dangerous territory. Between his ill health and Kate's, William Windsor has also largely withdrawn from public engagements.

All of this follows the decision on the part of Charles's people to shrink the surface area of the royal family as a public institution. Since the 1960s, all the immediate family of the monarch have taken on significant public roles; but that has proven a little too risky: we need only mention the rogue Sussexes – and, of course, Andrew and his possibly malfunctioning sweat glands. Too many times the last few years, or even decades, have been enlivened by various royals briefing against each other. A leaner, meaner operation is favoured by Charles Windsor (relatively speaking).

Which is all well and good until the king has cancer, the princess of Wales a surgery recovery ordeal, the prince of Wales altogether too much on, and still there are charity galas to be attended and municipal swimming pools to be opened. Camilla has stepped up – reluctantly, according to the royal gossip-hounds – but there

are only so many inane occasions one woman can attend.

Even such a stripped-down operation is vulnerable to dysfunction. We have spoken of 'the palace', but there are two palaces involved here – Buckingham (Charles) and Kensington (Wills and Kate). *Private Eye's* royal hack, known only as 'Flunkey', claims that they are at sixes and sevens: whether or not the edit was Kate's work, the decision to release the picture came from Kensington. The fiasco, however, laps inevitably up against the gates of Buckingham, much to the annoyance of the king's people. They have, after all, chosen to be relatively open about Charles' illness, and the limits it places on his activity. There is not much to speculate about (except, inevitably, whether his cancer is more serious than they are letting on). The photo disaster is a desperate reaction to speculation provoked by earlier secrecy, which has inevitably just made things worse.

All of this is, of course, a temporary embarrassment. Kate will be back on her feet in due course; so will Charles, or else he will be dead, and we will go through the whole circus again. The more fundamental problem has to do with the ever stranger relationship between the monarchy and the media in this country. Both the decision to spread out royal duties under Elizabeth and the decision to re-centralise them under Charles are fundamentally initiatives in relation to the media.

Yet in the interim the media has changed enormously – at least twice. There was first of all the creation of the modern tabloid press by Rupert Murdoch and equivalents, which

took the gossipy output of the *News of the World* and *Daily Mail* up to the 1960s and married them to an almost admirably pervasive cynicism. The Murdoch tabloids were, of course, always notionally monarchist; yet they were utterly committed to profit, and the need for endless scoops gave them (and the competitors pulled along in their wake) the habit of pushing ever further. The gutter press became very dependent on paparazzi photographs, which got them into hot water when Diana Spencer died – she was pursued to the end by telephoto-wielding pervers, sparking widespread public mourning.

Co-dependent

That was merely a flesh wound for the press, which – having relentlessly monstered Diana for many years – quickly got on board with the public mood, and made the story one of an out-of-touch palace. Worse was to come for them with another of their dirty tricks – voicemail hacking. It was a leak from Harry's phone that first sent people to jail for that crime – namely, *NotW* royal correspondent Clive Goodman and private dick Glenn Mulcaire.

Were the royals married to the press, you would characterise the relationship as one of pathological co-dependency. Just as people ill-advisedly 'stay together for the kids', these two institutions have a common purpose in keeping sections of the masses reconciled to the grubby manoeuvres of state power. The monarchy, in a constitutional regime like ours, allows the government to act with executive power, and offers a single point on which to project the mass of anxieties, known by the name of 'patriotism'. These goals are accomplished by way of story-telling, which requires story-tellers and means of mass broadcast. The popular press played that role adequately in this country at least well into the 2010s. It needed the royals as raw material for the stories – the royals, meanwhile, needed the reach of the tabloids.

Today we are at least in the midst of a further transformation of the media, if not quite yet at the far side of it. The default entry point for news media has become the internet; but this has given considerable power to the *platforms* that provide that entry point – social media and search engines. This has tended to decimate the economic basis of the print media, however, by drastically reducing advertising revenue and reducing customer loyalty. I say we are not at the far end of this transformation merely because the effect has been to fatally undermine a determinate media structure without replacing it with anything viable, at least from the point of view of ideological reproduction.

Something will turn up, eventually: ideology abhors a vacuum. (Perhaps the US ban on TikTok really is, as some of its proponents promise, the beginning of a new and far more stringent regime of social media regulation across the board, which would in turn allow incumbent monopolists to shape the narrative more directly, like the media moguls of old.) In the meantime, absurd dust-ups like 'photogate' will likely continue.

After all, it could only get this far out of hand because the flattening effect of social media brings forth the most morbidly amusing conspiracy theories, which in turn become

problems of 'optics', which the 'respectable' media must in turn report on. To make things worse, the search engines are now trivially gamed by producing specific kinds of unreadably repetitive prose. Hacks for the *Sun* and *Mail* are hardly any better at this than more industrialised content-farming operations, so capitalist civilisation has tended to *lose* its former capability of controlling the narrative.

This has very recently gotten a lot worse. For all the hype, the one major effect of the launch of generative AI platforms like ChatGPT has been to effectively automate the production of this worthless slime. There is an idea out there called the 'dead internet theory', which states that for some time most web content has consisted of bots writing content for other bots to consume, in a perfectly pointless *perpetuum mobile*. Wikipedia calls this a "conspiracy theory", but it is the "conspiracy theory" most immediately pressed on anyone who scrolls through their Facebook feed nowadays, searching in vain for any posting from somebody they actually know. It has a little more than a grain of truth to it.

I have ended up, somehow, as this paper's own 'Flunkey'; and in recent years I had begun to think that the rift between the press and the royals – opened by the death of Diana and widened by the phone-hacking scandal – had begun to repair. The means by which it did so was the ritual sacrifice of Harry Windsor and his oh-so-troublesome wife, Meghan Markle. Their decision to take their distance from 'the Firm' allowed the press to present the conflict as one pitching detestable, modern, 'woke' pieties against the quiet, patient, conservative progress of a venerable institution through the ages.

Yet all this recent nonsense rather tells against my little theory. The institutional decay of both sides – most especially the press – has prevented a compact from truly being secured. From the point of view of the palace (or palaces), the only meaningful upside would be some let-up in the relentless scrutiny that has bundled the royals into one disaster after another. The press might have achieved this by diverting its dirty tricks wholly and permanently onto the Sussexes and other 'woke' adversaries, like the NGO activists who embarrassed Lady Susan Hussey a few years back.

But it cannot. The tabloids are all but drowning in possibly AI-generated glop. Their output is ever more governed by nonsensical twitches in the public's obsessions – obsessions they used to be able, reliably, to invent on command. The king, meanwhile, sits ill at ease on the throne of a kingdom in an advanced and obvious state of decay, his subjects divided and rancorous. On March 19, video footage was mysteriously obtained by *The Sun* of the Waleses trooping around a Windsor farm shop: "the image the world has been waiting to see", declared the *Mail* in its turn. There is an undertone there: "*why* were we waiting? Help us to help you."

A serious left has scores to settle with both these institutions and, while we may not have much use *per se* for this ridiculous doctored photograph, we ought to be cheered by the weakness of the institutions forced to account for it ●

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MINERS

Spirit lives on still

There was something approaching panic when George Galloway announced he was attending. David Douglass reports on this month's commemoration in Doncaster marking the 40th anniversary of the Great Strike

On March 9, hundreds of ex-miners and their families and supporters throughout Yorkshire marked the 40th anniversary of the 1984-85 Great Strike with the Hatfield Main miners strike parade.

The wheels were set in motion last August, when I got the association of former Hatfield Main National Union of Mineworkers members to agree to back it, and if necessary fund it. We had the support of local councillors, many of whom are miners' sons and daughters, and in general it all looked like a trouble-free plan. But sadly I happened to have a stroke in November and it took a wee while for me to reconfigure reality - as I write this one-handed, I am still in hospital. But I managed to organise much of the day from hospital - including the invitation to Arthur Scargill to be our main speaker, which he accepted.

Previously I had organised three such commemorations at 10-year intervals and envisaged the occasion as a national demonstration - I sent early drafts of the publicity out to all sections of the trade union and workers' movement.

But on the ground things were not so smooth. My vision at first had been that the whole rally would end up at one of the iconic areas surrounding the coal mine that an ongoing campaign had earlier saved from destruction. But various plots of land surrounding the site had been bought for industrial development and the road infrastructure was such that local developers had hoped to block out all memory of Hatfield Main as a once militant and politicised sector of the populace - and not just miners either.

In previous decades I had in true anarchist tradition said to the council and police: 'Here it is - we're having a march and rally, and we're coming through here.' But now dealing with the council means risk assessment, road closures and lots of bureaucracy. All this led to some friction between me in a hospital ward in Sunderland and the people with boots on the ground doing the spadework. But the biggest friction of all was the question of what it was all for. What did the miners' strike mean to people now, 40 years on - not just those of us still alive who experienced it, but a whole generation of people born since?

Some thought that this commemoration, like the strike itself apparently, was not political (for some just a family affair) and so people should not be using it to make trouble for the Labour Party. One can imagine how I responded to this, but it did bring home to me how visions even within this community had changed. From the Great Strike being one more page in the miners' ongoing war with the state and capitalism, rating alongside 1912, 1921, the general strike, the 70s and the decade of war (1983-93) against the closures, it has now become a case of 'Forget the ball - get on with the game'. Yes, honour the men who fought, but without really understanding what it was all about and the ways in which that war is still happening today.

The issue of politics - whose politics and why? - is still crucial, but now it seems the majority of lefty liberals would not support the miners' fight to save the industry. Today the *Guardianistas* and most



Margaret Thatcher: wanted to smash miners

of the left would actively support closures, though they might disguise this with flowery terms about how it is all just 'transition', or 'maybe in 10 years time'. We have seen this so clearly with the steelworkers, where the unions by and large tried to 'run with the foxes' of proletarian heavy industry and 'hunt with the hounds' of net-zero and climate disaster: riding two horses going in opposite directions with one arsehole.

Such sympathy for the miners is rather like that for native Americans or the Jacobites - what happened was sad, but inevitable. Rubbish, of course: the mine closures were part of a deindustrialisation programme - a plan to drive heavy industry abroad, where it is more easily handled through super-exploitation, union repression and crushing poverty.

Platform

The whole thing was brought to a head when George Galloway decided to grace us with his presence. First off, I was asked if he could share the platform and I said no - not because as an anarchist I find much of his Stalinist politics objectionable or much of the community saw this as an attention grab, but simply because we had already picked the speakers: Arthur Scargill; the leader of the local Labour council, Nigel Ball; and Rose Hunter from Midlands Women Against Pit Closures. The local press got hold of the story, and did a big 'exposé', quoting from the Workers Party website and implying that he was indeed a guest speaker.

Tory councillors demanded that the whole thing be stopped - Galloway was a risk to the good old folk of Doncaster, you see. This triggered

some panic among younger members of the organising committee, who then kicked up a fuss because I had brought such pestilence upon them. They said I should ask him not to come - otherwise the council would withdraw grants, the police would ban the event, etc. As it turned out, the council had no such plans and the police could not see what the fuss was about. Nevertheless the committee issued a statement in which they said this was purely a day for memories and honouring the men who fought. It emphasised that the event it was not political, and we had not invited George.

Well, that was true specifically, but he came anyway and - surprise, surprise - he was glad-handed all along the route, with many people having photos taken with him. He, of course, was in his element. By the time they were outside the club where the march ended he had caught up with Arthur and they briefly posed for photos together - George making a brief (no kidding) speech about what a magnificent class fighter Arthur was. For all the fuss, Galloway didn't consume any babies, but posed like a celeb at an Oscar ceremony and everyone announced what a nice bloke he was. One website reported that he said Scargill was a hero of the working class - and George was given a fantastic reception by the miners.

While there were misgivings, there was none of that on display on the day - with as the veterans of the battles, wearing their aging British Coal and National Coal Board donkey jackets, but displaying their strike badges and slogans as fiercely as ever: 'Coal, not dole',

'No justice, no peace'. Clearly the men and women who took part in the fight, but now live in the ruins of that once prosperous community, knew what this was about and would not easily forget the struggle and who the enemy is now.

But if anyone thinks this is a Labour-loyal community, they are in for a shock. It is not that they all turned Tory, but they were reacting to the fact that Labour had pissed all over us. While some voted against Labour by voting Conservative, they were not *for* the Tories: they were against the Labour traitors. Galloway might do well by standing a candidate in one of these local seats, but the biggest impact will be made once again by mass Labour abstentions.

Reception

The crowd knew nothing of the wobbly knees behind the scenes or the dynamics behind the event, and they cheered all the speakers to the rafters.

Maybe 2,000 folk had assembled in hearty spirits, and no less than two brass bands and a pipe band filled the air with combative music. The bar and concert room were rammed to capacity and people were at length turned away and clustered round the doorways and in car parks, where the speeches were relayed.

As I have said, I was not present, but against the stark background of the pithead my old fellow Jarrow lad and anarchist, Tom Pickard, read my speech to the crowds. Here are some extracts:

The world needs primary steel, but because it has hardly any

coal Britain is the only capitalist country in the world unconcerned about having no steel-making facilities. Maybe in a century or so we will have a substance that replaces steel, but, while we need it, it will be made in blast furnaces ...

The government has put a two-thirds penalty on its carbon tax - no other country does this, that's the truth. That tax is killing British steel, British industry and everything made from it - ships, planes, trains, wind turbines ... Some steelworkers leaders concede that we support decarbonisation, but that means no more steel.

Some people may be asking, 'What's he rabbiting on about steel for, when we are marking the destruction of coal and our resistance to that in 1983-94? Because, as we foretold, coal decimation was a prelude to that of steel, which is needed for manufacturing, engineering, shipbuilding and producing wind turbines ...

For any greens looking mystified, there are no decarbonised wind turbines: they require blast furnaces, coal and therefore miners. You can't have renewables without coal: offshore wind means coal mines - not just here, but anywhere abroad. But here's the rub: we still use steel, coal, oil and gas, but we just won't produce it here ...

You might say, 'Look at the bad weather. The climate is doomed, isn't it?' No - this is the safest time ever, as far as loss of life or injury resulting from environmental disasters are concerned. In the 1920s there was a 50 times greater chance than now of dying from earthquakes, typhoons, floods, extreme heat or cold, high winds, forest fires ... And, the further you go back, the worse it was!

Rose Hunter reminded everyone of the contribution women had made and she left many a tear in the eyes of those remembering their stand - in 1984-85, and in the 1992 campaign many took a lead role.

But, when Arthur took to the stage, the room was electric. He went through all the myths of the strike: how it happened, the question of the time of year, the ballot, international aid, violence, the political militarisation of the police and just how close we came to outright victory - we lacked that final push from the working class as a whole, which would have taken us over the line.

When he finished, the crowd went mad and burst forth which a thunderclap of applause as vibrant as they did 40 years ago. Of the 1,800 men who worked at Hatfield, many of those still going have changed little over the years. There were feelings of comradeship deeper than the ocean, and the strong memory of hard, militant politics was the flavour of the afternoon - many younger people there could not help but be impressed by this generation of old fighters.

For all the fears and the problems, the organising committee did a wonderful job. The event set the scene for keeping the debate alive - for the politics of today and of the future ●

WAR

Mycenae c1200 BCE: soldiers marching to war

Ten thousand years of sorrow

Class exploitation and war go hand in hand. Jack Conrad explores origins, Greek warriors, Christian theology and the widely held idea that Marx and Engels urged the backing of the lesser evil

Steven Pinker opens his 2011 book, *The better angels of our nature*, subtitled *Why violence has declined*, by explaining why his *real* starting point is not with the “anarchy of the hunting, gathering and horticultural societies”, in which our species spent most of its evolutionary history. Instead he claims to trace a fivefold reduction in the chronic violence that “characterised life in a state of nature”, beginning with the onset of the “first agricultural civilisations and governments.” Pinker calls this the Pacification Process.

As one of those incorrigible, TED-talking, professional bourgeois optimists, Pinker finds it convenient to accept as a given the Hobbesian notion that we must have strong states, law courts, armies, police forces, prisons and all that crap, if our dark passions are to be curbed. Without that there can only be “continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”. In a phrase: “war of everyone against everyone”.¹

By taking 8000 BCE as his point of departure, Pinker purports to show that life is slowly getting better, less fractious, more peaceful. Of course, a generalised nuclear exchange between the big powers would change that Pollyannaish picture in an incandescent flash. But there is a more substantial problem with Pinker’s account. He assumes that for the vast majority of our “evolutionary history” life was, yes, “nasty, brutish and short”.

However, the evidence that we have shows no such thing. Contemporary hunter-gatherer societies in sub-Saharan Africa, such as the San, can be taken as the inheritors and continuers of an original communism dating back 200,000 years or thereabouts. While Bantu herders and white colonial incomers have murdered and persecuted them, taken the best watering holes and killed off much of the big game, a militant egalitarianism still reigns amongst

them. While undoubtedly some inter-personal violence happens, in particular between randy young men, would-be male despots are given short shrift. Humorous put-downs, walk-outs and culturally embedded levelling combine to maintain what Christopher Boehm calls an “anti-hierarchy”.² Crucially, in terms of our discussion, there is an absence of war between San groups. There is, however, exogamous marriage, with males coming into the group, not females moving out. So it is make love, not “war of everyone against everyone”.

War certainly needs to be categorically distinguished from mere occasional inter-personal violence. Carl von Clausewitz, and his 1832 *Vom Kriege* (‘On war’), has, of course, provided the now standard definition. War, he says, is never a single act: it is a duel on an extended scale. War is an “act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will”. War is the “previous” peaceful policy, the politics, of this or that tribe, state, class or party, continued by “other, violent, means”.³ War and peace are therefore opposites which constitute a unity. Where there is no war, neither is there peace.

Chris Knight, following Frederick Engels, has *homo sapiens* breaking with the violent alpha-male hierarchy that characterises our nearest living biological cousins, the chimpanzees and gorillas, and, with good reason, we think characterised our now extinct, early palaeolithic ancestors such as *homo erectus* and *homo heidelbergensis*. In his convincingly argued account, the human revolution consisted of a whole series of attempts - led by women, in alliance with their brothers and sons - before the new order was finally established. But this leap from ‘nature red in tooth and claw’ allowed language, symbolic culture and uber sociability to take off.⁴ Males were incorporated as the second productive sex. And, far from this original communism being based on scarcity, as Engels sometimes

imagined, the exact opposite was surely the case. There was plenty of free time, lots of storytelling, weeks of collective play ... and an abundance of megafauna for males to hunt, so as to provide the extended matrilineal family with meat.

Though it is incredibly sparse, the archaeological record shows none of the tell-tale signs of war in the lower and middle palaeolithic. That changes with a vengeance with what is still commonly called the neolithic revolution (it was perhaps closely connected with the mass extinction of megafauna outside sub-Saharan Africa and the onset of the Holocene). Hastily arranged mass graves have been discovered, dating from the third millennium BCE. Bodies appear to have been tossed in - they lie jangled one on top of the other - and there is not the least sign of reverence associated with ‘normal’ burials. Skulls are cracked and arrow points are embedded in bones. This and other such examples provide “a strong argument in favour of the warfare theory”, write Jean Guilaine and Jean Zaimit.⁵

Indeed cave paintings from the time show groups of male figures, drawn using black or brown ochre, mostly armed with bows and arrows, clearly engaged in fighting each other. Even if this portrayal was not Stone Age news reporting, but mock battle (a kind of dress rehearsal), it unmistakably points to a definite reality: war. With the Bronze Age there come armed states, walled cities and the elite male profession of making war: the image and ideology of the warrior hero emerges.

The neolithic was, in fact, a counterrevolution which on the upside brought much improved tools, but on the downside women’s oppression, slavery and the imposition of a steep, pyramidal social hierarchy with, at the top, chiefs, priests and kings, who live off and exploit the labour of others. With cattle herding and sedentary agriculture, war, or the threat of war, comes, though, to be a social necessity. Booty, slaves, tribute,

new lands could be gained through war - a constant temptation. By equal measure, raiders, conquerors, aspiring hegemony had to be fended off, if harvests, cattle, slaves and the other wonders of civilisation were to be protected. War is thereby made into a norm and the brief moments between wars are treasured under the name of peace. The Greeks venerated the goddess, Eirene; the Romans the equivalent goddess, Pax.

Just and unjust

That logically brings us to the concept of just and unjust wars. A quick glance at Wikipedia shows that the rulers of ancient Egypt and ancient China had some sort of notion of just wars. However, this amounted to little more than priests relaying that the gods, or the ancestors, were saying exactly what the pharaoh, or the emperor, wanted to hear. Defend the state from heinous foreign invaders, or invade this, that or some other suitably disrespecting - and vulnerable - foreign state to seize territory, slaves and exact tribute. Be they wars of defence or wars of aggression, they needed little in the way of justification.

Indeed amongst the warrior elite the excuse needed to launch a full-scale war could be nothing more than that their precious sense of honour had been dissed in some way. A provocation, real or entirely imagined, was, though, needed. After all, even the most bloodthirsty warrior chief must psych themselves up. But war is what gave them purpose, prestige and the wealth needed to bestow generous gifts to their band of armed followers. And, while war is undoubtedly a risky business, there was always the glorious prospect, the gods willing, of much loot. There was, naturally, the possibility of defeat, being killed, or being captured and sold into slavery. The gods are capricious, the Fates decide.

So, while Greek philosophers could entertain a doctrine of ‘natural slavery’, they also recognised that nothing more than bad luck could result in landing oneself in such an

unfortunate predicament. Hence for Aristotle the object of military training is

... not to bring into subjection [slavery] those not deserving of such treatment, but to enable men (a) to save themselves from becoming subject to others, (b) to win a position of leadership, exercised for the benefit of the ruled, not with a view of being the master of all, and (c) to exercise the rule of a master over those who deserve to be slaves.⁶

The most famous account of Greek warfare, as everyone knows, is Homer’s *Iliad*. Though packed into a few short months, this great poetic work tells the story of the 10-year struggle between the Greek Achaeans and the Trojans, and the events that led up to the terrible conflict. Things begin with a beauty contest between the goddesses, Athena, Hera and Aphrodite, with the mortal Paris, a Trojan prince, awarding the prize - a golden apple - to Aphrodite. That brings gratitude from her and spiteful vengeance from the other two. With the help of Aphrodite, Paris wins the love of the Spartan queen, Helen, the most desirable woman in the world. Together they elope to Troy. Her husband, Menelaus, is outraged. He happens, though, not only to be king of Sparta: his brother is Agamemnon, the ruler of Mycenae, and the high king of all Greece.

To avenge Menelaus, and retrieve Helen, the Greeks raise a mighty army and launch a thousand ships across the Aegean to attack Troy. Homer has the subsequent long series of indecisive battles between Greek and Trojan warriors reflecting and being heavily influenced by rival Olympian gods and goddesses (code for the forces of nature). Plagues are inflicted, arrows guided, winds made unfavourable. The immortals too have their jealousies, their feuds, their favourites, their precious sense of honour. But it is clear that what really motivates the Greek kings and

princes is booty: bronze, silver, gold and slave girls. The *Iliad* opens with the quarrel between Agamemnon and the mighty Achilles, the best Greek warrior, over the daughter of the priest, Chryses. He comes to the Greek camp with a generous ransom offer. Agamemnon is willing to give her up, but only in return for Achilles' bed-mate, the beautiful Briseis. The two spectacularly fall out.

Fascinatingly, the only ordinary, rank-and-file Greek soldier named in the *Iliad*, as far as I know, is the "irrepressible Thersites". Homer describes him as "the ugliest man who had come to Ilium"⁷. Bandy-legged, with rounded shoulders, a game foot and an egg-shaped head: giving him such a physique makes him morally suspect for an elite audience. But Thersites is wonderfully eloquent in the general assembly of the Greek army. He tells the truth. Agamemnon always gets the first pick, when it comes to booty gained from sacked towns: he gets the gold, the choicest women to sleep with and make his own property. In other words, Thersites denounces the war with Troy as unjust. He calls for the rank and file to take to the ships and return home.

Odysseus, king of the little island of Ithica, beats Thersites over his back and shoulders with his staff and humiliatingly reduces him to tears. The rank and file, according to Homer, applaud his brutal action. They do not want kings insulted by this "windy rant"⁸. An unlikely story. Thersites was the spokesperson for the rank and file.

Of course, the *Iliad* is not history. It is even possible that Homer never existed. But through this epic work we gain access to the thought world of the ancient Greek elite ... and, with Thersites, a glimpse of its popular opposition.

Probably, the attempt to develop a coherent doctrine of just wars came after the Roman empire is said to have adopted Christianity as its official religion in 380 CE. It should be added that Christianity had become the *main* popular religion by this time and the emperors clearly decided to first cohabit with and then coopt the Christian church's top ranks of bishops, abbots and deacons. Empires, however, by definition rely on repression, exploitation and constant warfare. There is a big problem then when an empire cloaks itself in the Jesus religion. After all, the biblical Jesus teaches his followers about the virtues of peace, about turning the other cheek, about resisting not evil.

The circle was squared by the likes of Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE), Isidore of Seville (c560-636 CE) and rather later, but most decisively, by St Thomas Aquinas (1225-74 CE). It is not "always sinful to wage war" according to Aquinas. Three requirements have to be met for a war to be judged as just. Firstly, it must be conducted by the "authority" of a legitimate "sovereign", not a "private individual". Secondly, the war needs to be undertaken against an enemy because they "deserve it on account of some fault". Thirdly, belligerents should have "righteous intention".⁹ Aquinas came to the conclusion that a just war could be offensive and that injustice should not be tolerated so as to avoid war. Nevertheless, Aquinas argued that violence must only be used as a last resort. On the battlefield, it was only justified to the extent it was necessary and soldiers needed to avoid acts of deliberate cruelty. Aquinas argued that it was only in the pursuit of justice that the good intention of a moral act could justify negative consequences, including the killing of innocent civilians during a war.¹⁰

The 1066 Norman conquest, the Crusades, the European wars of religion that spanned the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries all came with prayers, relics and blessings of holy

water. But, of course, Marxists seek to penetrate what lies behind the flim-flam and reveal the rival class forces involved. Nonetheless, to discount, to dismiss the ideas which people use to fight out their interests would be foolish in the extreme. The doctrines of Augustine, Isidore and Aquinas coloured, shaped and to some degree drove events and therefore have to be grasped in their own right.

However, after the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), the role of religion in justifying wars tended to decline. Diplomatic manoeuvre, international agreements and naked state interests came to the fore: *Realpolitik*. This is what we find with von Clausewitz. Militarily this reflected the era of well drilled, professional infantry and the line of bayoneted muskets. Not that the need for ideological mystification ends. The bourgeois revolutions in America (1776) and France (1789) roused the population using notions such as liberty, justice, patriotism and the rights of the people. This, not mindless square bashing and a miserly pay-packet, is what motivated volunteers and conscripts.

Marx and Engels

As a team Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were very much influenced by the French Revolution and its wars against the great powers of aristocratic Europe. In their early writings they used the words 'revolution' and 'war' "almost interchangeably".¹¹ Like most of their radical contemporaries, they saw the French republic under siege and mobilising the population to defeat the internal and external forces of counterrevolution. The actual history and the conflict between the pro-war Girondins and anti-war Jacobins need not concern us here.

With the battle of Waterloo in 1815, of course, Napoleon met defeat. However, the spectre of the French Revolution haunted aristocratic Europe. Out of fear the Holy Alliance came together and imposed a stifling reaction across the face of the whole continent. France had the Bourbon monarchy restored, much to the delight of returning aristocratic exiles. The franchise was restricted and ever more conservative governments followed. Russia, Prussia and Austria dismembered Poland and kept Germany divided into a patchwork of oppressive, petty, ineffective states. Even the mildest reformer was considered a dangerous subversive. Police spying and censorship were ubiquitous. Naturally there was opposition, indeed in 1830 and 1846 there were uprisings in Poland led by the *szlachta* (the revolutionary traditional aristocracy). While they commanded sympathy from across the spectrum of progressive opinion, the revolutionaries were crushed amidst much bloodshed. In France the same happened in 1830.

To end the period of reaction, to establish the most basic freedoms, it was necessary to make revolution - and to make revolution was to immediately confront the Holy Alliance (plus the global hegemon, Great Britain). Inevitably that meant revolutionary war - not in support of any existing state, but a war of 'the Democracy' against all reactionary powers, crucially the *main enemy*, Russia, and Britain.

This was the world that Marx and Engels came into as young revolutionary democrats who were making the transition to becoming full-blown communists. They therefore envisaged revolution across Europe involving the unity of a variety of opposition forces - in class terms proletarians, peasants, middle class professionals, the radical bourgeoisie; in party terms the Chartists in Britain, Agrarian Reformers in the US, Social Democrats in France and in Poland nationalists who were committed to an agrarian democracy (ie, not the *szlachta*). While, apart from in

Britain, there was no immediate prospect of the working class coming to power, there was the immediate prospect of the bourgeoisie coming to power, especially in Germany, and the working class immediately beginning the fight against the bourgeoisie with a view to coming to power within a relatively short period of time (ie, permanent or uninterrupted revolution).

During the 1848 revolution, this strategy saw members of the Communist League and the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* ('The organ of Democracy' edited by Marx) advocating war against tsarist Russia. This was not, could not, be conducted by Prussia, let alone the petty German kingdoms and principalities. No, it was *revolutionary* Germany which fights and defeats its own autocrats through war and then spreads the flame of liberation to other countries in Europe by taking on the Holy Alliance. This, of course, could be a bourgeois-led revolutionary Germany, but, if that was the case, the popular forces - not least the working class - would already be exercising a decisive influence: perhaps they themselves would be on the verge of taking power. Either way, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* committed itself to a foreign policy which sought the unity of a new Poland and support for the Italian, Hungarian, Czech and other such national movements.

That support did not, though, extend to other national movements - specifically those deemed to have made themselves into cat's paws, agents, of the reactionary powers: eg, the Croats and other such south Slav peoples. Engels famously dubbed them 'non-historic peoples'. It should be pointed out that, while this accurately described the political position of the leaders, it was a wrong call. After all, the aim should have been to split the masses from those who, out of their own selfish reasons, were willing to be used by Austria and Russia. Note, not long afterwards, Engels can be found describing the Serb and Romanian national movements as progressive, because they were aimed against pan-Slavism and Russian tsarism, as well as Ottoman rule.

Needless to say, Marx and Engels were quickly and decisively disabused of any illusions that they had in the revolutionary potential of the German bourgeoisie. They too knew all about the 1789 French Revolution, yet, whereas Marx and Engels drew inspiration, they recoiled in panic from the prospect of any re-enactment on German soil. The first stirrings of the working class movement in Germany had them pleading for a compromise with reaction. Their Frankfurt Assembly was full of cowards: it produced no Marat, no Danton, no Robespierre.

True, after the defeat of the revolutionary wave of 1848-49, Marx and Engels did look to conflicts between the existing powers as possibly producing conditions that could help revive the revolution. However, as far as I know, they only *actively* supported an existing capitalist power on one occasion. Their co-thinkers in the US tirelessly worked to get Abraham Lincoln elected in 1860 by winning over the large German-American population, especially in New York City, to vote for him. Their comrade and friend, Joseph Weydemeyer, served as a lieutenant colonel in the Union army, along with many other heroic red 48ers. Again and again Marx and Engels and their comrades urged Lincoln to play the trump card: freedom for black slaves in the south.

Eventually, in January 1863, after much hesitating, 'Old Abe' eventually agreed to violate the sacred rights of private property. The emancipation proclamation was issued. It proved a decisive move. What had been a constitutional war became a revolutionary war. Black regiments

soon took to the field against the Confederacy. By the end of the war they made up some 10% of the Union army and were renowned for their aggression and bravery.

Using their position in the International Workingman's Association in London, Marx and Engels also did their utmost to prevent the Palmerston government in Britain from intervening to tip things in favour of the Confederacy. And, of course, they unstintingly praised and gave intransigent support for the Lancashire mill workers, in their boycott of southern cotton, despite the suffering this caused them. A model of proletarian internationalism in the eyes of Marx and Engels.

All that was done in the full knowledge that victory for the Yankee north would see America fully independent from Britain for the first time and quickly elevate it into the first rank of nations. Once there, Marx and Engels predicted, it would prove not only a naval, financial and industrial rival to Britain, but an imperial challenger for global hegemony. On the positive side, however, now that black labour was no longer found in chains there was the possibility of forming an hereditary proletariat and putting a working class stamp on US politics.

There was too the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian war, which Marx initially - mistakenly - saw as an unprovoked act of aggression by Louis Bonaparte. But, as he half-suspected, it was the wily Otto von Bismarck who tricked France into firing the first shots and thereby excusing the pre-prepared crushing German counterattack. However, what needs to be understood with Marx and Engels is that they were never in the business of backing this or that 'more progressive' country against this or that 'more reactionary' one. They had long declared that workers have no *fatherland* - because nowhere were they in power. Their entire foreign policy was, therefore, designed to achieve two key objectives: (a) the formation of the working class in itself; (b) the formation of the working class into a class for itself.

So their side in the Franco-Prussian war was neither Prussian-led Germany nor Louis Bonaparte's second empire. No, it was the Paris Commune and the anti-war wing of the working class movement in Germany, led by Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Babel. That is crystal-clear from their writings, their speeches to the IWMA, its resolutions, publications and letters to the press.

It should be added that towards the end of their lives both Marx and Engels became less and less pro-war and more and more pro-peace. Hence their emphasis on slowly building the power of workers' organisations, using elections, including winning a majority, and defeating a reactionary coup, if need be through mutiny in the popular militia. They certainly worried that, while a general conflagration in Europe would bring crashing down one crowned dynasty after another, it would see millions dead and set back the huge progress the working class movement had been making by a decade or two. That was true especially for Russia.

Whereas once there was stagnation and reaction, increasingly they recognised the potential for revolution. In point of fact, in 1881 they write of the world revolutionary centre shifting from France to Germany and from Germany to Russia. It was, Marx and Engels thought, Russia, through a popular revolution, that would now stimulate proletarian revolution in Europe.

Potresov and Lenin

We must appreciate how little of Marx and Engels the first generation of Marxists had available to them. It was, after all, in my lifetime that the first English translation of the *Grundrisse*

came out. *The German ideology, The economic and philosophical manuscripts, the Dialectics of nature* went unpublished even in German till the 1920s and 30s. Meanwhile, most of their journalistic articles and the mass of their letters gathered dust in archives and private hands.

In 1914 the best known writings of the Marx-Engels team on the subject of war was an 1897 collection of NRZ articles and Marx-Engels writings on the Crimean War, put together by Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling. Their aim was to counter pro-Serb sentiments being whipped up by the press in Britain and France. However, because of shifting diplomatic alliances, Russia joined the Anglo-French Entente in 1907 and the Ottomans aligned themselves with Germany-Austria. Therefore the Marx-Engels exposure of Russia's war aims could serve the social-imperialists on either side in World War I.

German and Austrian social-imperialists tried to excuse themselves by claiming that Marx and Engels were rabid Russophobes: every war against Russia was a just war. In Russia, Alexander Potresov - one of the original *Iskra* editors alongside Lenin - insisted that Marx and Engels always chose the lesser evil: eg, they supposedly wanted the victory of Prussia over Austria in 1866 - not exploit the outcome. Potresov's conclusion was that the Anglo-French-Russian Entente was to be preferred over the German-Austrian-Ottoman Central Powers.

However, the anti-war left largely accepted this framework as a given. But, they argued, events had rendered the views of Marx and Engels outdated. Lack of source material, the necessity of coming out with quick answers and prior assumptions, forced them to fashion a principled position out of an entirely bogus history.

Rosa Luxemburg took it for granted that Marx and Engels never changed their minds on Russia and were therefore plain wrong. The Russia of 1848 was hardly the Russia of 1905. Lenin, on the other hand, always highly respectful of Marx and Engels, developed a whole schema of the rising bourgeoisie being revolutionary till 1871, but then becoming thoroughly reactionary with the imperialist, final, stage of capitalism. In practical terms there is nothing wrong with this approach. It did, after all, allow the Bolsheviks to oppose both sides in World War I.

Nonetheless, as we have seen, it does Marx and Engels a great disservice. They were hardly champions of the capitalist class prior to the 1871 Commune. No, Marx and Engels championed the working class, which proclaimed that the "despots of all countries are our enemies".¹² ●

This article is the first part of the talk given to Communist University Spring 2024 by Jack Conrad: CU videos can be viewed at: youtube.com/communistpartyofgreatbritain

Notes

1. T Hobbs *Leviathan* New York 2009, p72.
2. C Boehm *Hierarchy of the forest* Cambridge MA 2001, p10.
3. A Rapoport (ed) *Clausewitz on war* Harmondsworth 1976, pp101-22.
4. See C Knight *Blood relations* London 1995.
5. J Guilaine and J Zammit *The origins of warfare; violence in prehistory* Oxford 2005, p152.
6. TA Sinclair (trans) *Aristotle: the politics* London 1992, pp435-36.
7. EV Rieu (trans) *Homer: the Iliad* Harmondsworth 1976, p45.
8. *Ibid* p47.
9. T Aquinas, 'Question 40 (four articles)' *Summa theologica* pp3073-74: www.ccel.org/ccel/a/aquinas/summa/cache/summa.pdf.
10. S Lazar and H Frowe (eds) *The Oxford handbook of ethics of war* Oxford 2018, p115.
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POLEMIC

Delusions of 'official optimism'

Socialist Appeal has discarded its 'clause four' Fabianism and made a 'communist turn', all explained by heady talk of a coming revolutionary crisis. Mike Macnair assesses its perspectives

The first thing to be said is: hats off to Socialist Appeal/*The Communist* for actually publishing their British perspectives document.¹ The *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain does publish its political resolutions,² but for the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party in England and Wales, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and Anti-Capitalist Resistance, perspectives documents remain private, with at most summaries being published.³

Keeping perspectives documents and their equivalents private is a fundamental political error. It is a foundational Marxist political principle that "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves".⁴ To apply this principle it is essential that real political choices, and the arguments to support one or another choice, be made available as far as possible to the working class, not restricted to some class of political specialists or 'cadres'. Privacy of perspectives documents and debates thus negates the idea of working class self-emancipation.

There are, of course, material limits on this availability; but it should be noted that the Social Democratic Party of Germany before 1914 published the full stenographic minutes of its annual *Parteitage* (conferences),⁵ and the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, with vastly smaller resources, also published stenographic minutes of its 1903 congress and endeavoured to publish as far as possible later party events.⁶ The material limits are massively reduced today by IT.

There are also 'security' limits caused by repression by the capitalist state and by the labour bureaucracy. We can agree that we should, for example, use pseudonyms where these can actually help avoid victimisation. But the widespread belief on the far left that keeping political differences and documents internal avoids state repression is merely 'performative security' or 'security theatre'. The original 1944 RCP was thoroughly penetrated by state agents and bugs. The 'Spycops' inquiry exposed that the police had full knowledge of the supposedly secure proceedings of the SWP conferences.⁷ The "security theatre" of unpublished documents and 'internal bulletins' and so on merely keeps secrets from the broad workers' movement - not from the state or the state's agents and allies in the labour bureaucracy. So, once again, for *The Communist* to publish this document is decidedly positive.

Communist

The second positive feature of the text is the general shift of Socialist Appeal to open self-identification as 'communist', of which this document is part. The Trotskyist and sub-Trotskyist far left has for too long imagined that calling themselves 'socialist' or whatever allows them to escape being identified as communists - it never worked. The effect was usually just to give an impression of dishonesty. This appearance of dishonesty would only be reduced where groups actually broke from communism, in the sense of rejecting the essential claims of opposition to imperialism and to their own country's imperialist wars: but the usual consequence of this policy is, as with Schachtman, with the ex-Trot 'neocons' or with the 'Eustonites', to cease even to be leftists in any usable sense of that indeterminate term.



New name, same old rubbish

Socialist Appeal's turn in this respect reflects another positive development: that is, that a (minority) section of the youth are keen to identify as 'communist', breaking the taboo around the word. On the basis of Socialist Appeal's record the turn is likely to be its latest version of following political fashion, as I argued last November.⁸ But the underlying shift among the youth is positive.

The title of the document is 'British perspectives 2024: theses on the coming British revolution'. The first part of this title, "British perspectives 2024", is banal, but accurate. The second, "theses on the coming British revolution", is inflated and plainly false. The document does not offer a set of theses. Nor is it an analysis of "the coming British revolution" conceptualised as a revolutionary process (analogous to the 1640s in England, or 1789 and after in France, or 1917 and after in Russia...). It offers a narrative or journalistic description of the recent evolution of the economic and political situation globally and in Britain, which concludes with the immediate tasks of the "Revolutionary Communist Party" about to be founded.

To explain the argument, it will be best to work backwards from its operational conclusions to the immediate supporting claims, and from there to the underlying assessment of global and British political dynamics. It will then be possible to assess the argument working forwards, from the global and British political dynamics, to the conclusions.

This will be a two-part discussion. This week I will lay out the argument and discuss the plausibility of its

analysis of the global and British political dynamics. Next time I will look further at its claims about the existing left, about Socialist Appeal-RCP's growth, and about the argument that a small organisation can under conditions of revolutionary crisis leap to becoming a mass party; and about what is unambiguously missing in the 'Theses': a programme for workers' power and revolution.

Operative

The operative conclusion of the document is, essentially, that RCP members must get out there and recruit people. The immediate target is to move from (the claimed) 1,100 members now to 1,400 at the time of the May congress. Then, according to the document *How communists are preparing for power in Britain* (not published),

This congress resolves that every party member should recruit and consolidate at least one new member over the next 12 months. We agree on a target for Party membership of 2,000 by the 2025 congress. If we do our work properly, then this is a modest aim. The 2,000 must be used as a launch pad to 5,000 and then 10,000 members.

The justification of these targets is in the 'Theses':

We must set ourselves the goal of reaching 5,000 and then 10,000 members in a measurable short space of time. The objective situation demands it. This will allow us to build a base in every locality, workplace and trade union.

In the revolutionary storms that

lie ahead, a small revolutionary party can emerge onto the scene and rapidly grow amongst the working class.

Such was the case with the Spanish POUM, a centrist organisation (ie, one that wavered between reformism and revolution), which grew from about 2,000 members to 40,000 or 50,000 in a matter of weeks in the heat of the Spanish revolution.

Trotsky's April 1937 comments on the POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, created in 1935 by unification of the Spanish Trotskyists with the ex-Communist Party 'Right Opposition') are (selectively) quoted in support of this view.⁹

As I argued last November, this line repeats the arguments of Gerry Healy and his co-thinkers for the launch of the Workers Revolutionary Party in November 1973 and of Tony Cliff and his co-thinkers for the launch of the Socialist Workers Party in January 1977. The argument was in my opinion already wrong in Trotsky's hands in 1937, and in Healy's and Cliff's hands in the 1970s. But I will return to this point in my next article. Our present concern is that the justification of this approach has to be that the opportunity exists for the new RCP to grow explosively, because there is a "political vacuum" and Britain is "entering a pre-revolutionary period", analogous to conditions in Russia in 1905 or 1917, or to Spain in 1935-37.

Vacuum

The "political vacuum" is a Labour, in the first place, about the Labour left, that

... the younger generation, who have known nothing but austerity and capitalist crisis, will be looking far beyond such [left-Keynesian] piecemeal 'solutions'. The reformist politicians are increasingly exposed for what they are.

Figures like Jeremy Corbyn will not be a point of reference for this generation. Instead, the youth are completely open to radical, revolutionary and especially communist ideas.

While this is almost certainly true of the current Labour left - smashed and driven out in the wake of the failure of Corbynism - the 'Theses' are sufficiently cautious to include the statement: "We do not write off the reformist mass organisations, which can be transformed by events." That means (if it means anything) that a new Labour left can be produced by the dynamic of events.

The *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain will not benefit, say the 'Theses', because:

In such a period, in the past, the old so-called Communist Party would have grown substantially, given its name. But it is steeped in reformism and nationalism, and has been reduced to a shadow of its former self. It spreads illusions about the United Nations and offers pacifism instead of revolutionary politics. If people join, they quickly leave, given the party's reformist politics.

No use is made of the CPB's official membership figures returned to the Electoral Commission (usefully

discussed by Lawrence Parker last August), which showed a sharp dip in the Corbyn years, followed by a rise in 2020-22, taking the party to nearly 1,200 members - a 54% increase on 2016, and 33% on their official figures of around 900 in the pre-Corbyn years.¹⁰

It is also noteworthy that on page 11 of *The Communist* (No4, March 14) Rob Sewell writes on 'From opportunism to ultra-leftism: the criminal zig-zags of the Stalinists' - a purported historical account of the old 'official' Communist Party, which assumes that the current CPB is the simple continuity of that party, rather than the largest of the fragments left when the Eurocommunists liquidated that party in 1991. As for the far left, "Most of the far-left sects have over the past period watered down their ideas in an attempt to find a shortcut to building a revolutionary organisation. This has completely failed." Again, there is no actual attempt to analyse the state of the far-left groups. For example, the Socialist Workers Party as of December 2023 claims 6,000 'registered members'; the finance report for its annual conference states that 2,504 members pay subs to the party. They recruited 1,234 members in 2023, of whom 711 pay subs. They report growth in subs (which is a good indicator of actual membership) since 2020, and growth in sales of publications in 2023.¹¹ On a smaller scale, RS21 claims to have grown from 115 at its launch in 2014 to over 400 in January 2024.¹² Neither is a case of "completely failed".

Crisis

The next level up from the 'vacuum' is the assessment that mainstream British politics is in crisis: "Britain has gone from being perhaps the most stable country in Europe just over 10 years ago, to possibly the most unstable today." The Tory Party "has become a laughing stock" and electoral defeat will lead to a further shift of the Tories to the right. Hence:

The ruling class have no alternative but to rest upon the rightwing Labour leaders, who in turn are keen to do their bidding. The scene will be set for class battles and rising radicalisation, as Starmer continues where the Tories left off ...

As a result, the trade unions will be pushed into opposition or semi-opposition to the Labour government, given the pressure from below.

This argument supposes that the trade union leaderships will be unable to hold back strike struggles for any significant period: unlike under the 1929-31, 1945-52, 1964-70, 1974-79 and 1997-2010 Labour governments.¹³ This is possibly true. But the argument depends on the supposition that the dynamics of the next Labour government will be more like those of the Popular Front governments in Spain and France in 1936 than like those of any British Labour government so far.

In favour of this view the 'Theses' proposes, as an immediate cause, the fact that British capitalism is in relative decline, shown by slow growth, "largely due to the failure of the capitalists to reinvest their profits into modernising industry", leading to a "permanent slump" and median household incomes, and those of the poor, falling behind "peer countries"

Canada, Australia, Germany or France.¹⁴ Taking this analysis (for the moment) for granted, British relative decline was already a matter of public concern in the early 1900s, and the diagnosis of failure to reinvest in modernising industry was already a theme of discussion under the Wilson governments of 1964-70 and 1974-79.

Other things apart, one would expect British relative decline (after the loss of the world hegemony in 1940) to be a gradual slide towards financialisation (as in 16th-17th century Genoa and Venice, and the 18th century Netherlands) followed by economic dominance of the tourist industry (as in 18th century Venice), until the hollowed-out state is finally knocked over by open war (Netherlands in 1795, Genoa in 1796, Venice in 1797). This evolution would tend to *weaken* the local working class, as it goes on. The expectation of revolutionary crisis in the 'Theses' has to come not from the specific *British* situation, but from the *world* situation.

And so it does. The 'Theses' begin with the claim that "Capitalism worldwide is in a state of terminal decline". The case for this view is essentially journalistic observations about austerity as the price of the 2008-09 bailouts and the difficulties of any new bailout in the face of a new crash.

Chinese capitalism, which previously played a key role in helping to bail out the system, is now facing its own crisis. From a factor of stability, it has become one of instability, as the Chinese ruling class strategic interests collide with those of the USA.

The wars in Ukraine and Gaza are seen as forms of economic shocks, with the USA "facing another Afghanistan-style humiliation" in Ukraine; and political polarisation in the USA, with Trump in particular expressing that "the ruling class has lost or partially lost control of the situation".

Plausible?

How plausible is this argument? The first and essential point to be made is that it is necessary to explain to the broad workers' movement, as far as possible, a *realistic* assessment of political events and dynamics - not the 'official optimism' so common on the left. The point was well made by Trotsky in 1932, discussing the Soviet economy:

There is nothing so precarious as sympathies that are based on legends and fiction. There is no depending on people who require fabrications for their sympathies. The impending crisis of the Soviet economy will inevitably, and within the rather near future, dissolve the sugary legend and we have no reason to doubt will scatter many philistine friends into the bypaths of indifference, if not enmity.

What is much worse and much more serious is that the Soviet crisis will catch the European workers, and chiefly the communists, utterly unprepared, and leave them receptive to social democratic criticism, which is absolutely inimical to the Soviets and to socialism.

In this question, as in all others, the proletarian revolution requires the truth, and only the truth. ... First and foremost we serve the Soviet republic, in that we tell the workers the truth about it and thereby teach them to lay the road for a better future.¹⁵

The point that to "tell the workers the truth" is a fundamental political principle was repeated by Trotsky

on several occasions.¹⁶ In the end, it took longer for the crisis of the Soviet economy to manifest itself than Trotsky imagined. But, when it did materialise, the disastrous consequences of 'official optimism' were all that he had feared.

The argument of the 'Theses' is, in my opinion, an example of 'official optimism'. It constructs its argument by selecting one-sidedly all the elements of the political dynamics which point towards a rapid leap forward of the revolutionaries, while excluding all those elements which tend either to slow down the process of development or to point in the direction of the victory of nationalist authoritarianism and war.

The practical effect of this one-sided 'official optimism' is - as in the SWP today, in the WRP in the 1970s, in the Maoist organisations of the same period worldwide and in the 'official communist' parties in their 'leftist' periods - necessary to keep the rank-and-file membership running around like blue-arsed flies without time to think or to question their leadership.

World

Is the world about to tip into open global crisis, of the sort of 1848-50 in Europe, 1859-1871 in Europe, the US and Japan, or 1914-1950 globally? It is certainly *possible*. It has to be said, for reasons I will discuss below, that if the left goes into such a crisis still thinking in the way Socialist Appeal/RCP, the SWP, and so on think, the outcome will be the same as the fate of the Chilean left in and after 1973, the Argentinian left in and after 1976, or the Iranian left in the revolutionary crisis of 1979-81: destruction.

That said, the case offered by the 'Theses' for this view is essentially *impressionistic*. We are told, in the first place, that "The strategists of capital are terrified of a new slump, as they have used up all their reserves in staving off a depression over the last 15 years."

It is true that the response to the 2008-09 crash was massive bailouts, funded by public borrowing, and states leaning on lenders to keep 'zombie borrowers', both consumer and business, afloat. The background was that 2008 was a shock to the *political* regime, which for 10 years had been insisting on the "great moderation" (in defiance of the previous 'East Asian' and 'dot-com' crashes) and insisted that financial engineering, allowing the poor to borrow on mortgage, would resolve the problem of social inequality.

Since then, expectations have been radically lowered; the capitalist regimes have operated a *state-controlled* crash in the form of the pandemic lockdowns in 2020; and 'reshoring' and 'near-shoring' operations have reduced US vulnerability to trade interruptions, and the US has turned to open protectionism against China, ramping up anti-Chinese propaganda, as well as to war in Ukraine. Both turns also operate as US protectionist measures against France and Germany (as was also true of the 2003 invasion of Iraq).

As a result, a financial crash like 2008-09 would be *manageable* for the USA, even if it involved unwinding market positions and financial engineering operations on a large scale, with massive losses to creditor interests. For a single example, defaulting US debt to China under the name of 'sanctions' would free up \$769 billion.¹⁷ This sort of option is just more 'thinkable' today than in 2008.

Is the USA, in fact, "facing another Afghanistan-style humiliation" in Ukraine? This claim is at least premature. Ukraine is currently experiencing a 'shell crisis' like 1915 in the UK.¹⁸ But the result

has not been far-reaching Russian breakthroughs, but slight movement of the front lines. The war can go on with this character for several years (it should be remembered that it *started* in 2014 with the US-controlled 'Euromaidan' operation, the uprising of Russian-speakers in the Donbas and the Russian seizure of Crimea in that year). It remains a *proxy* war in spite of the presence of Nato special forces and missile specialists in Ukraine: not a full commitment of US and allied forces like Afghanistan, which, moreover, only ended in "humiliation" after 20 years. The war, meanwhile, has delivered a boom for arms manufacturers.¹⁹

What about US political polarisation and Trump? Certainly, US political dynamics are moving towards the reversal of the gains on the rights of black people, of women and of 'LGBT+ people', since the 1960s. The US is similarly moving towards radical increases in censorship, especially on campuses - spearheaded by Zionist Democrats as much as Republicans.

Trump is a maverick, and it may be that the 'deep state' will act against a second Trump presidency: but on March 20 he is reported to have announced a clear commitment to Nato, as long as the Europeans pay their way: that is, merely demanding increased European tribute, as presidents GHW Bush, Clinton, GW Bush and Obama all did before him.²⁰ And in office, in spite of all the rhetoric, he delivered merely conventional Republican tax cuts for the rich and welfare cuts for the poor, and the appointment of extreme-rightist judges. It is far from clear that the actual dominant capitals in US politics will be seriously concerned about a second Trump presidency.

Capitalism as such is in decline. This decline was already reflected in the creation of limited liability in 1855. This blunts market incentives in order to secure consent for the political regime from small savers. Since then there have been on-off increases in state intervention to deal with any number of 'market failures', and much modern 'privatisation' is merely privatisation of profits, while leaving the state on the hook for losses.

The USA is also - and has been since around 1970 - in relative decline *as an industrial producer*, while remaining absolutely dominant in military power and finance - as the UK was from, roughly, the 1850s. China has emerged as a rival, but remains much weaker than the US - comparable to the relation of Germany to the UK in 1871-1914. Europe, which could develop as a real rival to the US, remains under tight US political control (like the British political control of Germany and the US before 1861 through 'states' rights'). This is reflected in the Ukraine war, which is absolutely against European interests, and the US's ability to bring France and Germany 'back into line' on the Middle East, and crush the Corbyn movement in Britain, through the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign.

Britain's response to relative decline was the expansion of its territorial empire as a zone of protection (through 'non-tariff barriers'). The US's response has been, since the mid-1970s, the mere export of destruction through wars and proxy wars. This reflects the overall decline of capitalism: the UK had mainly a net emigration down to its loss of global hegemony status; the USA does not.²¹ It was the *growth* of capitalist industry, at the expense of peasant agriculture, which drove emigration; the US, rather, depends on continued immigration (as the UK also does) to get low-status jobs done.

Global collapse, therefore, does not look immediate. Rather, there is a drive towards larger and more destructive wars - which will continue, irrespective of who is US president. The UK is affected by this drive, but it is not about to precipitate a full-scale crisis.

Britain

The argument that Britain is *unusually* unstable is a surprising one in a Europe in which a 'post-fascist' party governs Italy, and extreme right parties have been growing dramatically in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal ...

As I said earlier, the argument in the 'Theses' for British relative decline due to underinvestment is an *old* argument, going back at least the 1960s (when comrades Alan Woods and Rob Sewell were young ...). Since then, the Thatcher government promised to 'Make Britain Great Again' by abandoning the old industries, setting free financial innovation, and encouraging foreign direct investment in the remaining industries (cars, for example, where foreign-owned *maquiladoras* (assembly plants) superseded the old British industry; or the sale of 'British champion' International Computers Ltd to Fujitsu, which led to the Post Office scandal²²). The Blair-Brown government continued this policy by promoting 'public-private partnership' arrangements and financial engineering in local government as an alternative to tax rises.

It is this Thatcher-Major-Blair-Brown regime of British 'recovery' which is now coming apart in the 'crises' in the National Health Service and in local government - both caused by financial engineering and public-private partnerships. The underlying failure of this regime to deliver on its promises is also reflected in the jails running out of space,²³ in the problems of river pollution, in the housing problem, and in the squeeze on defence spending in spite of the ongoing calls from military figures to increase it.

Is the decay of this regime likely to lead to an actual revolutionary crisis in Britain in the short term? Once we see that there is a *global* turn away from the regime of neoliberalism, and in the direction of protectionism and great-power war, this actually becomes significantly less likely.

In the first place, the USA will be (already is) increasingly concerned that its vassal states deliver military support to its projects. If that involves unwinding some or all of the financial engineering of the neoliberal period through 'financial repression', that is a price US administrations are likely to be willing to pay.

Secondly, if the Tories are in total disarray (true), this is due to the radical inconsistency between the dreams of setting financial engineering further free through Brexit, and the supposed material benefits that would accrue from this project (as in Liz Truss's dreams), plus the actual constraints of British dependency on a low-tax regime to attract hot money, and the global turn, also reflected in the Brexit vote, away from neoliberal globalism towards nationalism and traditionalism.

But, having crushed the Labour left, capital now has to hand a trustworthy 'second eleven' in the form of the Starmer-led Labour Party. Sir Keir has already abandoned most of Labour's alternative policies - but remains 20 points ahead in the polls; and none of the Trotskyism of his youth, or his human rights lawyering before he became Director of Public Prosecutions, has been deployed against him by the press. The trade union leaderships in their large majority have backed him against the left.

It is true that a Starmer government will probably deliver nothing for the working class except a few crumbs.

But the context of the war drive, and losing the Tories, means that Starmerite Labour in government will be able to explain continuing cuts and repression by the necessities of overcoming national difficulties and pursuing national defence.

Yes, we have a mass movement against the Gaza war. But not against the Ukraine war.

Yes, the working class will eventually be driven to resist through strike struggles, and so on: as it has been driven to resist on a limited scale by the inflation/cost of living crisis' caused by the Covid crash and the Ukraine war. But that is in principle the same dynamic that emerged under previous Labour governments: not a failure of the political regime as such ●

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Notes

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DEBATE

Thinking beyond ceasefires

Zionism is predicated on ethnic cleansing, oppression and ultimately genocide. Carl Stevens of the Republican Labour Education Forum gives his take on different possible progressive solutions to the Israel-Palestine conflict

The Labour Left Alliance meeting on February 29, entitled 'What is the solution? One state, two states or something altogether different', featured a debate between advocates of four positions on the future direction and possible solutions to the national question in Israel and Palestine. These were:

1. One democratic, secular state - Tony Greenstein;
2. Two states - Adam Keller (Gush Shalom);
3. Middle East regional socialism - Moshé Machover;
4. Federal republic - one state for two nations - Steve Freeman (Republican Labour Education Forum).

(It should be noted that positions 1 and 4 are different versions of one state.)

In the first round of the debate the speakers concentrated on presenting their cases. In the second round they emphasised their criticisms of each other's views.

One state

In presenting his case for one democratic, secular state, Tony Greenstein began with the current massacres in Gaza, which is now a death camp - the beginning of the end of Zionism, he thought. He said this is not a national conflict, but a conflict with a Zionist settler-colonial movement. He explored the history of Zionism as a "land without a people for a people without a land". Zionism was and remains a settler-colonial movement founded on ethnic cleansing.

Comrade Greenstein argued that the solution is the same as in South Africa - a unitary, democratic, secular state. There are, of course, differences in demography, but to accept a two-state solution, which Zionism will never concede anyway, is to accept Israel as it is. He disagrees with the idea that Israeli Jews constitute a nation, but, even if they do, it is a settler nation without rights to oppress the indigenous people. What binds the Israeli Jews is antagonism to Palestinians, so it is a question of equality, not national rights. They do have certain national attributes, such as a common language, and these could be accommodated in a 'constitutional settlement'.

How to obtain this is a difficult question, he admitted. Israel is supported by the US and the west and that will continue, whatever abuses it commits. The solution must be a region-wide one - and this is where he agrees with Moshé Machover. But where he differs is that we cannot set the pre-condition of socialism. Let us be realistic, he argues, socialism has not been achieved in any country in the world, despite the existence of anti-imperialist states, such as Cuba. Can a resolution be achieved before socialism? Tony says yes, but it may need a national revolution in the Arab east.

He notes that the Arab ruling classes are bound to the US, which means that the overthrow of the Arab regimes is a precondition for the overthrow of Zionism. This would enable the possibility of a single, democratic state - not two states, which would enable Zionism to reassert itself. After all, Israel is already weaponising anti-Semitism and the holocaust like never before. Tony ended with an observation from Gideon Levy that no Israeli children visiting Auschwitz



Gaza: slaughter of the innocents

came back saying 'Never again should this happen to any people'. The Zionist lesson is that the destruction of Gaza is *permitted* because of the holocaust.

Two states

Adam Keller (Gush Shalom) stated he is not a Zionist and agreed with Tony on the history of Zionism as a settler-colonial state - Israel was an extension of European (imperial) expansionism. But he disagreed with Tony's claim that the current conflict is not a national dispute and that Israel is not a nation. Nations created by conquest - like America, Australia, New Zealand, Canada - are still nations. Adam says that nobody denies that America is a nation and Israel is a nation in a same way. There are seven million people in Israel and they have as much right to exist as a nation as those in any other settler-colonial state. There is no way to achieve a single state, he continued, because Israelis will not give up their nation. There is no force more powerful than Israel, when it comes to imposing a single state.

Adam referred to the comparison with South Africa, but it had settled, recognised borders. True, Israel's borders of 1949-67 are internationally recognised by the United Nations, which accepted the division of British Mandate Palestine into two states. Also, whereas black South African workers could take strike action - eg, in gold and diamond mines - and this gave them leverage in the struggle, Palestinians have no strategic hold on the Israel economy. Palestinians need to work in Israel, but Zionist Israel does not need them. It is looking to India to replace Palestinians and this leaves Palestinians in a weak negotiating position.

Palestinians were happy to get their own state, with a maximum of

22% of the disputed land. They may deserve more, but this is the best they can get. Since October 7 the world has been forced to recognise a problem that cannot be ignored. Joe Biden is taking up a two-state solution, Adam stated, but he did not know if the US president can be trusted on this. In his view the only practical solution is two states: any other solution might be nicer or more just or beautiful, *but* it is not possible to implement it.

Adam referred to a demonstration in Tel Aviv of about 2,000-3,000, protesting about events in Gaza. He hoped that a temporary ceasefire and exchange of prisoners would become permanent and end of war, so that reconstruction can begin. Two states is not a perfect solution, but better than the present situation.

He then spoke about the mood in Israel of immediate anger and revenge, with genocidal speeches, etc - the peace movement there is isolated by war frenzy. Many Israelis are happy to see Gaza destroyed and say they brought it on themselves. But in the last month there has been a gradual shift in public opinion. Now protestors are coming out who previously had been repressed by the police. Public opposition to war is growing (slowly at first). But more and more are coming onto the streets who regard the official war aim as futile and recognise that Hamas cannot be totally liquidated. After all, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) are suffering losses in the guerrilla war.

Socialism

Moshé Machover said he has no blueprint - there is no solution possible soon. He compared the whole question with the climate crisis. Which also has no solution under capitalism. It will be a socialist and regional answer and not

confined to the box of Israel-Palestine.

Moshé said that we should start from principles, not blueprints. To this end, he asked: (1) What are the minimum conditions that a benign and equitable solution must satisfy? (2) What is the nature of the conflict in order to find a solution? And (3) how can a proper resolution be achieved, when it becomes possible?

The minimum conditions are equal rights for all and national rights. There are two nations. He agrees Zionist colonisation is based on displacement of the indigenous population (as in Australia, the US and Canada). There is a Hebrew nation established through colonisation. No nation will accept an unequal status that leads to a state of permanent conflict and war. Underdogs will not accept their role. The right of return is a minimum requirement recognised under international law.

The conflict is rooted in colonisation and the Zionist regime will continue this, he continued. There has to be de-colonisation or de-Zionisation. What is happening is a colonial conflict, not a war between two states. Colonisation created Israel and Israel is set up to continue this project.

Moshé said that, when a solution becomes possible, it may be one state, two state, a federal state or a binational state - we cannot prejudge this. However, he addressed the problems posed by Adam's two-state and Tony's one-state solutions. He rejected the idea of two states because that would be a US-imposed 'solution'. But the US will not impose a two-state solution on a Zionist Israel (or in the unlikely event that there will be something less than equality, where Israel, with all its military power existed alongside an inferior, demilitarised sub-state. Either

way, a US two-state solution would be a disaster.

Moshé also rejected a one-state solution - he recognising that there were several versions of this, some of which satisfy the minimum conditions of equal rights. But can it be achieved? There is currently no social force that can overthrow Zionism and that is the difference between Israel and apartheid South Africa, with its black working class. The overthrow of Zionism would only be possible with the participation of the Israeli working class, which has no interest in doing that. What would the Israeli working class have to gain if they lost their privileged position? True, the Hebrew working class is exploited, but it enjoys national privileges. However, in a socialist Middle East the Hebrew working class would have an incentive to ditch Zionism. There is no solution under capitalism.

Federal republic

Steve Freeman of the Republican Labour Education Forum put forward the case for a democratic, secular, federal republic of Israel-Palestine. He said the RLEF was orientated to promoting democratic republican ideas for the labour movement in England and the rest of the UK, but after October 7 we were forced to turn our attention to Palestine. The US government, the British government, the Tories, Liberal Democrats and Labour Party all supported the 'two-state solution', while the TUC and all the major unions do the same. However, in opposing two-states ideology, the question was posed about a democratic republican alternative.

We are not trying to make a blueprint or write a programme for Israel-Palestine, Steve argued. All we are trying to do is think out the most democratic solution to this terrible situation. Our answer is for a democratic, secular, federal republic of Israel and Palestine, which we identify as "one state with two nations". At first, this seemed like a new idea, but, the more we researched, we found it can be traced back to Judah Mangus and Noam Chomsky and their versions of a binational state. Not all versions of a binational state are supportable, but ours is the most democratic.

We can start by identifying three problems: (1) partition; (2) the crisis of democracy; and (3) the role of Anglo-US and EU imperialism and the various authoritarian states in the Middle East (but we are not going to concentrate here on the third one).

The partition of British Mandate Palestine in 1948 (the Nakba) and the repartition in 1967 was a disaster for the people, Steve continued. This is symbolised by the partition wall, known as the Wall of Apartheid, that is 440 miles long and came out of the Second Intifada (September 2000 to February 2005). This partition was an economic and social disaster for the people suffering poverty and underdevelopment on the Palestinian side, as well as those suffering considerable poverty among sections of the Israeli working class. There is considerable economic waste with bureaucracy and arms production and the army needed to maintain this. This partition state is a massively expensive system, not least in the exclusion of five-six million refugees. The partition state must be ended and replaced by a single state with the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour,

including the freedom for returning refugees.

Second, there is a 'crisis of democracy' on either side of the partition wall. On the Israeli side there is Netanyahu's government and creeping fascism, plus the unwritten constitution and the dispute with the supreme court that brought massive demonstrations before the war. There exists 'Jewish nation-state law' and the 20% of Palestinian Israelis are second-class citizens facing discrimination. But if you cross the wall is democracy doing well there? Obviously not. There is an absence of civil rights and instead a military dictatorship and the daily oppression of occupation. There are no elections and no accountability for the Palestinian Authority. There are a large number of political prisoners. Now there is fascism in Gaza imposed by the IDF. We have a very serious problem, in that 'democracy' is either on the way out or does not exist (in this connection Steve noted Adam's reference to the emergence of street protest in Tel Aviv).

The solution flows from these two problems. First, end partition and occupation, with one state as an integrated, economic, single market. Second, one democratic secular republic with full equality between all citizens. It has to be a federal republic of two nations, Israel and Palestine, and a federal constitution would enable much greater unity between the Israeli and Palestinian working class.

This is a rather more radical solution than some people think. We are not talking about a Zionist Israel continuing to exist. We are arguing for a democratic, secular Israel without Zionism. For this to happen there has to be a democratic movement inside Israel - we may be pessimistic about this, but we should not be totally pessimistic, given the mass movement we saw before the war began.

Now if we come to one state, there are two versions that we must reject. First is 'Greater Israel' that implies the liquidation of the Palestinian nation, ethnic cleansing and all the rest of it. But the idea of a 'Greater Palestine' means the liquidation of the Israeli nation and would lead to ethnic cleansing and genocide. The democratic solution has to recognise an Israel in which 20% are Arab-Palestinian Israelis. These are Israelis and we need to keep reminding ourselves and not equating Israelis with Jews or Hebrews. So a federal republic of two nations is about democracy and the unity of the working class.

Steve said that he would not discuss the question of the Anglo-US imperialism, except to say that this has to involve the working class in the US, UK and Europe. The role of imperialism cannot be stopped by anything happening in Israel-Palestine as such. There is a struggle here and in the US already going on - now we hear that the 'mob' has invaded the streets. We have our own crisis of democracy growing because of the crisis in Palestine.

He concluded that the RLEF's was the most democratic, compared to all other proposals for a democratic, secular republic - a fully functioning democracy based on the sovereignty of the people of Israel and Palestine, and equal rights for all citizens and their right to self-determination. Second,

it is radical, because it goes to the root of the problem - the partition of 1948 - and demands the replacement of the Zionist Jewish republic by a democratic, secular republic. This does not mean a 'reverse partition' by going back to pre-1948 Palestine, but aims to transcend partition with a new unity. Third, it is a revolutionary proposal, because it requires the mobilisation of the democratic forces in Israel and Palestine - a democratic revolution 'from below'.

There has to be a new constitutional settlement. Israel does not have a proper constitution, because it could not agree how to define the state in 1948. They called it "Jewish and democratic", but, as Tony has said, you cannot have a Jewish state that is democratic. That is a contradiction in terms.

Round two

In the second round the speakers responded to each other's positions as follows:

One democratic, secular state: Tony Greenstein said he agreed with much of Moshé's exposition, but he singled out the federal republican position for criticism as a "dog's dinner that will appeal to no-one" on two grounds:

■ There is no possibility of a democratic movement within the Israeli state, because the last time it excluded Arab Israelis and the Palestinian question, and this will not change. Tony went further by contending that if it were not for the Palestinians there would have been civil war amongst Israelis, because half of them identify as Israelis and half as Jews - most of the latter as messianic fundamentalists. These Israelis and Jews are kept united by the threat of the Palestinians.

■ The second point concerns the working class. Tony believes that it is a revolutionary class in some circumstances, but not in the case of a settler-colonial state like Israel. Then the working class becomes the most reactionary section of society. He compared them with the white working class in apartheid South Africa or the southern working class in the US. Tony argued that, in believing the working class can play a revolutionary role in social change, the republicans are failing to understand the distinction between the working class 'in itself' and 'for itself'.

Tony questions the self-determination of nations. He thinks this does not apply to settler-colonial nations, because they are not oppressed. He agrees that where settlers have destroyed or marginalised the indigenous people they do form a nation of sorts. But even in the USA and Australia the question of the rights of indigenous people remains. There is no Israeli nation, but Zionism claims there is a Jewish nation cemented by the Jewish nation-state law. Arab Israelis are not even second-class citizens, because they have a degraded form of citizenship. Bedouins have even fewer rights.

He agrees with Moshé that it is hard to have a crystal ball. There may be an Arab uprising in the Middle East that will overthrow those regimes. That may come quickly, but we cannot predict when that will be. He agrees with Moshé that there is no solution within the 'box' of Palestine. There

has to be a region-wide solution, but Tony thinks that a national uprising of the Arab people that overthrows their regimes would endanger Zionism. Whether this leads to socialism cannot be known, but hopefully it will.

Tony says there is no solution within Israel among the Jewish people. There is no reason to have a Jewish state - even within a confederation or anything else - because this would allow Jewish supremacism to come back. There has to be a state where all are equal and politics are not decided by ethnicity. There would be cultural rights and religious freedoms. He says that Zionism has to go in all its forms and no tinkering around with constitutional settlements will achieve this.

Two states: Adam Keller agreed with Tony that there is no possibility of radical anti-Zionist politics within Israeli Jews. They will not give up on Zionism (although they may be compelled to make a concession to the Palestinians if there is sufficient international pressure - Jewish Israelis might agree to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza and allow a Palestinian state).

Adam said that Zionism is a state where the majority of the citizens and of MPs are Jewish and the government has a majority of Jewish ministers (with token Arab ministers), and an army composed of Jewish officers. This structure cannot really be broken up. Only a stronger army could defeat Israel and this would lead to nuclear war. The only possibility is that the IDF might be forced to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza.

A Palestinian state could exist as a sovereign state in the United Nations, but would be much weaker and not have its own army or airforce. He compared Israel-Palestine with US-Mexico. This would be a big improvement if Palestine were more like Mexico - a weaker, but independent neighbour. He believes that Zionism could give up on a Palestinian state but would not abandon its claim to be the state of the world's Jewish people. In this context Adam discussed the history of Zionism, which aimed to create a "normal state" somewhere. But Zionism created a disaster for Jews and many others - but now we have to deal with today's reality.

Middle East regional socialism: Moshé Machover referred to the republican answer (one state, two nations) as a blueprint. It meets the minimum (democratic) conditions, he said, but it is not feasible in present circumstances: it cannot be achieved without the consent or compliance of the Israeli working class. This will not be forthcoming at present.

He concluded that the republican case is an illusion, agreeing with Tony that the Israeli working class will not support deZionisation. It has nothing to gain from deZionisation under capitalism (or anything short of socialist transformation). However, he disagreed with Tony's dismissal of the Israeli working class, which he said is derived from rigid (non-dialectical) thinking that assumes that what exists now is permanent and unchangeable. Moshé does not rule out deZionisation.

He pointed to the assumptions that underlie Tony's one-state proposal, but he believes this is a dangerous illusion because Tony's 'one state' would have to be imposed by brute force against the Israeli people. This would end very badly. If one state was possible it could only be kept in existence by constant repression. The Hebrew nation would not accept a subordinate position and the removal of national rights.

Moshé pointed out Adam's hopes and illusions in US imperialism - either they will not happen or will not work. In the highly unlikely situation of two states being imposed by the USA it would require the suppression of Palestinian democracy by the colonial-settler state. Two states

would be a continuation of the present oppression in a new way - be careful what you wish for, he added. Adam's definition of Zionism is deficient, because it has never given up its claim to the whole of Palestine. Israel claims to be the nation-state of the Jewish people of the whole world - hence its right of colonisation and no right of return for Palestinians. He described 1970s prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's support for a Palestine state as an "Indian reservation".

Moshé concluded that both two states and the federal republican one-state position are an "illusion", while that of a one-state, 'democratic Palestine' is a "dangerous illusion". However, he does not abandon democratic demands. He says we should advocate "equal rights for all" - meaning equal individual and national rights for both existing nations. He ended with an optimistic note by pointing to solidarity between Hebrew and Palestinian workers in the same workplaces and the unity in the 2011 demonstrations in Israel.

Federal republic: Steve Freeman responded to all this by stating that the most important thing is the working class - the Israel-Palestine working class has to be the force for change.

This does not mean that we ignore the working class in the region or across the world: we are all connected together. We have to have a perspective or thought for the Israeli-Palestinian working class. He does not define the Israeli working class as the Hebrew working class, since 20% of the Israeli working class is Palestinian Arab and we have to look to unite the Israeli working class that Moshé had just spoken about. The working class is the only democratic force in the world.

The two-states ideology does not produce a democratic answer, he continued, because it depends on the US. We may get a two-state 'solution', but it will be the US and Zionist Israel in control. It will be something quite reactionary despite some people's illusions that there will be two democratic states. No, there will not.

The force for democracy has to come from the Palestinian and Israeli people and from the working class of both nations uniting. It may be that in the middle of this dark night we cannot see the dawn, but there will come a time when the working class in the current crisis - and we have never seen a crisis like this - will be forced by circumstances to come together and unite. Steve said he was optimistic despite the fact that everything looks dire. He believed that what Adam said about going onto the streets in Tel Aviv was the most optimistic thing we heard at the meeting.

The final point he made concerned what Tony said about the democratic movement in Israel and about the constitutional (supreme) court before the war. Of course, the first stage of such a movement is bound to bring all its prejudices to one spot and probably keep all the Arab people out of it. But if that movement is going to evolve it will involve the Arab people of Israel and the Arab working class. And it will evolve and not remain in that primitive first stage. That movement is going to come back again, because the crisis will come back much more severely after this war than was the case when people were opposing Netanyahu's constitutional changes.

Democracy has to be central to the answer, Steve concluded, because that is what the masses want. The Palestinian people want democracy, as do ordinary Israelis - or at least a better one than they have now, and that it is a big motivator.

This does not contradict socialism, as Lenin explained so well. The only way to socialism is through democracy and the democratic revolution. The fight for democracy is the fight for socialism in reality ●

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

Expose their
anti-imperialist
pretensions

Part of the establishment

There are still those who look to Hezbollah and the opening of a second front to save the Gazan population from genocide. But the last thing Hezbollah wants is war with Israel, writes **Yassamine Mather**

Last week I wrote about repressive Arab states banning demonstrations and other protests in support of the Palestinian cause - and I had previously written about the reasons why we have not seen any sizeable pro-Palestine demonstrations in Tehran or other major Iranian cities, explaining some of the reasons behind the apathy of ordinary Iranians.¹

Of course, we should not underestimate the fact that, despite the lack of any serious action by the Islamic Republic and the Lebanese Hezbollah (one of Iran's allies in the 'axis of resistance') over the war in Gaza, there are many forces both in Israel, including the current government, but also US Republicans and maybe some Democrats, who are very keen to extend the war beyond the Lebanese border and thereby create a situation where Hezbollah gets involved as a combatant and by extension Iran too.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, visiting Israeli posts in the north, commented that "we are now in a double battle" - he mentioned Iran and Lebanon, as well as Hamas. His minister of economy went further, saying that if Hezbollah opens up a second front in the war, Israel will wipe them off the face of the earth. Currently neither the US nor Iran's Islamic Republic want such an escalation and the Biden administration has issued very clear, direct warnings to Iran's leaders, compelling them to take a very passive attitude faced with an ongoing war and genocide in Gaza.

I want to make it clear that I am not in favour of another regional war that could lead to the kind of dire consequences such as we have heard: eg, wiping Lebanon off the face of the earth. But I am in favour of ruthlessly exposing the anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist, pro-Palestine rhetoric that has come from the Islamic Republic over many decades. Not because masses of Iranians believed it, rather because there are too many Palestinians and naive leftists in the west who are misled by what is in actual fact cynical window dressing.

No wider war

Meanwhile, in Lebanon Hezbollah - the main alleged proxy of the Iranian regime in the region - is showing unprecedented conservatism. Yes, there have been skirmishes with Israeli forces, drone strikes, etc. However, after such incidents the leaders of Hezbollah take great care to claim that these are all simply Israeli attacks on Lebanon - nothing to do with Gaza. Looking at future elections and its position in the current coalition, Hezbollah's main concern seems to be not losing support amongst voters.

Speeches by Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah repeat the usual slogans, but contain very little by way of concrete proposals or substance - disappointing many Palestinians, not just those in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla.

Political ties between Iran's clergy and Lebanese Shias go back to the pre-1979 era, when Iranian clerics



Hassan Nasrallah: consulting Iran's supreme leader

had close ties with Amal ('Hope Movement' in Arabic), a political party with historical roots in the Shia community. It was established in 1974 as the 'Movement of the Deprived' by, amongst others, Mostafa Chamran, an Iranian who later became a minister in the Tehran government.

Historically, parts of Lebanon contain very sizable Shia populations - eg, the south, the north and central Beqaa valley and the southern suburbs of Beirut - so it was inevitable that the coming to power of Shia clerics in Tehran following the 1979 revolution influenced political events in Lebanon. The new Iranian rulers and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps provided funds and training to a Shia militia that adopted the name, 'Hezbollah', meaning 'Party of God'.

Hezbollah's most glorious moment came when it succeeded in actually defeating the Israeli army in a 2006 battle - probably the only occasion when that has happened to Israel. However, it should be pointed out that, contrary to western propaganda, Hezbollah was even then much more than just a militia. It was a political organisation with a vast network of volunteers and paid employees, involved in every aspect of social life particularly in southern Lebanon. From education to health, from food distribution to religious taxation, Hezbollah ran that part of the country. But now it has become a far more

important political force, with a substantial presence in parliament and government.

In accordance with the 1943 agreement, Lebanon's political power has been distributed among its primary religious sects: a Sunni Muslim holds the position of prime minister, a Maronite Christian serves as president, and a Shiite Muslim assumes the role of the speaker of parliament. Since the early 2000s Hezbollah has held a number of seats in parliament, as well as a minimum of two ministers in every government.

The pro-US Iranian diaspora likes to portray Hezbollah as an ultra-conservative Muslim group, forcing women to wear the long black Shia chador (body-covering veil). Reality is, however, very different. The organisation is extremely pragmatic and nowadays it has its serious aims and ambitions in terms of its own position within the Lebanese state. If you ever see photos or watch videos of election rallies held by Hezbollah in Beirut and other major Lebanese cities you will see that the party's young women supporters are often unveiled - many wearing sleeveless, open-necked, yellow T shirts sporting the party's slogan on them. They wear make-up and bear no resemblance to the black-clad conservative women of southern Lebanon.

And the western, liberal dress code is no coincidence: it reflects

Hezbollah's enthusiastic adherence to the Lebanese version of neoliberal economic policies, in terms of privatisation, accepting IMF loans, anti-worker legislation, cuts in social spending ... (policies very similar to those followed elsewhere in the region). The Hezbollah of 2024 has wholeheartedly backed such policies. It is no longer the party of the young, radical clerics who supported the disinherited poor of the south. Nowadays the popular base of the party includes the growing Shia business and middle classes, whose main aim is to ensure Lebanon's economic stability and therefore want to avoid regional conflict at all costs. They want to enrich themselves.

When you look at some of the southern suburbs of Beirut where Hezbollah is quite strong, you see many wealthy families taking part in the party's activities. Some of this base has invested in leisure tourism and, as an integral part of the accepted party pragmatism, they definitely do not want Islamic ideas in the industries that they are involved in. Nowadays, professional organisations representing engineers, doctors, architects, etc, proudly announce their association with the party too.

In addition to this internal support there is also international backing from expatriates. An organisation called Friends of Shia Lebanon acts globally to collect financial support from

wealthy Lebanese individuals who live abroad. Amongst the wealthiest are owners of major multinational companies with interests throughout the Middle East and Africa (for example, Car Care Center ERS, which has numerous international branches).

And Hezbollah is proud of these wealthy supporters. Ali Fayyad MP actually acknowledged this trend back in 2010, when he boasted that "Hezbollah is not a small party any more, It's a whole society. It is the party of the poor people, yes, but at the same time there are a lot of businessmen in the party. We have a lot of rich people, some from the elite class".²

Side of the state

Inevitably this has created conflict with sections of Hezbollah supporters in the south, but nothing too serious because many of them get the crumbs from the neoliberal economics. Amongst reported sources of discontent are the young volunteers returning from fighting in Syria who complain about the wealth gap between ordinary people and sons and daughters of Hezbollah officials, who like to display expensive cars, houses and clothes.

When it comes to protests and demonstrations against neoliberal economic policies, against the sectarian constitution, Hezbollah has been on the side of the Lebanese state. This stems directly from the organisation's ideology: workers should not demand more than what is provided by the capitalists, who in turn have charitable obligations towards the poor. Class struggle is regarded as negative, as it tries to challenge and break apart the Umma (Muslim community).

Despite the riches of some, Lebanon's economy has faced a number of major crises in recent years, notably 2020, following the huge chemical explosion and fire in the Port of Beirut which killed over 200 people and injured 7,000. The country's unstable currency nosedived, external and fiscal deficits ballooned and there were colossal losses in the banking sector, leading to what is referred to as a 'sudden stop' - an abrupt reduction of capital inflow.

Hezbollah's deep involvement in Lebanese capitalism makes it very conscious of the vulnerability of the country's fragile economy, so, even if it did not have Iran's constant advice to 'refrain from major military involvement against Israel', Nasrallah and other Hezbollah leaders are unlikely to endanger Lebanon's economy by escalating the war in the region.

Those who praise Hezbollah or Iran's Islamic Republic as beacons of hope for the region do a disservice not only to the Palestinian cause, but to the peoples of the region - not to mention the working class ●

Notes

1. See 'Threats mask timid actions' *Weekly Worker* January 4: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1472/threats-mask-timid-actions.
2. www.thenational.ae/news/world/follow-the-money.