

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

# weekly **worker**



**'New left Trotskyist' orthodoxy equals strategic unrealism and abandoning working class politics**

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# STORM SHADOWS AND THE PHASE INTO WORLD WAR III



# LETTERS



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

## Lars and Vol 38

I refer to the article, 'A hundred years is enough', by Lars T Lih (September 19). He starts with a remark about narrative, then engages upon one of his own!

The primary target of his polemic appears to be what he calls "confessional sects", but he also singles out György Lukács for some reason, then fails to justify this. The common form of narrative employs formal logic, which is inadequate for historicism. As Lukács suggests (in one of those three books, cited by Lih), "For Lenin as a Marxist 'the concrete analysis of the concrete situation is not an opposite of pure theory, but - on the contrary - it is the culmination of genuine theory, its consummation - the point where it breaks into practice'."

Empirical investigation, which Lih suggests is appropriate, fails to be sufficient for concrete analysis of the concrete situation - the concrete has to be assembled from an analysis which employs dialectical methodology. This is why I can agree with many of Lih's facts and some of his propositions, but certainly not his conclusions. I would suggest that he started with a narrative and then finds facts to suit - this is common practice among positivists.

In terms of Trotsky's account, it's entirely possible that he made assumptions about Stalin's role in the period leading up to Lenin's return from exile, but so what? Stalin was quite capable of recalling party policy, but never a theorist of any great merit. This is very much evident beyond 1924, when his lack of foresight resulted in wild policy changes, as he reacted to events. I doubt that I've actually read the third book in Lih's trilogy, but it's abundantly clear that the cult of Lenin was very much of Stalin's creation - the mausoleum, the proliferation of statues, which I'm sure would have horrified Lenin, if he'd known this in advance.

If all the pieces were in place and no great effort required by Lenin upon his return, why would he have bothered writing his April thesis at all?!

The author mentions Lenin's *Philosophical notebooks*, but misses the most important point: Lenin was very familiar with Hegel before the suggested epiphany in a library. He was certainly well acquainted with Marxist dialectics, as demonstrated by his "concrete analysis of the concrete situation", and excellent at persuading others, before realising ideas in practice. The *Notebooks* are a systematic project of following the footsteps of Marx in the reworking of Hegel onto a materialist basis. This work is largely unknown, but of great importance. Instead we end up with a cult of Lenin, initiated by Stalin, which does carry some of its baggage into the Fourth International. Lenin's conclusion is that dialectics is the science, the logic and theory of knowledge of modern materialism.

Probably the final project of Lenin can be found in his 1922 article, 'On the significance of militant materialism'. A journal was established under the editorship of Abram Deborin, but, with Lenin dead, a debate ensued between the Mechanists and the Deborinists. Stalin took these two

down, one at a time, culminating in the publication of *Diamat* - the subsumption of philosophy beneath the party. This was one of the greatest acts of sabotage by Stalin: Hegel was thrown out in favour of Heraclitus, volume 38 remained in obscurity and dialectics was reduced to 'matter in motion'.

Some further points I must deal with before closing. The break with the Second International came about in 1914 and there was indeed a left wing before that, to which Lenin adhered. Nothing to do with libraries, but everything to do with the outbreak of war and the Second International betrayal. Evald Ilyenkov throws more light on Lenin's *Materialism and empirio-criticism*. Again nothing to do with Hegel or libraries, but a very necessary defence of dialectics against Alexander Bogdanov and the Machists. Lenin regarded Georgi Plekhanov's responses as too weak and in the *Notebooks* dismisses Plekhanov's grasp of materialist dialectics scathingly. Much of this comes to light in the work of Ilyenkov, after the death of Stalin.

In conclusion, an attack on so-called "confessional sects" would be much more constructive without the accusation of "Leninist cult". The religious analogy has some traction in the sense of appearance, but in essence the problem is dogma. Dogma stems from formal logic, Positivism and poor or absent use of dialectical reason, presented by Lenin in the obscure volume 38, practised by Marx and revived in the works of Ilyenkov.

The cult of Lenin, opportunistically promoted by Stalin, evolved into personality cult around Stalin himself, with huge historical consequences. Lih has the wrong target for his polemic.

Joanne Telfer  
email

## Pondering Lars

I had a chance to ponder the Russia of Lars T Lih, thanks to that *Weekly Worker* article. In one essay I read on John Riddell's website he formulates the Russian Revolution of 1917 as a democratic revolution, with not much resemblance to a fight for socialism. It's important to see the forest through the trees, but Lars Lih's trees are very dense.

I'm reminded of what Lenin said in a *Pravda* article in 1917: "In politics it is not so important who directly advocates particular views. What is important is who stands to gain from these views, proposals, measures." Lih's beliefs give ammunition to the demoralising view that socialism is not possible and not worth fighting for. The social class which most benefits from propagating this lie is the *haute bourgeoisie*. I could consider that Lih is both a nominal socialist and a bourgeois academic, until I'm proven wrong. He seems to be a champion of bourgeois democracy, not socialist democracy.

Lih views Karl Kautsky as the mentor of Russian political development to the point of referring to him as the "architect of October". I have my own title for Kautsky: the 'parliamentary radical democrat'. The logic of Lih's thinking escapes me, but, then again, if October is seen as a bourgeois revolution, then Kautsky figures aptly in this revisionist history. Kautsky's ultimately evolutionary - or bourgeois - parliamentary road to socialism was completely opposite to what Lenin came to espouse (and his argument against Bernstein in

the Second International, 1898-99, had its limits). For Lenin, a parliament should only be used as a platform to expose the ruling class and build movements, not as a means to overthrow the state. I find it dangerous to rehabilitate Kautsky without discussing how his parliamentarism is counterproductive, really counterrevolutionary (especially during revolutionary times, where it can invite defeat; case-in-point, Allende's Chile, 1973). I don't believe at all that the creation of the Bolshevik revolution was due to the work and influence of Karl Kautsky.

In the early years, Lenin shared a lot of Kautsky's views: ie, that "the state should be used for a specific form of transition from capitalism to socialism" (Lenin, December 1916) rather than to "smash" the state (Marx), but Lenin's views evolved: Lenin said he came to realise that Kautsky always sidestepped the issue of proletarian state power. I imagine that Lenin would be rolling in his grave if he knew that the historic legacy of the October revolution was being hijacked by the ghost of Kautsky.

Lih's views about 1917 minimise, downplay and underestimate Lenin's role, especially about the run-up to October, specifically regarding March and April. What happened reflects a breakthrough direction from the Old Bolshevik policies of 1905 and afterwards, contrary to Lih's view of 'continuity'. This new direction doesn't mean that there was a total break from the past. It's not uncommon for societal conditions to evolve from their roots, assimilating influences. Lenin's April theses don't signal a rupture from the past, but it's not a continuation either, in my humble assessment. There's a middle ground that gave Lenin the opportunity to speed up the revolutionary momentum of a workers' revolution.

The traditional, longstanding Old Bolshevik plan to gain leadership in a provisional bourgeois government was no longer feasible. There were leftwing or 'new Bolsheviks', who shared Lenin's perspective of a new state form, made up of the existing soviets, and what followed was the slogan, 'All power to the soviets!' The soviets were novel and, as Lenin said, they existed nowhere else except in Russia.

The immediate and absolutely necessary task, and which would avoid an expected bloody repression, would be to transcend a struggle for proletarian control in a bourgeois government, and to achieve the soviet conquest of state power. The Old Bolshevik politics were to a good extent obsolete. A cutting-edge experiment was on the agenda. But Lih disagrees with this scenario: October is conceived of as an ahistorical bourgeois revolution without any - or any meaningful - socialism to speak of. He says: "I do think it was Old Bolshevism which came to power in 1917"; and: "I admire the October revolution more as a democratic revolution than a socialist one" ('The ironic triumph of "Old Bolshevism"'). According to Lih, a democratic republic was the goal of the Old Bolsheviks and they were "carrying through the democratic revolution to the end".

Lih's depiction of Lev Kamenev, a theorist, doesn't correlate with the record. Kamenev was an Old Bolshevik who held centrist views at times and, evidently, took a pro-war, defencist stance in 1917.

He didn't subscribe to the need, practicality and timeliness of a workers' government, which Lenin and his partisans were campaigning for. When push came to shove in October 1917, all the Bolsheviks voted for Lenin's advocacy of insurrection, except for two Bolsheviks - Kamenev and Zinoviev - who voted 'no'. Lih is fine with Kamenev and Zinoviev; these are the Bolsheviks, over Lenin, who meet with Lih's approval. (Lih doesn't see the revolution as an 'insurrection'. He says we shouldn't go along with the "folklore that the Bolsheviks succeeded because they relied on 'insurrection' rather than 'electoralism'" - 'Karl Kautsky as the architect of the October revolution', 2019)

The fact that the October revolution was accomplished so quickly from the April date may show that there was substantial agreement by April with Lenin's radical conclusions - enough Bolsheviks shared his views or could be persuaded, and they then branched out to agitate and organise among the masses. The Bolsheviks were aware that they were in the throes of a socialist revolution. They no longer believed that socialism in Russia would have to wait for revolution in the west, but they also thought that without eventual socialist revolution in the west, the Russian Revolution, in isolation, couldn't survive.

Lenin had abandoned the slogan of democratic republicanism and assumed the slogans of land distribution to the peasantry, an immediate end to the war and workers' control.

GG  
USA

## Old Aunt Lars

As last observations on Lars T Lih's 'A hundred years is enough' let us look at the question of his methodology.

In argumentations some set up an 'old aunt Sally' - or a 'straw man', to use a non-sexist term. For instance, to ridicule Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution we hear that it proposes simultaneous revolution on a global - or at least a wide regional - scale instead of a revolution on a national scale as part of a period of a rising tide of global radicalisation, which will have its own national time scales within that. Similarly, Louis Shawcross (Letters, October 3) has the man who thinks polar bears wander the streets of Glasgow as a typical representative of the entire working class, displaying his own contempt for that class.

So, on to Lars T's stages in revolution; Lenin saw the February 1917 revolution as a 'stage' in the same revolution that culminated in October, whereas Kamenev and Zinoviev saw it as a separate historical stage: a bourgeois and then a socialist revolution in the indefinite future - the standard Stalinist concept. That worked well in South Africa, didn't it - now the most unequal country in the world after its 'successful' bourgeois revolution brought us those 'Black Economic Empowerment' millionaires and one black billionaire (president Ramaphosa's brother-in-law)? But, because Lenin was no anarchist, he understood that the socialist revolution could not be achieved until they had won the backing of the working class via the soviets, thus resolving the stage of dual power that began in February in favour of the working class. The

straw man methodology of Lars T equates the two opposing positions, because they both contain stages, so there were no differences between Lenin and Kamenev, and Lenin's April theses were a waste of time and effort.

As for Lenin's time studying Hegel in Berne before returning to Russia, Lars T tells us: "As usual, the claims about Lenin's rupture with the Marxist past are presented by means of a piquant story, which I call the 'Lengel legend' (my label ties together Lenin and Hegel). According to this legend, Lenin is devastated by social democracy's failure to condemn the imperialist war in 1914. He feels completely isolated, even from Bolshevik comrades. He realises that Marxism needs to be rethought top to bottom, and so he holes up in the public library in Berne, Switzerland. There he abjures politics for a time and embarks on a serious study of the most abstruse book of the most abstruse philosopher, Georg Hegel's *Science of logic*. Through diligent note-taking, he discovers the profound essence of the dialectic that eluded him heretofore."

I have two copies of Lenin's volume 38, his *Philosophical notebooks* (one of them Vanessa Redgrave's, containing her notes on the study of that volume, which was mandatory in Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party - one of that organisation's many strengths, despite its weakness and Healy's personal degeneration). Lenin did not discover "the profound essence of the dialectic that eluded him heretofore": he deepened and developed that knowledge, which did assist him in making the October revolution.

He didn't repudiate all his previous understanding of the dialect and Marxism; this is a real 'old aunt Sally'/'straw man'. He was already a sophisticated dialectician before that study. He didn't have to repudiate his 1908 book *Materialism and empirio-criticism*, but he certainly came to understand better what was insufficient and wrong with Kautsky, Plekhanov and others even back then. Lenin had already understood the difference between the German SPD's 'party of the whole class' and Lenin's revolutionary party after that blackest day in the history of the working class - the SPD's voting for war credits to the kaiser on August 4 1914.

There is a world of difference between Lenin discovering "the profound essence of the dialectic that eluded him heretofore" and developing and refining that understanding.

Gerry Downing  
Socialist Fight

## Slogan fetish

As the person who at the last aggregate of the CPGB proposed drafting a statement on the war in Ukraine in order to seek closer cooperation with others on the left, I must register my disappointment with the text drafted by the Provisional Central Committee and published in last week's *Weekly Worker* ('Establishing a principled left', October 3). It should be obvious that I am not criticising the PCC for taking this initiative - quite the opposite. I am, however, critical of its execution.

There is clearly a lot of political overlap between a number of groups currently operating on the British left. It is important to find out where we agree and where

perhaps we disagree, hopefully with a view to sharing joint campaigns and achieving unity beyond this issue.

It is vital to clarify differences on the war in Ukraine, especially as there is a lot of confusion on the left over this. Many groups have adopted a social-pacifist position (Stop the War Coalition, Corbynites, etc), and then there is the social-imperialist camp (supporting Ukraine/Nato/US, like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty), while a few groups like George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain even think that socialists should support Russia, because it is the lesser evil.

But the text produced by the PCC is not a statement. It is a long article with numbered paragraphs, with much unnecessary detail. A statement should be short and sharp, and concentrate on the political principles. I proposed to the PCC to delete, as a minimum, points 1-10 and point 19. This would have helped to make the text into an actual statement and would mean the reader would not have to wade through all sorts of paragraphs about this or that weapons system.

Also, there are omissions that I find rather puzzling. Ever since I joined the CPGB some 25 years ago, the organisation has distinguished itself by stressing the need for a politically independent, working class position in a war between two reactionary sides. As internationalists, we have a particular responsibility to deal with our own ruling class (particularly in this war, where the British government and the media are acting as willing lapdogs to the US in its efforts to keep this bloody conflict going as a proxy war against China). Not because we are nationalists or believe in socialism in one country, but because this is where we can confront most directly a section of the international ruling class.

The concept of 'revolutionary defeatism' and the slogan, 'The main enemy is at home', are crucially important in this context.

The PCC says these ideas are *implicit* in the text and the request to make them *explicit* is a sign of "fetishism with words". I find that claim even more puzzling. Have we not fought tooth and nail to keep the name 'CPGB' alive? Is that fetishism? How about our insistence on reclaiming 'communism' and stripping it of its Stalinist heritage? How about 'dictatorship of the proletariat'? I really cannot see why we should abandon 'The main enemy is at home'. It is succinct, understandable, recognisable, it speaks to our political history and our political practice, and it sums up what we fight for - in stark contrast to much of the left.

Also missing is the necessity of establishing a workers' militia - another long-established key weapon in the CPGB's propaganda arsenal. I have been told that this was left out on purpose, implicitly and explicitly, as "some of the other groups would never agree to it".

Now that is a new one on me. Since when have we dropped political demands that we believe to be correct, because others *might* not agree with them? Should we not at least *try* to convince those groups and win them over? Especially as we could have a very useful and important public discussion around some of those (possibly) disputed questions.

Along with deleting unnecessary sections of the PCC's statement, I propose the following should be added: "Our position is for revolutionary defeatism. The main enemy is at home. Therefore, we fight for a Communist Party and a workers' movement capable of overthrowing the capitalist state. Towards this goal we support the democratic republican principle of the replacement of the standing army by a popular militia and support strikes, boycotts and actions by trade unions to disrupt the military supply chain."

This is, incidentally, taken almost word for word from a statement that the PCC produced in cooperation with the Dutch Communist Platform and which appeared in the *Weekly Worker* on

February 2 2023. The last half-sentence has been added by me to flesh out what we actually mean by revolutionary defeatism. It is more than the hope that 'our side loses'. It is a strategy for the working class to become the hegemon of society - here, today.

Lastly, I do think that CPGB members should at least have had a chance to see and amend the text before it was sent to other groups. We are, after all, not interested in building a 'follow the leadership' sect. We want to build a real Communist Party, with fully engaged and active members.

**Carla Roberts**  
email

## Second coming

Oh dear. Eddie Ford displays the one-dimensional thinking which reflects the old partyist dogma of 'trade union consciousness', which determines for us that trade unionists are doomed only to a myopic political vision ('Davos on the Mersey', October 3). This is the kind of formula generally associated with the anti-working-class deviants of council communism or ultra-leftist factions of anarchism.

Eddie makes the discovery that Sharon Graham *et al* regulate the rate of exploitation, and the entire history of the working class could be seen as an attempt to change the degree and rate of capitalist exploitation. We would hardly be much good to the working class, if we didn't get involved with the nuts and bolts of here and now, and instead confined ourselves to the higher intellectual theories of political thought. Better wages, shorter hours? Nah, mate - I'm holding out for the international victory of the working class and can't be bothered with reformist, short-term measures like that.

What earthly use would such attitudes be to actual workers? The dynamic, revolutionary Industrial Workers of the World used to engage in on-the-spot bargaining of wages and conditions, while inscribing of their banners 'Abolition of the wages system'. We engage with the employer to win the best terms in the here and now, while discussing with our mates the possible future without capitalism, without wage-slavery.

Eddie puts me in mind of a born-again Christian coalminer I worked with. He refused to pay the mineworker's pension, because he believed the day of judgement and the second coming were at hand. It would be a waste of money, he argued. Eventually I convinced him he might have the dates wrong, and a few quid wouldn't make difference when it arrived. He's been drawing his pension 35 years now - though still waiting for Jesus.

Class-consciousness does not require a special sort of organisation. It's perceived quite independently of the form of organisation where it is achieved and, when needs must, a trade union, a community action group, a secular religious body or indeed a mass party of the working class can be utilised and adapted.

Unions are less under rank-and-file direction these days and suffer from a whole layer of middle class civil servants - apart from the bureaucratic tendencies of 'jobs for life' leaders - but without them we would be utterly defenceless. So let's not sneer at the unions: they are still by and large the first line of defence and the advanced guard of the worker in moving forward. They can likewise be weapons in the fight for class power.

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## ACTION

### Grenfell fire: analysis of the public enquiry

**Saturday October 12, 11am:** Online public meeting. Peter Apps, author of *Show me the bodies: how we let Grenfell happen*, reflects on phase 2 of the public inquiry. Organised by Homes for All: [www.facebook.com/Homes4AllUK](http://www.facebook.com/Homes4AllUK).

### What made us human?

**Tuesday October 15, 6.30pm:** Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'The evolution of we-ness'. Speaker: Volker Sommer. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.facebook.com/events/383277434578956](http://www.facebook.com/events/383277434578956).

### Stop Israel's drive to war

**Wednesday October 16, 6.30pm:** Rally, The Atrium, 124 Cheshire Street, London E2. In recent weeks Israel has bombed Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Gaza and the West Bank. Starmer and the US are taking the world into a war for which there will be no winners. Registration free. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events/london-rally-stop-israels-drive-to-war](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events/london-rally-stop-israels-drive-to-war).

### Lambeth for disinvestment from Israel

**Wednesday October 16, 6.30pm:** Lobby of the council meeting, Lambeth town hall, 1 Brixton Hill, London SW2. Lambeth council has over £10 million of local government pensions invested in companies complicit in Israel's oppression of Palestine. Organised by Lambeth and Wandsworth Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [palestinecampaign.org/events/lambeth-for-divestment-lobbies](http://palestinecampaign.org/events/lambeth-for-divestment-lobbies).

### What is imperialism?

**Thursday October 17, 7pm:** Online session in the 'ABC of Marxism' course. In part three Matthew Jones speaks on US imperialism. Registration free. Organised by Why Marx?: [www.facebook.com/whymarxism](http://www.facebook.com/whymarxism).

### Trade unions building solidarity with Palestine

**Saturday October 19, 10am to 4.30pm:** Conference for trade unionists, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Key Palestinian voices and union leaders discuss solidarity with Palestine, including divestment campaigns targeting institutions complicit with Israel's crimes. Tickets £20 (£15). Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [palestinecampaign.org/events](http://palestinecampaign.org/events).

### End service charge abuse

**Tuesday October 22, 6.30pm:** Online public meeting. Charges have rocketed, while services are not being delivered. Tenants are squeezed into debt by this legalised extortion. Organised by Social Housing Action Campaign (SHAC): [www.facebook.com/events/8775916142447948](http://www.facebook.com/events/8775916142447948).

### Walter Rodney: what they don't want you to know

**Thursday October 24, 7pm:** Film screening, Working Class Movement Library, 51 Crescent, Salford M5. Documentary about historian and Marxist Walter Rodney (assassinated in 1980 at the age of 38). The film covers cold war conspiracies, black power and Rodney's murder. Register for free ticket. Organised by Working Class Movement Library: [wcml.org.uk/event/walter-rodney-what-they-dont-want-you-to-know](http://wcml.org.uk/event/walter-rodney-what-they-dont-want-you-to-know).

### Mixing pop and politics

**Friday October 25, 7pm:** Book event, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Author Toby Manning introduces *Mixing pop and politics: a Marxist history of popular music*, his radical history of political and social upheavals in the last 70 years, told through the period's most popular music. Entrance £3.50 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: [housmans.com/events](http://housmans.com/events).

### Bargain books

**Saturday October 26, 11am:** Book sale, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Get your hands on Marxist classics and rare pamphlets. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/485](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/485).

### Stop Tommy Robinson, stop the far right

**Saturday October 26, 12 noon:** National demonstration. Assemble central London (venue tbc). Tommy Robinson is planning a march to spread racism and Islamophobia. Mobilise to prevent the far right from taking over the streets. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: [standuptoracism.org.uk](http://standuptoracism.org.uk).

### Resisting war, austerity and the far right

**Sunday October 27, 12 noon to 5.30pm:** Conference, SOAS, University of London, 10 Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Chart the left's next steps, as Israel takes the Middle East into a wider war, Starmer backs imperialism and austerity, and the far right make gains. Speakers include Lindsey German and Clare Daly. Tickets £15 (£5). Organised by Counterfire: [www.facebook.com/events/1760965174648074](http://www.facebook.com/events/1760965174648074).

### Israel, war and the Labour government

**Tuesday October 29, 7pm:** Public meeting, Central United Reformed Church, 60 Norfolk Street, Sheffield S1. The UK is deeply implicated in another Middle East war. We need a powerful anti-war movement to halt Israel's genocide. Speaker: Chris Nineham. Organised by Sheffield Stop the War Coalition: [www.facebook.com/STWSheffield](http://www.facebook.com/STWSheffield).

### SOS NHS

**Saturday November 2, 10am:** National conference, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Hospitals are crumbling, waiting lists are millions-strong, services are being outsourced, and staff overworked and underpaid. Discuss how to campaign to save the NHS. Registration free. Organised by Keep Our NHS Public: [www.facebook.com/events/556724363454578](http://www.facebook.com/events/556724363454578).

### CPGB wills

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

## Fighting fund

# Par for course

Top of my list of donors this week is New Zealand comrade HR, who not only pays for the three copies of *Weekly Worker* sent to him each week, but gives us more than double the subscription price. He's just set up a monthly standing order for £66! Thank you, comrade.

But the most generous contributor over the last seven days is comrade AC, with his fantastic £100 bank transfer. Other bank transfers/standing orders came our way from FK (£39), BO (£35), CG, DV and NH (£30 each). RG and GD (£25), JD (£20) and TW, IS and SM (£10). Thanks very much to one and all.

And the same applies to our three PayPal donors - GW (£15), MH (£10) and KA (£5). All of you have played a part in increasing the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund total for October by no less than £460 - up to £694 after just nine days. Our monthly target is, of course, £2,250, so that's about par for the course.

As I keep stressing, our printing and postage costs have soared, but the need for a paper like the *Weekly Worker* is also increasing. Where else will you find a paper that champions free

and open debate within its letters pages, carries serious polemics pitting different viewpoints and all with the central aim of uniting the principled left behind the project of building a Communist Party? Only if that is achieved can the working class hope to win the battle for extreme democracy and socialism.

Last week we not only carried a four-page supplement - *FT* tint and all - we got hundreds more printed for the successful, 300,000-strong, October 5 Palestine demonstration. It went down hugely well. That, of course, meant extra costs in printing and postage. So we need our monthly fund target regularly met and, when possible, substantially exceeded. We're still a long way off that target for October, so readers upping their contributions is vital for us! See below to find out how you can do your bit ●

**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](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate)

**LOBBYISTS**

# How to buy a government

Labour is supposed to be the party of working people, but its recent troubles show how bourgeois politics and big money interweave, argues **Paul Demarty**

**H**ard luck to Sue Gray, the lifelong Whitehall bureaucrat who took a chance on running Kier Starmer's staff. It turns out that the staff have had the last laugh - most especially Morgan McSweeney, Starmer's campaign *consigliere*, who now replaces her as chief of staff. Gray will take up a new role as "envoy to the nations and regions", which sounds to us like a ridiculous make-work job, but at least it will get her out of the house ...

Her resignation - likely under heavy manners - comes as part of a wider reshuffle, by means of which Starmer seeks to regain the initiative after relentless scandals over petty corruption, and the cheerful abandonment of one already meagre election pledge after another. There has been no honeymoon period to speak of, really. Gray's own role in all this is largely incidental. The great kerfuffle over her salary was silly enough stuff, though it gave a clear picture of the main motivations of the average government functionary. It seemed to be a secondary symptom of her perceived control-freakery (although what else is a chief of staff supposed to do?) and obstructionism at a time when the government is relentlessly under fire.

But the endless scandals have always had the feel of not really being about what they *should be* about. We are not too terribly concerned about the prime minister's trousers, or his spectacles, though a fondness for splashing quite so much cash on them seems a little vulgar (perhaps he is more than usually prone to losing his glasses). Focusing on the Waheed Alli-Keir Starmer angle gives the impression that this is a matter of one businessman engaging one politician in an improper, though legal, financial arrangement. Even the wider 'gift economy', uniting Labour MPs to an adoring public of rich benefactors, fades into insignificance next to the ordinary business of parliamentary lobbyists.

## Next scandal

Lobbying is a very good issue for a leader of the opposition to bring up. David Cameron waxed solemn about it back in February 2010, when he commented that lobbying is "the next big scandal waiting to happen. It's an issue that crosses party lines and has tainted our politics for too long - an issue that exposes the far-too-cosy relationship between politics, government, business and money."

Cameron was maybe wrong after all. Lobbying has never *quite* exploded into the sort of scandal it should have done; and so the circus has continued. Instead of exploding into a great calamity, lobbying has just become the default condition of politics. It is like the old joke about two fish: the first asks the second, 'How's the water today?' The second replies, 'What the fuck is water?'

Cameron himself, of course, got wrapped up in a minor scandal, when Greensill Capital, a bank specialising in 'supply chain financing', collapsed in 2021; Lex Greensill, the bank's owner, employed Cameron, who allegedly used his contacts in government to get Greensill business applying his financial voodoo in the public sector. Greensill had been an unpaid advisor to several government departments during Cameron's years as prime minister (how very public-spirited!). Cameron survived well enough to get hurled into the Lords



John Heartfield 'Millions back me' (1932)

and to become foreign secretary last year. He joined a government which had shed people repeatedly over funnelling lucrative contracts to their mates, especially during the pandemic. And that is precisely it: people *survive* lobbying scandals. It is baffling that an MP can do more damage to their career by going on *I'm a celebrity* than by inviting one's businessman mates to 'advise' the government.

The Tories tend to get away with this, perhaps because nobody expects any better. The old cliché is that it is sex scandals that topple Conservative governments, and financial scandals that do it for Labour. That is too glib by half, but Labour is in the end haunted by its remaining links with the wider workers' movement. It is *supposed* to be the party of working people (or "hard-working families", or whatever the branding is this week). Yet it, too, is rotted away with lobbyists.

An interesting recent piece in the *London Review of Books* by Peter Geoghegan, entitled 'Labour and the lobbyists',<sup>1</sup> offers a quite thorough inventory of all the ways Labour is in hock to loyalists, and its own contributions to the comical lack of transparency and regulation around

lobbying. There is, for starters, the enthusiasm with which business is tapped for 'advice' and services rendered. Geoghegan notes that

... in opposition, shadow ministers with minimal experience of governing worked alongside staff seconded from HSBC, NatWest, PricewaterhouseCoopers and a number of consultancy and advisory firms. In the days before the general election, senior Labour figures reportedly asked various companies - engineering firms, tech companies, management consultancies - to send more staff to help with policy work.

There is the revolving door - the way ministers, MPs and even staffers walk out of their politics jobs and straight into PR firms working on behalf of vast corporations. At the top end, we find people like Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson, who start their own 'consulting' firms with little obvious to recommend them except the useful connections of their founders.

The revolving door is a two-way thing, of course, and plenty of people filter *into* politics from having been corporate flunkies. There is the

recent example of Rachel Kyte, who was given a climate job in the government, having come from a charitable front group for Quadrature Capital (an investment fund with ample fossil fuel investments, which donated £4 million to Labour). It was, let us say, *unfortunate* that this should have turned up at exactly the moment that the government decided it would be investing a huge amount of money in 'carbon capture' technology - that classic bit of diversionary vapourware which substitutes for serious action to reduce fossil fuel dependence.

A third strand of the lobbying picture is the blurring of the line between factional organisations and think tanks, on the one hand, and fundraising apparatuses, on the other. Geoghegan cites Labour Together, the counter-Corbynite headquarters founded by the likes of Luke Akehurst nine years ago. In 2017, the group was taken over by a certain Morgan McSweeney. McSweeney used Labour Together to put together Starmer's campaign for the leadership in 2019, and then jumped ship to work for him. At the same time, he obfuscated their finances:

At the outset, Labour Together was financed by anti-Corbyn Labour donors like the hedge fund manager, Martin Taylor, and the venture capitalist, Trevor Chinn, and donations were published on the Electoral Commission website. Then, on McSweeney's watch, it stopped declaring them ... The electoral authorities repeatedly advised McSweeney that, as a members' association, Labour Together had to declare donations. But between December 2017 and late 2020 McSweeney registered just a single gift, of £12,500 from Chinn, and failed to report donations worth a total of £730,000. The electoral commission found in 2021 that he had breached election law, and Labour Together was fined £14,250 (the maximum fine the commission can levy is a paltry £20,000 per offence). The organisation dismissed it as an "administrative oversight".

Since then, the group has become an important nexus between the Labour leadership and the donor class. It runs fringe events at Labour conferences with corporate 'partners'. Much the same might have been said, in the Blair years, of David Sainsbury's Progress outfit. None of this stuff is terribly new.

## Purpose

For this, and other reasons, the tendency for people to view this as a matter of personal greed - or, at best, naivety about the 'optics' of too-cosy relations with the corporate lobby - is misleading. We are talking, instead, about the systematic suborning of political life by big capital. The system includes both the professionalisation of politics (the existence of intermediary organisations like lobbying firms and business-friendly ginger groups like Labour Together) *and* the woefully and laughably inadequate institutions that are supposed to prevent unseemly behaviour of this sort. Since the Register of Members' Financial Interests, the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Advisory Committee on Business

Appointments do not *actually* prevent what, in a just society, would amount to criminal bribery, they play another role: of punishing a few extra-bad apples and giving the veneer of respectability to the overall picture.

That may seem unfair to people who are, no doubt, consciously committed to the goal of keeping politics clean. Intentions can be finessed, however. The cybernetics pioneer, Stafford Beer, used to say that "the purpose of a system is what it does". He was onto something: the intentions of individual actors are less illuminating than the overall behaviour of the whole structure.

## State and capital

We Marxists are accustomed to using phrases like 'bourgeois politics' and 'bourgeois politicians', and perhaps we sometimes do so too crudely - as though being 'bourgeois' in this sense was merely a moral failing. In reality, bourgeois politics simply must, merely as a product of its role, be bribed. The details vary, but there simply must be ways for money to gain its required outcomes.

Capital requires a state to settle disputes between different capitals, to pursue the interests of national capital against other national capitals, and to manage class conflict, among other things. Capitalists, however, are divided, and so some means is required to subordinate different sections to each other. Even ignoring the existence of other classes in society then, there is a tendency for political contestation to map onto the pecking order in the wider economy - political forces emerge around divergences of interest, and the biggest wallet tends to win. The ideal form of capitalist politics actually exists - it is called the shareholder's meeting. One share, one vote.

Once we introduce class struggle into the picture, however, things get more complicated. The popular masses demand a say in the running of things, but they have little or no cash to throw at the problem. The emergence of strictly working class politics poses a special problem, since workers' interests are directly opposed to capitalist interests. As well as politically cohering capital, bourgeois politics must neutralise working class politics, and one means of doing so is incorporating workers' parties into the wider backscratching network. It is hard to think of a more morbid case of this than Labour.

Therein lies the fatal flaw of left Labourism. Because it does not question the constitutional regime, it cannot in the end succeed in replacing the power of money with working class power. Even spectacular breakthroughs, like Jeremy Corbyn's election as leader, leave the left hostage to the right, so long as they do not recognise the danger (which the Corbynites certainly did not). The history of the socialist movement has various mechanisms for counteracting the universal tendency towards corruption - subordination of elected representatives to party structures, imposition of a 'maximum wage', and means of recall.

There is no silver bullet, but we must fight the monster with what weapons we have ●

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## Notes

1. www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v46/n16/peter-geoghegan/labour-and-the-lobbyists.

ENVIRONMENT

# Nothing clean about it

Labour is pouring billions into over-hyped CCS technology as part of an effort to prolong the life of fossil fuel capitalism, writes **Eddie Ford**. Lobbying by oil companies has paid off handsomely

Last week, the government announced plans to commit almost £22 billion over 25 years to fund two carbon capture and storage (CCS) projects - one in Teesside in north-east England, and a second in north-west England/north Wales. Already giving you a clue about what is driving these projects, the East Coast Cluster - as it is known - is backed by oil companies including BP and the Norwegian Equinor, while the HyNet North West Cluster is being developed by the Italian oil company, Eni.

"This is absolute madness", Tweeted George Monbiot on X. CCS has failed time and again. Labour has slashed reliable green programmes, to "pour vast sums of our money into a complete crock." Surely, the only possible explanation is persistent "lobbying by fossil fuel companies".<sup>1</sup> In other words CCS and the £22 billion is about prolonging the life of fossil fuel capitalism.

CCS technology has never been used on a commercial scale in the UK before. Most of the very few CCS projects brought to fruition around the world have, yes, been sad failures. Nonetheless, the oil companies have successfully promoted CCS as some sort of green panacea that will save the planet ... and provide lots of lucrative jobs in desperately poor, deindustrialised, areas.

Government officials say they are expecting or hoping that the clusters will attract private-sector investment of about £8 billion, while directly creating 4,000 jobs - then supporting 50,000 more jobs in the long term. Ed Miliband, the energy secretary, declared a "new era" for clean energy jobs and chancellor Rachel Reeves - with the budget only weeks away on October 30 - said the announcement would come as one of a "drumbeat" of measures to kickstart economic growth.

This followed hints in her recent speech to Labour's conference in Liverpool that she would alter the government's fiscal rules and now appears to be pushing ahead with plans to borrow billions of pounds extra for infrastructure investment, despite the concerns in some quarters about the rising cost of UK government debt. Initial attempts to establish a CCS industry began in 2009 under a Labour government, but when the Tories came into office in 2010 the £1 billion funding plan faltered and was eventually scrapped five years later. The Conservatives went on to shortlist the two CCS projects for funding in 2021, but did not commit to the investment before they were voted out this year.

What about saving the planet? First of all, 25 years is a heck of a long time, given the climate crisis. When it comes to meeting the Paris Accords, which no-one seriously is now, it is already too late - you are not going to keep the temperatures down to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels as already can be seen by near countless statistics over the last few years. Yes, technically speaking, it is not yet 'official' that the limit has been broken, as that requires some more years for it to become the norm - nonetheless, that is where we are at.

As for CCS technology, we should not be against it as such - that would be ridiculous. But the real question, of course, is that it is being used extensively in a greenwashing fashion - hence the recently announced projects to much hoopla. For instance,



CCS requires pipes ... lots of them

in the US oil and gas companies are getting very generous subsidies for investing in CCS technologies - no wonder they are in favour of it!

But, crucially, this is a *con* because the oil companies use CCS to pump every last bit of gas or oil out of a field - in the process releasing loads of CO<sub>2</sub>. The extra gas and oil is then burnt or otherwise used - once gain releasing yet more CO<sub>2</sub>. In other words, CCS is not about creating some sort of carbon-neutral economy: it is about profit maximisation and *appearing* to be green.

## Steel and coal

Yes, under certain circumstances, CCS is supportable - or at least, not something we should automatically reject. One example would be steel, as producing it from the raw requires coal and Tata, the owners of Port Talbot Steelworks in Wales initially considered using CCS technology to reduce its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions - not objectionable as an idea. But that would have required either an entirely new CO<sub>2</sub> pipe-distribution network or a fleet of CO<sub>2</sub>-pumping carrier ships to move the CO<sub>2</sub> to where it can be geologically buried. Costly and hardly a profit spinner. So the Tata bosses pivoted to electric-arc furnace production which, rather than making new steel using raw materials dug from the ground, would mainly be melting down scrap.<sup>2</sup> Even though some coal will still be required, it can be sold as green technology and hence get £500 million worth of government subsidies.

Anyway, we should not fall for the CCS hype, especially as it is not a proven technology. It is not as if all

you need to do with your steel plant is capture the carbon as it comes out - pipe it out somewhere and it just stays there waiting for better days and better technology. There are numerous examples showing that, when this has been attempted, the damned stuff leaks and then you have got the additional cost - not of the capture - but of the storage which requires pipes. As a consequence, your steel, for example, would be highly uncompetitive, compared with those that don't bother using CCS.

In this context, it is worthwhile considering the question of trade unions. At this year's TUC conference in Brighton, a Unite motion passed narrowly, which declared that we cannot abandon fossil fuels "until we know how we will replace them, and how the jobs and communities from the North Sea fields will be protected". Naturally, this is the sort of sentiment you can generally go along with. However, having said that, this is an example of narrow trade unionism that simply looks at workers as labour-power - not as actual human beings that reproduce and want their children and grandchildren to live on this planet in a way that is sustainable, and supportive of human civilisation.

So it also seems appropriate to mention the closure last month of Britain's last coal-power plant at Ratcliffe-on-Soar in Nottinghamshire, bringing to an end a 142-year history of coal-fired electricity. Should communists campaign against its closure? Yes, we would oppose mass sackings, of course - nor can we be indifferent to the trashing of historically established communities, which has happened in so many coal-

producing areas since the 1960s. But campaigning to keep coal-powered stations open is an entirely different question altogether.

One might as well talk of reviving the charcoal burning industry, which was, of course, used by the Wealden iron industry in south-eastern England before the turn to coke and coal.

The charcoal to smelt the iron came from carefully managed coppices and the power was provided by watermills. Therefore the industry was eminently sustainable. The Weald produced the bar iron that was used to gate and fence St Paul's Cathedral and all those ship's cannons that allowed Britannia to rule the waves. There is still iron in abundance underneath what is now woods, forest and rolling green fields.

## Power trend

As the last coal power station closes in Britain, it is reasonable to look at what is going on in China. The argument or excuse from Beijing would be that, given Britain industrialised using coal power from the 1800s or thereabouts, China too needs to industrialise as fast as possible - with its fellow travellers peddling various version of that line. But this approach is *reductio ad absurdum*: Britain pumped out a load of CO<sub>2</sub>, as did America, so objecting to China doing the same is either hypocritical or part of a pro-imperialist desire to keep down the 'global south'. In reality, what China produces is consumed by Americans, Europeans and Brits, precisely because we do not live in two separate systems, or two different worlds. Birmingham used to be the workshop of the world, but now it is China. Nevertheless, we all consume the same stuff and live on the same planet.

Discussing the issue of carbon capture and all the rest of it, *Socialist Worker* recently warned about letting the market decide this question - saying "don't trust Starmer and his carbon capture con", which is correct.<sup>3</sup> As said, we need to look after our common planet, as it is the only one we have got - if Elon Musk wants to go to Mars, then best of luck and enjoy the view. But that is not where our future as a species lies: it is here on planet Earth. Yet *Socialist Worker* goes on to say that, if you leave it to the market, that "risks letting gas and biofuels take its place" - which sounds very radical and anti-capitalist, but is actually a cheap line indicating that the writer of the piece had not really thought about it. Condemning capitalism and the market is quite right, of course - it would be an odd communist who took umbrage. But all the statistics show that in the here and now, not because of the quixotic technology of the future, solar and wind power is *vastly* cheaper than fossil fuels of any kind, not to mention biofuels and certainly nuclear energy, which is pure madness on every level.

Therefore, according to a new report by the International Renewable Energy Agency, the world added 473 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity last year, and four-fifths of it produces power more cheaply than fossil fuels do.<sup>4</sup> This added capacity is roughly equivalent to 473 nuclear plants and produces electricity at prices that most fossil plants cannot hope to match, totally leaving behind the lumbering dinosaur that is the nuclear industry.

The global average cost of electricity from onshore wind fell to 3.3 cents per kilowatt-hour (three percent less than the year before) and utility-scale solar photovoltaic fell to 4.4 cents/kWh (12% less). Fossil-fuel prices rose in 2023 to 10 cents/kWh, says the International Renewable Energy Agency, which largely ignores nuclear power - that has been estimated to cost as much as 25-30 cents/kWh. As for battery storage, that has grown from 0.1 GWh gross capacity added in 2010 to 95.9 GWh in 2023. From 2010 and 2023, the costs of battery storage projects declined 89%, thanks to improved materials efficiency, improved manufacturing processes and economies of scale.

Clearly, meeting our energy needs and creating a sustainable planet requires *planning*: it cannot be left to the capitalists to put up wind farms and solar panels willy-nilly, while dreaming about making a quick buck. But the essential point is that this is not something we are hitting at from a crazy or utopian angle. Boris Johnson, before he became prime minister, said wind farms could not "pull the skin off a rice pudding" - which now looks profoundly stupid. As things stand today, Britain is powered going on for *half* by solar and wind power, and for all the worries of *Socialist Worker*, that is a trend obviously set to continue - barring a catastrophe such as the destruction of human civilisation ●

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## Notes

1. x.com/GeorgeMonbiot/status/1842108828738814146.
2. bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-68017180.
3. socialistworker.co.uk/news/dont-trust-starmer-and-his-carbon-capture-con.
4. forbes.com/sites/jeffmahon/2024/09/26/81-of-new-renewables-produce-cheaper-energy-than-fossil-fuels.

**UKRAINE**

# Notes on the war

It has, for the moment, become the forgotten war. Nonetheless, warns **Jack Conrad**, there is a distinct danger of escalation, even nuclear weapons, not least if the use of British Storm Shadows against Russia has been given the go-ahead

**H**umiliatingly - for Volodymyr Zelensky in particular - Ukrainian forces were ordered to withdraw from Vuhledar on the Donetsk-Zaporizhia border on October 1. Zelensky had, after all, just been touring the United States touting his 'victory plan' ... and doing his best, meantime, to boost the chances of Kamala Harris in next month's presidential election.

Reportedly Ukrainian forces in Vuhledar were outnumbered seven to one and new recruits 'froze' - faced, as they were, with successive human waves of Russian troops.<sup>1</sup> Not that battles are decided by force ratios alone. Personnel numbers, food, fuel and ammunition supplies, and the quantity and quality of equipment all count, but so too do intangibles, such as imagination, chance and morale. A point emphasised again and again by the Prussian military philosopher, Carl von Clausewitz, in his classic 1832 study, *Vom Kriege*: "... in combat the loss of moral force is the chief cause of the decision."<sup>2</sup> Obviously, Ukraine has a big problem with personnel numbers, training its troops to sufficient competence before putting them into the field ... and with morale.

Capturing Vuhledar came after two previous Russian attempts: October-November 2022 and January-February 2023. Both were costly failures. Russia lost many men and much equipment.<sup>3</sup> Yet, while gaining Vuhledar is important - it is well fortified and sits on high ground overlooking the surrounding countryside - this is no more than a *tactical* victory. Hence, it is unlikely to fundamentally alter the situation in the western Donetsk oblast, where most of Russia's efforts are directed at taking the *strategically* important town of Pokrovsk. Here is a vital rail and road hub and, if Russia manages to seize the town, it would severely disrupt Ukrainian supply lines on its eastern front - and perhaps even open the way for Russia to take the whole of the Donetsk oblast.

However, to meaningfully support any attempt to surround and take Pokrovsk by pushing north, Russian forces located in Vuhledar, would first have to advance over 23 kilometres of open land to reach highway H-15 (connecting the cities of Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia by way of Novomykolaivka, Trudove and Andriivka). Then there would be the heavily fortified towns of Kostyantynivka, Selydove and Kramatorsk to contend with. So a tough operation to mount at any time of the year - except that now, of course, the rainy season, the *rasputitsa*, has begun in earnest.

This makes land warfare all but impossible. The ground, including the unpaved roads and dirt tracks - which Ukrainian forces used to escape from Vuhledar - turns to mud. Infantry slips, slides and quickly becomes exhausted. Lorries - vital for supplying the front line with rations, munitions, fuel and reinforcements - get bogged down too. Wheels uselessly spin, axles sink into the sticky mire. Nor can tanks easily move. It almost goes without saying that the *rasputitsa* is well known in military circles to confer a great defensive advantage in times of war. Common nicknames are General Mud or Marshal Mud.

Only with the winter freeze



**Pawns in the 'great game': Russian POWs**

does full-scale offensive fighting become really feasible again. Tanks, howitzers, armoured personnel carriers, infantry and, crucially, lorries can move swiftly over solidly frozen ground and this allows for attack and manoeuvre. However, while the rains last, we should not expect any significant Russian breakthrough - unless, that is, Ukrainian morale completely collapses and its troops go AWOL from their bunkers and trenches (by any serious account, not something to be immediately expected). Nonetheless, when it comes to the eastern front in the Donbas, it is clear that Ukraine is on the back foot and the momentum lies squarely with the Russians.

We might, therefore, expect a renewed Russian offensive towards the end of 2024. Vladimir Putin's generals doubtless hanker after giving him Pokrovsk as a new year's gift. They will certainly have drawn up detailed plans for taking the whole of the Donetsk oblast and then a concerted Russian push towards Kharkiv, Ukraine's second city, in the north-east and/or Odessa in the south-west. Taking Odessa would all but landlock Ukraine and give Russia effective control over the entire northern Black Sea coastline.

However, at the present rate of advance that would take not a few short months of winter fighting, but years - many years. Meantime, even ruling out a more active Nato role and unexpected reverses, such as the Kursk incursion, the economic and social strains within Russia grow and grow in what is a war of attrition. The risk is that at some point the regime cracks and popular anger finds political expression (maybe in a well orchestrated colour revolution).

However, it works both ways. Last November, Mark Milley, former chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, infuriated Kyiv - as well as some more bellicose elements in the Biden administration - by comparing

Ukraine to World War I and suggesting that a stalemate had been reached. An assessment long argued by myself in these pages, which also finds confirmation in the Pentagon papers leaked back in April 2023. They too spoke of "stalemate".<sup>4</sup>

## Public opinion

For Zelensky the immediate danger - apart from incremental reversals on the eastern front - is not public opinion at home: rather public opinion in the west. Why do we suffer stagnant real incomes, increased taxes, deteriorating public services and gig jobs for what appears to be an unwinnable proxy war against Russia? A widespread sentiment - and not only in Germany, the country which has taken the biggest economic hit, with Russian oil and gas being cut off (not least with Nord Stream 1 and 2 being put out of action by what we still must presume to be US sabotage).

Crucially, there is the good old US of A. According to a recent YouGov poll, 25% of Americans say that the US should increase military aid to Ukraine, 27% say current levels of military aid should be maintained, and 28% say the US should decrease aid. Put another way, 55% of Americans do not favour additional Ukraine funding.<sup>5</sup> A similar poll conducted in the early days of the Russian invasion, in late February 2022, found 62% felt the US should be doing more. So the shift in public opinion is palpable ... and this will matter on Tuesday November 5, with Donald Trump saying on his Truth Social account that, if he is *not* elected president, this "war will never end, and will phase into WORLD WAR III".<sup>6</sup> Discounting the idea of Trump as the benign bringer of peace, he is not wrong. Nato's proxy war in Ukraine is phasing into a third world war.

Leaving that aside for the moment, there is a deep scepticism about Ukraine in Congress. Trumpist

representatives and senators - sadly not the Democratic Socialists of America's squad - pour scorn on Biden's pledge to "stand with Ukraine as long as it needs, as long as it requires". It seems that they care little to nothing about the Russo-Ukraine war and "a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing" (Iran and China are, ominously, another matter entirely).

Trump boasts that he can settle the Ukraine war within 24 hours of being elected. That is some two months before being officially inaugurated and handed the nuclear code card (the so-called nuclear football). That deal would require, one presumes, a land-for-land swap between Ukraine and Russia, with Russia getting back Ukraine's diminutive Kursk enclave, but Russia getting, in return, Crimea and maybe something like joint-sovereignty over four oblasts: Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia. A grossly unequal treaty that could easily see Zelensky ousted by an Azov regiment putsch. On the other hand, maybe Trump's offer would find Russia feeling unsatisfied and therefore refusing the deal. Who knows. So, at least in my estimation, it could easily go all too horribly wrong.

We should certainly not be surprised by big geostrategic shifts - whether or not Trump gets re-elected. Aukus has already been established and Japan and South Korea have been bolted on. There will doubtless be further Russian attempts to cleave Turkey, Hungary and Slovakia away from Nato. An AfD government in Berlin would be a dream come true for Russia. India can perhaps be relied upon against China, but not Russia. Conceivably Russia could be dismembered following an economic collapse and a colour revolution. Then again, especially if it continues to better Ukraine, Russia could be offered entry into the lower ranks of the imperialist club in return for breaking its 'no limits' alliance with

China. A Mao-Nixon rapprochement in reverse.

China would then be surrounded in an instant and either forced into accepting the status of a US neocolony, having its arms industry dramatically scaled down, its big banks and companies bought up on the cheap, etc - that or face strangulation and potential state collapse. Understandably, given the historic experience of its 'long century' of colonial oppression (1839-1949) seared into its collective memory, China might well choose to resist using whatever means it has at its disposal.

Bear in mind the 'sleep walk' towards World War I. There were dramatic shifts in perceptions and relationships. Enemies became friends and friends became enemies. As Britain stumbled in the second Boer War and came to see Prussia/Germany as a potential global rival, it abandoned its 'splendid isolation' from European continental concerns and instead embraced its old enemy, France. An arrangement cemented in 1904 with the Entente Cordiale. France's 1892 alliance with tsarist Russia became, in due course, a triple alliance between Britain, France and Russia. Historic rivalry pitting Russia and Britain over southern Asia ended with various robber-deals, including dividing Persia into two zones of interest. Japan too was brought on board with a formal alliance, starting with Britain in 1902. Such grand realignments readied the conditions needed for defeating the central powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary and Ottoman Turkey. True, the US eventually entered the war and tilted the balance and Russia was knocked out of the imperial system altogether by the Bolshevik-led October 1917 revolution.

But, in the end, Germany was much reduced, stripped of colonies, burdened with crippling reparation payments and forced to accept substantial territorial losses to the

east and the west. As for the Austro-Hungarian empire, it was fragmented into a series of small, often rival, states. That included Austria. It was left as little more than a pocket-sized territory with an oversized imperial capital. And, apart from Turkey itself - 'liberated' by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk - Anglo-French imperialism sliced and diced the Ottoman empire into neat colonial and semi-colonial administrative units.

Nonetheless, as things stand today, strategic thinkers in Washington must be more than satisfied with their Russo-Ukraine war. Far from Ukraine hitting the surrender button with Russia's 'special military operation', it more than survived. Albeit with considerable western military, technical and financial aid, Ukraine has subsequently bogged Russia down in what is a 21st century version of the 1914-18 western front. A quagmire. No wonder there is excited talk of ending Putin's *siloviki* regime and Balkanising the Russian Federation along the lines of 1918 Austria-Hungary.

The idea, common on the idiot left - including the pro-Kremlin Z left - that the Russian invasion is succeeding; that Ukraine is doing terribly badly; that the Kursk incursion was a dreadful blunder, a brilliant Putin trap that Zelensky fell headlong into; that the US has met its limits in Ukraine - all such nonsense testifies to a profound political myopia brought about by wishful thinking of the daftest kind. No-one - no-one who is serious, that is - expected Ukraine to defeat Russia and drive it back to the 1991 borders. That was never on the cards. Continued Ukrainian resistance is, in fact, a western victory in itself.

Most definitely, the US does not want a generalised nuclear exchange with Russia and therefore mutually assured destruction. Doubtless that is why everything is carefully calibrated. Ukraine is supplied with enough military hardware to check, drain and exhaust Russia, but nothing more than that ... yet. A proxy war that lasts for years to come suits the strategic purposes of Washington and Whitehall to a tee.

Ukraine can do the fighting and the dying in order to keep Russia bogged down. An unwinnable war, which will, though, create the conditions (so goes the calculation) for regime change in Moscow. A rollback strategy proclaimed by Jimmy Carter in January 1980 that worked like a dream in Afghanistan (the Soviet Union scuttled in February 1989 and collapsed in December 1991).

## Wartime economy

Russia has certainly thrown money at upping war production and adapted economically to the needs of a slow, grinding war. While western sanctions have had an effect, Russia has found other outlets for its oil and gas - most notably in China and India. Nonetheless, there are those who predict that Russia stands on the edge of an abyss, with inflation about to roar, reserves being run low and mounting debts. According to the Swedish neoliberal economist, Anders Åslund, this could "potentially force Vladimir Putin to stop waging war on Ukraine as early as next year".<sup>7</sup> Frankly, it is, though, hard to take such a prediction seriously.

That said, the brain drain of bright young men fleeing the country and mounting war losses has led to a labour shortage, not least when it comes to the war economy, and that in turn affects the ability of the state to raise more troops. Internal contradictions therefore mount.

Russia is due to spend an estimated \$190 billion, or 10% of its GDP, on its armed forces this year. A lot, but nothing compared to the UK's total war economy between 1939 and 1945: in GDP terms 15.3% in 1939, 43.8% in 1940, 52.7% in 1941, 55.3%

in 1943 and 53.4% in 1944. Britain could achieve such spectacularly high levels of expenditure fundamentally because, firstly, it possessed a world empire and, secondly, it could rely on generous US support (in exchange for handing over world hegemony).

In six years of war, there was a net flow of £10 billion into Britain. Of this £1.1 billion came from the sale of assets; £3.5 billion was made up of new borrowing, of which £2.7 billion was contributed by the empire's sterling area. Canada, for example, gave C\$1 billion in gifts and loans on easy terms. Above all there was though American money, loans and Lend Lease grants worth £5.4 billion. This funded massive British purchases of munitions, food, oil, machinery and raw materials. There was no charge for Lend Lease supplies delivered during the war.<sup>8</sup>

Russia has no such options available to it. Ukraine does, but within definite limits. "Ukraine could win the war if it had an additional \$50 billion per year, as well as a green light to bomb military targets inside Russia," says Åslund. Note, as of June 2024 the US donated \$55.5 billion in weapons and military equipment, followed by Germany's \$11 billion and the UK's \$9.6 billion.<sup>9</sup>

Ukraine might conceivably get Åslund's additional \$50 billion per year. But what about the green light to strike military targets within Russia? This is not, in fact, a "victory plan", as vociferously claimed by Zelensky in the US. That said, there can be no doubt that hitting military targets with long-distance missiles and drones has made a material difference when it comes to the front line.

Ukraine's commander-in-chief, colonel general Oleksandr Syrskyi, had been bitterly complaining about Russia having a 5:1 advantage, when it comes to artillery shells. Russia routinely fired 10,000 daily, whereas Ukraine could only manage 2,000. That very much matters. Neither strategic nor tactical *advance* is possible without massive artillery bombardment.

However, not only have the US, EU and Ukraine itself upped the production of artillery shells: Russian logistical facilities and ammunition depots have repeatedly been hit by drones and precision-guided missiles. In September facilities in the Tver and Krasnodar Krai regions of Russia were hit - an estimated 32,000 tonnes of munitions was destroyed. Such actions have, reportedly, helped reduce the gap between Russian and Ukrainian artillery fires to 2.5:1.<sup>10</sup>

If, as seems likely, Joe Biden has given the go-ahead for the Ukrainian use of British made Storm Shadows inside the 1991 Russian Federation, this will serve to narrow the fire gap still further. True, Russia has already moved its most important command posts, airforce bases and major storage facilities inside Russia, beyond their 155-mile range. In the process still further stretching Russia supply lines and thereby slowing down deliveries to the front line.

But, of course, the main importance of Storm Shadows is symbolic. Their use within Russian Federation borders is about escalation, dialling up Nato involvement. Not unexpectedly, this has seen Vladimir Putin warning about Nato being "at war with Russia". There is undoubtedly some considerable truth involved here. Ukraine could not use such Nato-made missiles without Nato technical and military back-up - crucially US satellites. Dmitry Medvedev, former president and prime minister, has, for his part, bloodcurdlingly talked about reducing Kyiv to a "giant melted spot",<sup>11</sup> Sabre-rattling, perhaps - but, as we have said, "till the moment when it isn't".<sup>12</sup>

Such warning should act as an urgent wake-up call for all those who consider themselves part of the

principled left. We have all, rightly, marched on each and every massive pro-Palestine national demonstration. But the war in Ukraine has largely been forgotten. Hence, when it comes to papers, websites, trade union resolutions and election manifestos, Ukraine is noticeable by its absence. Why? Perhaps, because, in Britain at least, Ukraine's war against Russia remains a popular cause. Calling for an end to arms supplies, refusing to support neither reactionary Ukraine nor reactionary Russia, demanding the abolition of Nato and all standing armies - such a principled position would doubtless risk short-term opprobrium. But only if we take that risk, I would argue, do we have a chance of fulfilling our socialist mission and avoiding the real danger of World War III.

## Social-imperialists

US unwillingness to do anything too overtly provocative, has, naturally, infuriated Zelensky's social-imperialist cheerleaders. In the form of the Ukrainian Solidarity Campaign - supported by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Anticapitalist Resistance and the Labour Representation Committee<sup>13</sup> - they demand "full sanctions" against Russian "imperialist aggression" (ie, siege warfare), claim that the Putin regime is "attacking democracy globally" and that Ukraine should get all the "arms necessary to liberate the country, from wherever possible and without conditions".<sup>14</sup>

The internationalisation of ruling class ideology is unashamed and unmistakable. It is "Putin's dictatorship" which is "linked to neo-fascist and authoritarian forces around the world", not Zelensky and his Banderite Azov chums. It is Nato which is democratic and under threat. Despite that, moans the USC, "most western countries have been slow in providing arms". Therefore the demand for supplying Ukraine with massively increased supplies of the most up-to-date fighter aircraft, tanks and missiles. A recipe for yet more slaughter and yes ... phasing into World War III.

Effectively this 'Arm, arm, arm Ukraine' line poses a 'guns or butter' choice in Europe, with the social-imperialists demanding guns. Perhaps the best known use of this particular phrase was, of course, Joseph Goebbels in a speech on January 17, 1936. The Nazi propaganda chief stated: "We can do without butter, but, despite all our love of peace, not without arms. One cannot shoot with butter, but with guns." Referencing the same concept, sometime later in the same year - another leading Nazi, this time Herman Göring - quipped: "Guns will make us powerful; butter will only make us fat" (as an aside he was rather on the stout side).<sup>15</sup>

Across Europe there is an aggressive drive by mainstream bourgeois politicians, opinion makers, arms manufacturers and the top brass alike to win an increasingly cautious public to accept ever bigger military budgets in the name of 'not letting Russia win'. Already Poland spends 3.9% of its GDP on the military, Greece some 3% and the UK, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia and Romania around 2%.<sup>16</sup> But the trend is upwards with all Nato members ... and between January 2022 and January 2024 a cool \$165 billion has gone to prop-up, finance and arm Ukraine.<sup>17</sup>

The choice of guns over butter should be openly admitted by the social-imperialists. However, some prefer mealy-mouthed formulations: eg, Branko Marcetic, a *Jacobin* staff writer, opposes the delivery of "offensive weapons".<sup>18</sup> The more honest, the more brazen - eg, Stephen R Shalom of the Mandelite 'Fourth International' - rightly say that the distinction between offensive and defensive weapons is meaningless.<sup>19</sup>

By contrast, we stick with Wilhelm Liebknecht's time-honoured slogan, "Not a man and not a penny for this system!"<sup>20</sup> Socialists - genuine socialists, that is - take no responsibility for the 'defence budget' of capitalist governments. We maintain that position, it should be stressed, because of political principle, because we are a party of extreme opposition, not out of economic calculation.

After all, it is argued, that military expenditure (mileyx) stimulates economic activity - a line taken by military Keynesians and self-proclaimed Marxists such as Paul Baren, Paul Sweezy, Michael Kidron and Ernest Mandel. Doubtless the profits of the arms companies such as Britain's BAE Systems are boosted with increased state orders for the means of destruction. However, the main burden is borne by taxpayers, not least other sections of the capitalist class. Dan Smith and Ron Smith conclude that the effects of mileyx are "complex and contradictory": it maintains capitalism, but suppresses overall economic growth.<sup>21</sup>

What seems likely at the moment is that economic activity in Europe is being suppressed by the Ukraine war: eg, cutting off cheap Russian oil and gas supplies and the range of other costly sanctions. However, in the US, the world's biggest arms manufacturer, Ukraine has probably acted as an economic stimulus.

The BBC headlined, in January 2023: "US weapons sales abroad hit record high in 2023, boosted by Ukraine war." Overseas sales increased by 56%, compared with 2022, reaching a total of \$238 billion.<sup>22</sup> As for the US itself, the mileyx budget in 2023 amounted to \$916 billion - dwarfing rivals such as China (\$296 billion) and Russia (\$109 billion).<sup>23</sup> What is for sure is that the extra orders have been a goldmine for companies such as Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Boeing and General Dynamics. They are awash with money.

However, everything else being equal, increased mileyx means reduced local government grants, sickness benefits, transport projects, etc. The social-imperialists ought, therefore, to be made to take full responsibility for that choice next time they march with their Banderite friends. 'Arm, arm, arm Ukraine' should be accompanied with calls to 'Cut, cut, cut ... services and welfare'.

Naturally, the social-imperialists claim that support for Ukraine is no different from supporting Palestinian self-determination: "Being leftwing means being on the side of the oppressed, whether in Palestine, Kurdistan or Ukraine. That is why the EU must continue to supply weapons to Kyiv and allow attacks on Russian territory." So says Die Linke MEP Carola Rackete.<sup>24</sup> This is the sort of screwball logic that, during World War I, led the 'father of British Marxism', Henry Hyndman, to, on the one hand, "applaud those like Karl Liebknecht, Mehring, Ledebour, Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg and Bernstein, who have remained true to the faith" by opposing the German war effort, and, on the other hand, support Anglo-French imperialism - that though it had allied itself to "Muscovite tsarism".<sup>25</sup> Germany posed the greatest threat to democracy and socialism, he argued.

There is amongst the social-imperialists a wilful refusal to engage in joined-up thinking. Both Ukraine and Israel serve as US proxies. Imperialist support for Ukrainian self-determination cannot, for understandable reasons, therefore, be separated from other wars and conflicts, not least Israel's genocidal denial of Palestinian self-determination.

The idea that the US, UK, Germany, France, etc, are supporting a "just war" in Ukraine and an

"unjust war" in Gaza and the wider Middle East, is a stupid, hopelessly opportunist muddle, to say the least. States which are committed to anti-trade union laws, restrictions on civil rights and the continuation of class exploitation at home, pursue those same *class interests* by other, violent, means abroad. If a war is supported by *our* capitalist state, then it follows that such a war is a criminal war.

Sympathising with ordinary Ukrainians who have been killed, injured, lost love ones, fled abroad, etc, is perfectly natural. War is horrible. But for 'socialists' to call for Ukraine's victory is not to see the wood for the trees. In Russia it might well be the case that we would 'prefer to see a Russian defeat than its victory'. To state the obvious, however, we are not in Russia. No, here today, in countries such as the US, Britain, Germany and France, supporting 'heroic Ukraine' is akin to supporting 'brave little Belgium' and 'plucky little Serbia', while not acknowledging that what was going on between 1914 and 1918 was a bestial inter-imperialist struggle over global domination. It had nothing to do with protecting the rights of little nations. The great powers used all manner of excuses to alibi their right to rob, plunder and exploit the colonial and semi-colonial countries, where the vast majority of the world's population lived.

Ukraine cannot be seen in isolation. Behind it there stands the unmatched might of the dominant imperialist bloc. The US violently yanked Ukraine out of the Russian orbit with the 2014 Maidan coup and then, step by step, established it as a pawn in the great game to dominate the Eurasian 'world island' and upend what Xi Jinping calls the "irreversible" rise of China.

The end result can either be socialism or barbarism ●

## Notes

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11. *The Independent* September 14 2024.
12. PCC statement 'Establishing a principled left' *Weekly Worker* October 3 2024: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1509/establishing-a-principled-left.
13. Thankfully RS21 no longer seems to be an affiliate. Whether this is the result of lethargy, lack of finance or an internal political struggle is unknown to me. Perhaps readers who are in the know might care to tell us, either publicly or privately.
14. ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org/2024/09/11/ukraine-solidarity-conference-declaration.
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19. SR Shalom *International Viewpoint* April 22 2022.
20. See Wilhelm Liebknecht's November 30 1893 speech to the Reichstag during its debate on the imperial budget: www.marxists.org/archive/liebknecht-w/revolt/11-not-one-penny.html.
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## POLEMIC

# Formulations, fetishes and failures

Steve Bloom dogmatically clings to 'new left Trotskyist' orthodoxy, says Mike Macnair, and this leads him and his co-thinkers to strategic unrealism and abandoning working class political independence

With this third part of my reply to Steve Bloom's criticism of *Revolutionary strategy*<sup>1</sup> we return from the questions of method and history, discussed in my last article, to questions of practical strategy. I begin with a point comrade Bloom makes quite briefly, but which is in my view absolutely fundamental: the "chain of revolutions" delusion, and its connection to the fetishism of the revolutionary moment discussed in my first article. I move from there into the way in which comrade Bloom's (and that of the organised far left in general) fetishism of the revolutionary moment is an *alternative* to Marx's and Engels's strategic conception. In the far left (Bloom included) the wager is on 'mass action'. In Marx and Engels, in contrast, it is *the organised movement of the working class* (warts and all) that offers the possibility of hope of escape from the infernal machine of capitalism.

## International

Comrade Bloom argues:

Waiting for the conditions to exist for a continent-wide revolution before taking power in a single country is as impractical as waiting for world revolution. We do not have an on-off switch that controls the timing of revolutionary processes. If we fail to take advantage of the social crisis in country A that creates the potential for revolution, because we insist on waiting for a simultaneous opportunity in countries B, C and D, by the time the possibility is posed in country B the opportunity in country A will have disappeared.

We have no choice, therefore, except to proceed with the "chain of revolutions" approach. Its failure in Europe during the 1920s and 30s cannot properly cause us to conclude that such a development is impossible.

From here he proceeds to an aspect of his false methodological claims, which I addressed in my second article.<sup>2</sup> There is no point repeating what I said there, beyond the point that he seems to imagine I am generalising on the single case of the Russian experience, where in reality, I am arguing that the Russian experience *fails to disprove* the repeated failure of his strategic line *elsewhere* - not just in the 1920s and 1930s, but in every wave of revolutionary crises and near-revolutionary crises since the 1940s. He goes on: "The length of time the Russian working class could hold onto power in isolation was conditioned primarily by the economic backwardness of Russia in relation to other imperialist nations. This is a condition unique to this one revolutionary experience; it will never be duplicated again."

This is plain nonsense. All the countries in which capitalism has been (temporarily) overthrown were colonies or semi-colonies, with the exception of the German Democratic Republic and the Czech part of Czechoslovakia;<sup>3</sup> most of them were, like Russia itself, socially dominated by small peasant production. Further, Cuba, though heavily *proletarianised*, had a classic colonial economy based on a monoculture (sugar) for the imperial market, with subsidiary tourist, and related, businesses. Cuba thus exemplifies the fact that capitalism *does not* spread uniform development, but, on the contrary, the imperialist metropolises act to *distort* economic development in the colonial



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and semi-colonial periphery.

The result is that countries outside the imperialist centres *will*, if they attempt *on their own* to break with capitalism, suffer from the Russian experience of generalised shortage, leading to "all the old crap must revive" (Marx in *The German ideology*; Trotsky in *The revolution betrayed*).<sup>4</sup>

It has to be added that industrialised countries (and post-industrialised imperialist ones, like the UK) are *more* dependent on international trade. Germany came close to starvation under the British blockade in 1914-18; the UK imports 45% of the food it consumes, so that under sanctions we can expect at least 40% of the population to starve; Greece *had to* surrender to the 'troika' in 2015, because the country has not been self-sufficient in food since the 5th century BCE, so that autarkic 'socialism' in Greece would not survive even remotely as long as the Soviet regime.

Beyond these points, comrade Bloom offers only the argument, "... what can Mike say about the Cuban revolution, where a political form that I would characterise as the dictatorship of the proletariat (I hope Mike agrees) survived for decades after 1959, waiting for the revolution elsewhere in Latin America to come to its aid?"

I have responded to comrade Bloom on Cuba before, in my February 22 article:

... it is in my opinion clear that the 'sectarian' opponents of the USFI in 1963 (Healy, Lambert, Robertson, Wohlforth, etc), and the 'official communists' and Maoists, were both right (as against the USFI) in understanding that what was involved in Cuba was an

extension of the 'socialist bloc', creating a regime of the same type, albeit a bit 'softer' than the USSR (as was also true of Yugoslavia): not a 'third way'.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, I characterise the Cuban regime as no *more* a dictatorship of the proletariat than any of the other Soviet-bloc regimes (I think they all had a degree of *connection* with the proletariat, but none of them represented the *class rule* of the working class as a class over the state and the petty proprietors). And Cuba did not "survive for decades after 1959, waiting for the revolution elsewhere in Latin America to come to its aid": it survived for decades after 1959 *because the USSR did come to its aid*.

## Waves

In short, comrade Bloom's arguments on this issue simply reassert the standard 'new left' Trotskyist dogma, and altogether fail to address my points. The importance of the issue means that it is worth quoting at length some of what I wrote about it in *Revolutionary strategy*, to which comrade Bloom gives no answer.

In the first place, at a very early stage in the book - criticising the 'national roads' approach of the centre tendency in the Second International - I wrote:

... what immediately followed [the publication of the *Communist manifesto*] (not, of course, as a result of the *Manifesto*) was the outbreak of an *international* revolutionary wave affecting France, Germany, Austria, Hungary.

Indeed, *previous* (bourgeois) revolutionary movements had also been international: the Europe-wide commune movement of the

12th and 13th centuries, 16th-17th century Protestantism (in particular Calvinism) and Enlightenment republicanism of the 18th and early 19th centuries. Future, more proletarian, revolutionary waves were also to be international in character, as in the rise of class struggles that led up to the 1914-18 war, those of the end and immediate aftermath of that war, the aftermath of 1945, and the late 1960s-early 1970s (p63).

I can add to this the short-lived wave of 'squares' protests and - most powerfully, albeit still not fully posing the question of workers' power because of the prior weakness of the class movement - the 'Arab spring' of 2011.

I can go a bit further into depth on this point with some of what I wrote in response to Trotskyist critics elsewhere. Thus in 2007, in the last article of my series on 'permanent revolution' and the 'transitional programme',<sup>6</sup> I wrote:

... the capitalist class is an international class and capitalist nation-states are not nationally autonomous entities. They are parts of an international hierarchical system of states, linked formally by treaty systems and in practice by international markets in state debt and in armaments. This state system is headed by a world-hegemon state (Britain to 1914; the US from 1945), whose armed forces are the ultimate guarantors of property rights globally and whose currency is, in consequence, the international reserve currency ....

Since the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is an international state system, not a series of fully independent nation-states, the proletariat can only expect to actually take political power - so as to hold it for more than a very short period - on a continental scale at minimum, and the seizure of power by the proletariat is therefore on the conjunctural agenda only when there is an acute crisis of the international state system as such ....

Within this framework, the seizure of power by the proletariat was posed *conjuncturally* when the international capitalist state order fell into acute crisis - that is, in 1914-20 and in 1939-48.

It was also, as it were, 'half'-posed at three other periods: (a) by the generalised rise of the workers' movement and strike struggles in the 1900s (the extreme point being the Russian revolutionary crisis of 1905); (b) in the later phase of the 1960s-70s rise in workers' struggles (the extreme points being the French 1968, the 1974-76 Portuguese revolution, and revolutionary crises in several Latin American countries); and (c) by the global depression resulting from the 1929 crash (the extreme point being the Spanish revolution and civil war).

I say 'half'-posed, because in the first two cases acute political crisis and mass class struggles did not involve an actual threat to the coherence of the armed forces of capitalist states generally. In the third case, the 1930s, the clear context was an offensive of capital against the workers' movement (rise of fascism). It would only be in the event that military resistance of the workers' movement inflicted a military defeat on the fascists and their allies within the state that this

dynamic would have posed the question of workers' power.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, I think it is utterly misleading to suppose that revolutionary crises mature in purely national frameworks. This idea of purely national roads to socialism (meaning by 'socialism' what immediately follows capitalism) is precisely one of the main elements in the politics that led the German, Austrian and Italian 'centrists' in the split in the Second International to *refuse* to reach for power, when the question of power was, in fact, posed on a European scale - in 1918-1920. The result was not to avoid civil war by waiting until the workers' movement was stronger in their own country (as they hoped), but to defer a civil war the workers' movement *could have won* into a later (and one-sided) civil war that the workers' movement was bound to lose.

## Single country

Secondly, I argue later in *Revolutionary strategy* that the *international* power of capital is sufficient to prevent any revolutionary regime in a single country appearing for any length of time as an attractive alternative to capitalism; without international action of the proletariat the new regime will inevitably be strangled:

Capitalism is from the beginning an *international* social formation, and the nation-state is, in relation to the world market, merely a firm. The state-firm retains liquidity by borrowing on financial markets. These, if they are national in form, are international in substance: this was already true of the 17th century Amsterdam and 18th century London financial markets. An attempt in a single country to break with capitalist rule - or even to significantly improve the position of the working class - will thus be met with withdrawal of credit by the capitalists, leading to an immediate crisis of state liquidity and more general economic dislocation.

If a socialist government responds by expropriations, the immediate effect is to break the incentive structure of the capitalist market in the country and *increase* economic dislocation. In addition, the response of international capital will then take the form of blockade and war. It thus becomes immediately necessary to move to generalised planning under economic autarky. This was the situation of the Bolsheviks in 1918-19; it has been repeated with varying results - usually the collapse of the socialist government - many times since.

The result is, in fact - as it was in the former tsarist empire - economic *regression*. Hence the socialist party loses its majority support and is forced - if it is to continue its course - to minority dictatorship and increasingly systematic repression. In countries that are not self-sufficient in food, energy and raw materials - ie, most advanced capitalist countries - the result would be mass starvation. The socialist government would collapse into a capitalist government far more rapidly than happened in Russia and China.

The exception that proves the rule is the outcome of World War II, the effects of which stretched down to the 1980s. The deep *global* crisis of British world hegemony, culminating in World War II, and the particular form which that war



took, yielded the result that the USSR was massively strengthened, while remaining under bureaucratic rule. In the ensuing 'cold war' there could appear to be a series of 'national revolutions'. But in reality these were possible because the countries involved (most clearly Cuba) were brought into and subsidised by the autarkic, bureaucratic 'planning' system of the Soviet regime. Equally, the US, now hegemonic over the capitalist countries, consciously encouraged social democratic and nationalist reform in capital's front-line states as an instrument to secure them from being added to the 'Soviet empire': part of the policy of 'containment'.

The offensive of the working class in the late 1960s and early 1970s destroyed the policy of containment and led the US to turn to a global policy of aggressive 'roll-back of communism' under the banner of 'human rights'. The fall of the USSR has finally destroyed the foundations of the policy of concessions for the sake of containment. The exception is now over. It still proves the rule, because it was international events and dynamics - World War II and the cold war - that enabled the supposedly 'national' revolutions and reforms. Capitalism is an international system and it is international events and movements that enable radical change in individual nation-states. (pp137-38)

## Trigger?

I also argued against the idea that the Russian Revolution as a national revolution triggered the European revolution. Rather, it could appear as a trigger because of the prior development of working class international unity through the Second International:

Far from the Russian Revolution triggering the European revolution, the European war triggered the Russian Revolution. The central European national movements then proved to be a bulwark first of German, then of Entente, policy against the Russian Revolution. The Russian Revolution did, at one remove, trigger revolutionary movements in Hungary, Germany and Italy. It did so not by the route envisaged by Marx and Engels, that the removal of fear of Russian intervention in central Europe would open the way to a revolutionary movement which would spill westwards. Nor did it do so by the route projected by Trotsky in *Results and prospects*, that the Russian Revolution would spill over into Germany and/or trigger a collapse of the London and Paris financial markets. Rather, the perception of the revolution as a workers' revolution triggered an international radicalisation of the workers' movement. This radicalisation reached its highest points in the countries which could not see themselves as victors in the war: Germany, Austria-Hungary and (in a slightly different way) Italy. Advanced workers in these countries saw a possibility of workers' revolution as a result of 1917. They could see this possibility because of the prior symbolic international unity of the workers' movement in the form of the pre-war Second International.

At first, October 1917 seemed to show that the working class could take power. This image promoted revolutionary attempts elsewhere. But the impulse rapidly ebbed. As disturbing news began to filter west, even Luxemburg, in prison, was hesitant. As the character of the Soviet regime was rendered more

explicit in the theses of the 1920 and 1921 Comintern congresses, the ban on factions and the Kronstadt events, the majority of the existing militant left activists of the workers' movement in western Europe took their distance from the Bolsheviks. This was reflected in the 1921 splits from the Comintern of both the larger part of those among the left of the Kautskyan centre who had flirted with it and the 'left communists' (larger than they later became).

These splits foreshadowed the future: the nature of the Soviet regime was to become a primary political obstacle to any attempt of the working class to take power into its own hands in western Europe, and ultimately to international class-political consciousness more generally (pp141-42).

I can add to this that it is important to be clear that - in spite of the debates about 'socialism in one country' - the Russian Revolution was not limited by the boundaries of a single country, nor by self-determination treated as a principle. The civil war of 1918-21 involved the reconquest by main force of the large bulk of the colonial possessions of the former tsarist empire, most of which had in 1918 elected to secede. If it had not done so, it is perfectly clear that the Reds would have gone down to military defeat. This was a continental revolution - but, even so, without enough forces of production in its own territory to avoid being strangled over the long term by British, and later US, sanctions.

I do not wholly exclude the possibility that it will be necessary to gamble on revolution in a single country and hope that our local revolutionary crisis will turn out to be the first swallow of spring. As I wrote in 2007 in response to Trotskyist critics,

We may in an acute crisis in the future wind up having to gamble against long odds in this way. That is, we may be faced, as the Bolsheviks were, with the choice between a gamble on the international workers' movement and lying down to be shot in a rightist military coup. But our task now is not to promote the idea of a gamble (= a repeat of 1917/revolution in a single country). It is to promote the means by which the odds can be shortened: the international unity of the working class.

Hence, what is needed is to fight now for the international unity and common action of the working class as a class and the workers' movement as a class movement under capitalism. This line is counterposed to the common far-left practices of (1) political concessions to nationalist 'realism' on immigration controls, etc, for the sake of formal unity with left Labourites; (2) little-British (in reality Atlanticist) calls for withdrawal from the European Union, and (3) abandoning solidarity with the workers' movement in 'third world' countries attacked by imperialism for the sake of an illusory 'anti-imperialist' alliance with nationalist, Islamist, etc reactionaries.<sup>8</sup>

It should, I hope, be clear from these extended quotations that comrade Bloom's argument for the "chain of revolutions" approach is merely dogmatic, and does not address my actual arguments against this approach, which I have just repeated.

It should also be clear that what is central to comrade Bloom's argument is the claim that "If we fail to take advantage of the social crisis in country A that creates the potential for revolution, because we insist on

waiting for a simultaneous opportunity in countries B, C and D, by the time the possibility is posed in country B the opportunity in country A will have disappeared." In other words, this argument is merely a variant form of the fetish of the revolutionary crisis and "seizing the moment", which I criticised in my first article responding to comrade Bloom.<sup>9</sup>

## Moment

Where does the far left's fetishism of the revolutionary moment - both at the expense of the prolonged period of preparatory work that has to precede it and at the expense the objective aims that have to be posed so that it makes sense (political democracy, continental and international common action) - come from?

There are three elements. The first is the problem of the overthrow of the state, which the far left insists requires an insurrectionary general strike. The second is the standard historical narratives of the Russian Revolution and of the split in the Second International. The third, and most fundamental, is the far left's loss of the understanding of why Marxism as such insists on the dictatorship of the proletariat and on the struggle for the actually existing, warts-and-all, workers' movement under capitalism, as essential to getting beyond capitalism.

The first point appears in comrade Bloom's August 1 article. In his original criticism of the US Marxist Unity Group's supposed 'schematism' in focussing on the constitution, he conceded that an electoral route was a possible route to revolutionary change, but insisted also on the alternative possibilities of the "dual power" theoretical approach to establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat" and on a third alternative: "the direct military conquest of power. This was the road followed by the Chinese and the Cuban revolutions."<sup>10</sup> This is the route called by Maoists 'prolonged people's war'. In his August 1 article, both the possibility of electoral victory and 'prolonged people's war' disappear, and the character of the state as a coercive apparatus and the fact that it intervenes in elections mean that the only road to its overthrow is the mass strike and workers' councils:

... if we are going to 'smash up' the existing state, we need a mechanism to do so. That mechanism can only be a mobilised mass movement, armed for self-defence against the existing military and police forces (and any new armed force created by the counterrevolution) - a mass movement that is also capable of making deep inroads into the consciousness of these existing repressive forces and thus neutralising them, to the greatest possible degree, as a tool to be used against the revolution. As noted above, this mobilised mass movement is also at its height during the days or weeks that a mass strike is taking place.

It is comrade Bloom who is the schematist here. Comrade Bloom quotes in his August 1 article an email from me to him. I argue there that it is first necessary to build up the workers' movement under capitalism on the basis of democratic functioning, so that "when the existing state falls into crisis, there is a large minority already existing which can think of socialist collective action as an alternative way of making decisions, and hence possibly running society". Then:

It is perfectly possible that the form of the crisis will start with a left victory in a general election, or with a military mutiny, or with OTT repression in response to

minor terrorist activity triggering a radical loss of legitimacy and collapse of the state, as in Ireland in 1918 and Cuba in 1958-59; or whatever. (It can also start with military defeat in a war, which is the essence of Russia 1917 and Germany and Austria 1918-19 underneath the superficial appearances.) It does not have to take the form of the mass strike.

It is also false to suppose that the resolution of the crisis has to take the form of the insurrectionary general strike. October 1917 in Petrograd notoriously involved fewer casualties than the making of Eisenstein's film about it: because it was a police action by armed forces units loyal to the Petrograd Military-Revolutionary Committee, following on the electoral shift in the political composition of the soviets over August-October 1917. The decisive question is splitting the armed forces; and this is, in turn, a question of winning mass political support.

The second issue is the standard historians' narratives. I have referred before to Lars T Lih's work on this issue. Lih shows that standard narratives of Lenin's genius start with the factional writing of 1924. I add that, as I have argued before, the line that the only real choice was between "wrong but wromantic" [sic] Luxemburg and Trotsky, and "right but repulsive" Bernstein, Ebert and Noske, was a construct created by cold-war-period historians who served in Anglo-American intelligence services at the end of World War II - Peter Nettl, Carl Schorske, Leo Valiani, Leonard Schapiro, and so on - and serves the interest of the capitalist state in tying the workers' movement to 'safe' forms of protest.<sup>11</sup>

## Other layers

The third and most fundamental point is the issue of the class perspective. Comrade Bloom writes:

Mike and I agree regarding the class character of any revolutionary struggle that is actually going to lead to the emancipation of the peasantry, oppressed nationalities, women, etc. I note, however, that this correct overall understanding has generated a demonstrable historical tendency within the revolutionary workers' movement: to actively subordinate struggles by other oppressed social layers to working class revolution, expecting such struggles to wait until the working class is victorious, or limit demands to those which are deemed compatible with a working class agenda. This is a tendency we must actively repudiate in my judgment.

This is just a standard Eurocommunist argument against the class perspective - that the struggles of "other oppressed social layers" must not be "subordinated" or made to "wait" or "limit their demands". This is the late 20th century version of popular frontism. The class perspective is formally 'conceded' in the first sentence, but immediately denied as far as practical politics is concerned. As I have argued elsewhere, the practical consequence of this sort of politics in the USA is the phenomenon of 'Vote Clinton, get Trump' and as a consequence Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh on the Supreme Court of the US, so self-defeating; in the UK, the political helplessness of the Corbynistas in face of the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign.<sup>12</sup>

Lying behind this is a fundamental misunderstanding of why the workers' movement is central to the Marxist perspective. The question is, what is the source of hope for a positive

escape from the capitalist dynamics that are driving towards world war, ecological catastrophe, and so on?

The answer is that, in order to overcome capitalist dynamics, we need to move to cooperative collaboration, on the basis of politically democratic decision-making. The basis of hope is, then, that the working class as a class is driven by its situation towards organised cooperation - in trade unions, in cooperatives, mutuals, workers' collectivist political projects, and so on.

It is thus the organised workers' movement, and the potential to organise that points the way to a possible socialist future; not the episode of strike or street action; nor, on a larger scale, the revolutionary crisis merely as a crisis and a 'mass mobilisation'.

In contrast, the small proprietors - peasants, small businesses, self-employed professionals, intelligentsy, and official and managerial bureaucrats - have individual 'turf' interests, which their class position drives them to defend both against outsiders and against each other. Marx demonstrates in part one of *Capital* that capitalism grows out of this logic of competition among the small proprietors. In *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* he shows that this logic of petty-proprietor individualism also throws up the 'man on horseback': the Bonapartist state.

For the workers' movement to subordinate itself to strategic alliance with the "other oppressed social layers", which means oppressed sections of the upper and middle classes, is then both to subordinate itself, in reality, to political representation of capital, just as the 'popular front' always did, and to obliterate the grounds for hope in generalised human emancipation that arise from the distinctive situation of the proletariat as a class.

Present global dynamics are pretty bleak. But the workers' class movement still offers the potential of a way out - if we can only overcome the ties of managerialism, popular frontism and 'national road' ideas ●

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## Notes

- Also in three parts: 'In search of a synthesis' *Weekly Worker* August 1 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1502/in-search-of-a-synthesis); 'Historical and methodological differences', August 29 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1504/historical-and-methodological-differences); 'Matters past and present', September 12 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1506/matters-past-and-present).
- 'Analysis of historical causes' *Weekly Worker* October 3 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1509/analysis-of-historical-causes).
- Slovakia was an internal colony; the Czech area was part of the industrial core of Austria-Hungary before World War I; Czechoslovakia in the inter-war period was a middle-rank capitalist state subsidised as an Entente front-line country.
- T Carver and D Blank (eds) *Marx and Engels's 'German ideology' manuscripts* New York 2005, p97: "all the old shit would have to be re-established"; *The revolution betrayed* New York 1972, p56: "all the old crap must revive".
- 'Deal with the arguments' *Weekly Worker* February 22 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1479/deal-with-the-arguments).
- Linked at [communismuniversity.uk/mike-macnair-programme-and-party-articles](http://communismuniversity.uk/mike-macnair-programme-and-party-articles).
- 'Leading workers by the nose' *Weekly Worker* September 12 2007 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/688/leading-workers-by-the-nose).
- 'Defeat was fault of enemy machine guns' *Weekly Worker* May 24 2007 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/674/defeat-was-fault-of-enemy-machine-guns).
- 'Fetishising revolutionary crisis' *Weekly Worker* September 26 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1508/fetishising-revolutionary-crisis).
- cosmonautmag.com/2023/12/the-struggle-for-a-democratic-socialist-republic-and-the-dictatorship-of-the-proletariat (towards the end of the text).
- 'Containing our movement in "safe" forms' *Weekly Worker* September 12 2019 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1266/containing-our-movement-in-safe-forms).
- 'Intersectionalism, the highest stage of western Stalinism?' *Critique* Vol 46 (2018), pp541-58 (preprint available at [ora.ox.ac.uk](http://ora.ox.ac.uk)).

# ISRAEL



Protesting in Gaza against Israel's war

## What's really behind the war?

South Africa provides no strategic guide. The indigenous population is neither needed nor wanted. Zionism has two key strategic aims: ethnic cleansing and maintaining regional hegemony, **Moshé Machover** explains

Events are moving very fast and I assume that most people are following the news. But I want to speak about what is really behind the multi-faceted war in the Middle East (ie, several wars going on at the same time).

The short answer is the essential, all-important, long-term strategic aims of Israel, so it is not just the present Israeli government. The first of these strategic aims is the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and the annexation of the remaining parts of the 'Promised Land'. The second is establishing and reinforcing Israeli regional hegemony.

When it comes to the details, it is important to remember what lies behind them. For example, most commentators look at individual episodes, such as what happened on October 7 last year, and this is where we see the effect of Israeli propaganda. For such commentators it is as though the whole conflict in the Middle East started with the Hamas attack on Israel a year ago.

The better commentators start from further back - from, let us say, the June war of 1967 - and some of the more thorough-going ones start from even further back. But this is the wrong way of looking at it - let me quote where this kind of approach leads you. I'm quoting a *Guardian* editorial on Israel's war in Lebanon. This is a very good editorial actually, but it says: "Benjamin Netanyahu appears to have no long-term plan in mind, no clear strategy for an exit" (October 1).

This is a conclusion that you come to if you look at this episode individually, out of its historical context: a chain, not of 'episode after episode', but an evolution of events since the beginning of the Zionist project of colonisation. The commentators - even the better ones - look at each event as a separate item, a separate episode; and they ask, 'What

is the endgame of this war?' It is as if *this* war has its own isolated endgame, so what is its 'exit strategy'?

### First principles

Let us get back to first principles: look at the fundamental nature of the Zionist colonisation project, and from examining these first principles we can make some important deductions, because Israel acts in each episode with a view to advancing its long-term strategic aims. And therefore we can predict quite a lot with a high probability. Of course, you cannot predict everything with *certainty*. There are contingencies; but the main outline of the unfolding strategy follows from the fundamental principles underlying the Zionist colonisation project right from its beginning.

So let us start with principle number one. This is something I keep repeating every time I speak about the conflict in the Middle East, because it is a fundamental key to understanding the nature of Zionist colonisation. The Zionist model of colonisation is not the same as, and not similar to, that of South Africa. A lot of people are confused by the recognition that what you have in Israel and its occupied territories is a kind of apartheid, and the colonial conflict that most people remember from their own lifetime is the one in South Africa, because this is the most recent one (older people may remember the decolonisation of Algeria). They are also, I think, led a little bit astray by the academic description of both the South African colonisation and the Zionist colonisation of Palestine as 'settler colonialism'. This is in the academic post-colonial discourse, and they put Zionist colonisation and South Africa under a common heading, as if they were of the same kind.

In this context, I think we

should apply a Marxist analysis of colonialism. Here the key to understanding the nature of a colonial conflict is the political economy of the colonial state. The mode of production, if you like: who is doing the major part of direct production? Who are the main direct producers? And if you look at South Africa, you will see that under apartheid - as now - the major direct production was being done by the indigenous people, not by the settlers. The settlers did some, but mostly they were in the position of exploiters: ie, not engaged in direct material production, which was done by the indigenous people.

This is not the same at all with the Zionist colonisation of Palestine - a more apposite comparison is not with South Africa, but with Australia or North America. Therefore what we should be looking at is the process of colonisation, as it unfolded in Australia or North America - in the United States, for example - and you will see that, since the indigenous people were not needed as exploitable labour-power, they were surplus to requirement: the colonisers, rather than exploiting their labour-power, focused on getting rid of them by various means, various forms of ethnic cleansing - and this, of course, was a very long process.

Most people who think nowadays about colonisation do not have in mind these old forms - the Zionist case is, as it were, an anachronism. It started doing in the 20th century more or less what was completed in Australia and in North America long, long ago.

The process in the United States is known as the Indian Wars, and the individual episodes of the conflict resulted in the part-extinction and other forms of ethnic cleansing of the indigenous people. The Indian Wars took up the better part of three centuries. It was also a long process in Australia,

but not quite so long; conditions were very different, because the indigenous people there had a mode of production that was much more ancient than in North America. In Australia it took a bit more than a hundred years, so also quite a long time.

All this was not something that was effected in a short span of time. It was a long process, composed of many individual episodes. The Indian Wars were not just one occurrence: they were a chain of events. And if you look at an individual Indian war and ask, 'What was the end game of *this* war? What is the exit strategy?', that would be a meaningless question, because you cannot look at each Indian War as a separate episode. If you look at each episode individually, you do not get a sense of where it is all leading to - you have to see it as part of a long-term process.

### Jewish majority

Now, if you look at the colonisation of the so-called Promised Land, you can see that we are now in the middle of this process. The long-term aim is a well established Jewish majority in the totality of this area - which is, at the very least, the territory "between the river and the sea", to use a convenient description. But it may actually denote a little bit more than that. People forget about the Israeli annexation of part of Syria in the Golan Heights, which was also ethnically cleansed of the majority of its Arab population and given to Israeli settlers to colonise.

So what we are looking at is a whole continuum of attempts to get rid of the Palestinian Arabs and annex the whole of Palestine. Now, of course, from the point of view of the colonisers this process requires, or is optimally done, in a situation of 'crisis'. Typically, ethnic cleansing is something that is carried out in conditions of war.

This means that the Zionist project,

and today the Israeli state, is in a situation of quasi-permanent war. Now individual episodes of war may be initiated by Israel, completely unprovoked, or can come as a response to an apparent or real provocation. They can come as a surprise.

Take the Suez war in 1956, which was initiated by Israel, France and Britain out of the blue. It was their own initiative, not a response to any warlike provocation by Egypt or anybody else. It was a premeditated plot by these countries. But such an event can come as an apparent response to a 'threat of war', as in June 1967, when Israel responded to what it depicted, or what appeared to be, the threat of an attack by Egypt. Israel acted - according to its own propaganda - in order to preempt a war. But the reality was, as it transpired later, that it was not in any danger of being attacked at the time.

Or, of course, an actual event can come as a real surprise, as did October 7 2023. But in every case, whether it was a premeditated, deliberate provocation by Israel or a response to an attack by others upon it, Israel made use of the conflict for furthering its fundamental strategic aims.

So I think we should look at the current war - or the bunch of wars that are going on - as part of the long chain of wars that are aimed, among other things, at achieving the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, and annexing the whole of Palestine to Israel. This is the nature of the underlying strategy driving the present series of conflicts, and we can predict that this will go on - Israel will continue with its current line of action: that is to say, attempting to accomplish the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and the annexation of their territory. Of course, nothing can be predicted with absolute certainty, but I think we can predict this with a high degree of probability.

What cannot be predicted with any degree of certainty is whether Israel will *succeed* in completing this work-in-progress of colonising Palestine and establishing a Jewish-supremacist, Jewish-majority state there. This is still an open question. The historical examples which I cited - namely, North America and Australia - point in the direction of success. Both of them were eventually successful in accomplishing the end result of ethnic cleansing and reducing the indigenous people to minorities incapable of retrieving their original homeland.

### Different century

There are, however, countervailing factors. First of all, we are now in the 21st century and things are rather different. There is a much greater weight to world public opinion - not enough, but still some weight - especially outside the imperialist countries. Moreover, in both North America and Australia the colonisers faced a pre-modern, isolated society, divided into many ethnic groups, and the indigenous people were isolated. In Palestine the indigenous Palestinian Arabs are a single, modern, national formation. And, moreover, they are part of a larger national formation - that of the pan-Arab nation of the Middle East. And so far, unlike in North America and Australia, where the huge, mainly European, immigration of settlers swamped the indigenous people numerically, the Zionist project has not managed to do the same. Palestine is not an attractive destination and in any case the Zionist project was only interested in *Jewish* immigration. So the potential reserve of immigrants was quite small: it was only Jews who were either ideologically motivated or who had no other choice of destination when they had to flee their country of origin.

The second strategic aim that I wanted to mention follows from the unique nature of Zionist colonisation (something that, as far as I know, has no counterpart in the history of colonisation), which is that the Zionist settlers had no metropole. If you look at the cases that I have taken for comparison, in both Australia and North America the settlers were mostly citizens of the metropole - in this case, Britain - that sent them to colonise those territories and provided them with the support and military might

that was required in the colonisation process.

So in that sense Zionist colonisation is unique. Having no metropole, no mother country that sent them there, Zionist colonisers needed a *surrogate mother* - and that was there right from the beginning, as you can see in the writings of the early leaders of the Zionist project, who envisaged the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population. They also discussed ways to compensate for the absence of a mother country. The way to obtain, as it were, a surrogate mother is to make a deal with the empire that dominated the Middle East. From the beginning the Zionists acquired a franchise from the leading empire dominating the region at any given time. In other words, the Zionist state acts under licence as a franchise of the leading hegemonic empire or imperialist power.

That is not to say that the Zionist state, or the Zionist project before the creation of Israel, is made up of mercenaries: ie, passive soldiers who do what they are told by whoever hires them. That is not quite the case with the Zionist project! It is proactive - more like a quasi-independent contractor - and in this capacity it is striving for regional monopoly, striving to be the sole contractor in the region in which it is located. Hence the second strategic aim is regional hegemony.

I am quoting here from a description on Facebook by Michael Karadjis, which, I think, is very appropriate:

Israel is the only real US ally in the region. And, the more extreme Israel is, the more it can only be a US ally. Neither Russia nor China could support Israel to such an extent without losing their alliances with the Saudis, Gulf, Egypt, etc, whereas the US, with its immensely greater military power, can. Of course, under this Israeli regime, it goes further than the US would prefer from the perspective of restoring some semblance of regional stability. But it is essentially bound to Israel. Israel also needs to show the US its power as a regional 'deterrent'. The US may have preferred Netanyahu didn't blow up Lebanon, because the US does not need 'deterrence' from Hezbollah (or from Iran). But, by demonstrating its incredible

deterrent power in relation to the pinprick nuisance Hezbollah was posing on its border, it shows the US its potential future use, as a good investment.

In fact, by demonstrating its power, Israel shows the United States its potential as a good investment. That is to say, if the big mafia boss wants to find a local franchise-holder for himself, then the best bid a local mafioso can make for getting this franchise is by showing he is the sole mafioso in that specific area - the contract goes to the fiercest, the strongest, the most aggressive bidder for that role.

### Strategy meeting

Look at the various wars that Israel has been engaging in. All have been used - or attempted to be used - not only to accomplish ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, but to assert or reinforce Israel's regional hegemony. This applies to all the wars that I have mentioned so far, but here I want to focus on a war which, remarkably, is very little discussed nowadays: the Suez War.

It is, I think, neglected, because somehow it seems not to have succeeded. It failed because the colluders in this war - Israel, Britain and France - had to withdraw after a fairly short time. Israel was occupying the Gaza Strip at that time and was mulling over the ethnic cleansing of Gaza even then, but had no time to accomplish it. It briefly occupied the Sinai Peninsula too, but was soon forced by the United States to withdraw.

It is worth thinking about the plan that the prime minister of Israel at the time, David Ben-Gurion, presented on October 22 1956 to the secret meeting which was held by the plotters in Sèvres, near Paris. The minutes were supposed to be destroyed, but somehow a copy was preserved, and was published by the Israeli historian, Avi Shlaim:

[Ben-Gurion] presented a comprehensive plan, which he himself called "fantastic", for the reorganisation of the Middle East. Jordan, he observed, was not viable as an independent state, and should therefore be divided. [Jordan consisted both of the East Bank and the West Bank that is now under Israeli occupation] Iraq would get the East Bank [that is to say, what is now the kingdom of Jordan] in return for a promise to settle the Palestinian refugees there, and to make peace with Israel, while the West Bank would be attached to Israel as a semi-autonomous region. Lebanon suffered from having a large Muslim population which was concentrated in the south. The problem could be solved by Israel expansion up to the Litani river, thereby helping to turn Lebanon into a more compact, Christian state. Meanwhile, the Suez Canal area should be given an international status, while the Straits of Tiran in the Gulf of Aqaba should come under Israeli control to ensure freedom of navigation. A prior condition for realising this plan was the elimination of [Egyptian president Gamal Abdel] Nasser and the replacement of his regime with a pro-western government which would also be prepared to make peace with Israel.<sup>1</sup> [Words in square brackets added by me - MM]

So we can see that what is going on now is not new. It is part of the long-term Zionist plan and was certainly not invented by Netanyahu or his government.

While Israel did not manage to advance its first strategic aim (ethnic cleansing and annexation) in 1956,

the Suez war did result in a major advance towards its other one. As a reward for its collusion, it was helped by France to become a nuclear power, holding a jealously guarded regional nuclear monopoly.

I do not know how many of those reading this will remember the Suez war (many were probably not born yet). But I can say that this is not only, I think, a very interesting episode in the history of the Middle East and in the whole chain of Israeli wars, which aimed, in the long run, to fulfil strategic aims: for me personally it was a crucial event that opened my eyes to the nature of the Zionist project.

So the Israel-Lebanon wars to some extent reflect what Ben-Gurion proposed, and what is taking place nowadays should also be looked at in this light - not as a short-term response or tactic, which is what most commentators would have us believe, but part of the long-term, strategic aims of Israel in the region.

In this connection I would like to add that what is being revealed is that the current Israeli attacks on Hezbollah, the use of exploding papers, and so on, are not short-term reflexes that Israel just thought of on the spur of the moment. They have long been in preparation. In fact, as *The Washington Post* and other media outlets have indicated, this war has been in preparation for several years. So the attack on Hezbollah - first of all, in order to accomplish Israeli aims in Lebanon itself, and then as an opening move to reinforcing hegemony in the entire Middle East (which also requires downgrading the position of Iran) - has been a long time in preparation.

In fact, some commentators have correctly indicated that Israel was so concerned with planning an attack on Hezbollah as an opening to a war with Iran that it overlooked what was actually happening in the Gaza Strip, and therefore was taken by surprise in October last year, because it was focusing on Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> So ironically, and contrary to what seems to many to be the case, the current conflict with Hezbollah is not a mere consequence of Israel's war on the Palestinians in Gaza. As I have stated, many think of the current genocidal war from a short-term perspective, but, if in fact you look at it in the longer term, it is the opposite.

Will Israel succeed? We can certainly say what its strategic aims are, but whether it will succeed in achieving them is something I would not like to predict - there are all sorts of uncertainties, including the fragility of Israeli society itself. So I make no predictions about the possible outcome of this war, which is very much an open question. That is why I have stressed the need to focus on the large-scale and long-term nature of what is going on ●

This article is based on Moshé Machover's talk to the October 6 Online Communist Forum: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBse2YW9tNw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBse2YW9tNw)

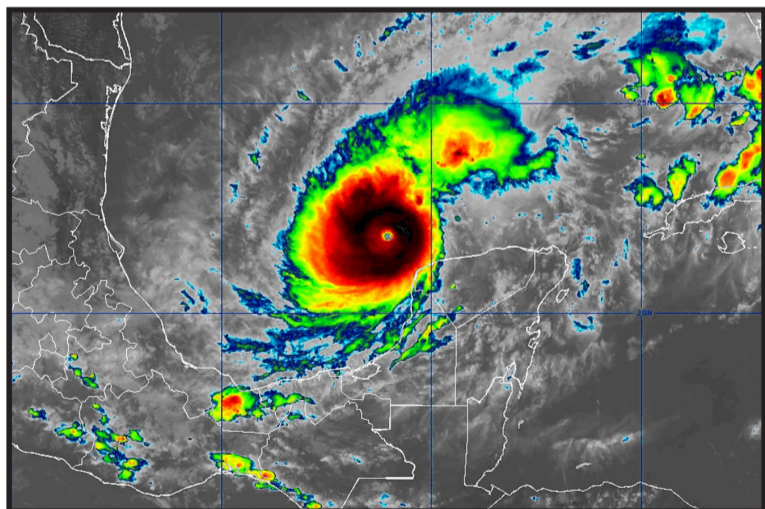
### Notes

1. A Shlaim, 'The protocol of Sèvres, 1956: anatomy of a war plot' *International Affairs*, 73:3 (1997), pp509-30.
2. A Tibon, 'Hezbollah-Hamas paradox: the war Israel prepared for, and the one it didn't see coming'. *Haaretz*, September 29 2024.

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## Online Communist Forum



Sunday October 13 5pm  
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A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: [youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](https://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)

# 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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# Waiting for the payback

Though they have been repeatedly condemned as *haram*, some leading elements in the Iranian regime want to go for nuclear weapons, warns Yasmine Mather

On October 4, three days after Iran's ballistic missile attack on Israel, Friday prayers in Tehran were led, for the first time in five years, by the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei.

Rumours on social media were predicting an assassination attempt, this time on Khamenei himself, but nothing came of it, although the atmosphere was tense. His speech was designed to boost morale after several bruising attacks that have no doubt weakened the Islamic Republic and its allies. Sometimes speaking in Arabic, the Shia supreme leader, sought to directly address the Arab street (mainly Sunnis) in a bid to outflank other regional dictatorships, with the defiant promise of defeating both Israel and the United States.

None of this could hide the nervousness in Tehran - not just about an imminent Israeli retaliation, but also the severe setbacks suffered by Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas and the whole axis of resistance, despite the restraint shown over the last 12 months. Alike, Iran and Hezbollah have carefully 'calibrated' their response to Israeli attacks and its ongoing genocidal war in Gaza.

Amongst insiders, the fragile health of the 85-year-old supreme leader is also a cause of concern. This at a time when the tensions and conflicts between the various factions in the Islamic Republic are heating up. As I wrote last week, Iran's new president, Massoud Pezeshkian, was under a lot of pressure to launch some form of missile attack on Israel. 'Conservative' factions were criticising his government for a failure to respond to the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on the day of the presidential inauguration.<sup>1</sup> That paved the way for the killing of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut on September 27. Now many of the president's 'reformist' allies are worried about the retaliation the country can expect from Israel.

## Nuclear option

Meanwhile, the website/paper of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, *Javan*, is advocating a rethink about the nuclear option.

On October 3, Gholam-Reza Sadeqian, the editor, wrote:

I'm not discussing the religious aspects of the legality [of nuclear weapons], but the scientific aspects of the nuclear programme. From a scientific point of view, we can't bar ourselves from research. One thing is the taboo of using nuclear weapons, but mastering the science of nuclear weapons and reaching the point of building a weapon when we wish to do so is an altogether different subject.<sup>2</sup>

Turning to the religious legality of building a nuclear bomb according to Shia theology, Sadeqian continued:

Some experts in Iranian studies and Shia theology may tell



US nuclear missiles on display in all their horrible varieties

[western governments] that the religious prohibition ... is not deception ... However, there will certainly also be others who will tell the Americans that Shia theology is dynamic and issues new rulings at inflection points ... This keeps the Americans in a state of constant guessing ... For them, Iran will remain a state that has no nuclear weapons, but may opt to have one ... It can have it instantaneously.

His deputy, Ali Qanadi, also wrote a piece with the same theme:

What is the solution ...? The past year has shown that diplomacy based on international public opinion could not stop the super-destructiveness of Israel. The limited military response option, such as Operation Truthful Covenant II [Iran's October 1 retaliatory attack against Israel] was effective ... but may not have established deterrence, and there is a risk for further escalation ... Other people may offer creative solutions to contain [Israel], but there is also an immediate solution ready at hand: changing Iran's nuclear doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

Here the more radical factions of the

Revolutionary Guards have an issue with the current supreme leader. He has time and time again declared nuclear weapons to be *haram* (forbidden or proscribed by Islamic law) and, although he can change his mind on day-to-day political and military issues, changing a major religious pronouncement is more problematic.

This brings me to the thorny issue of Khamenei's future replacement as supreme leader. There is no heir apparent. Many of the potential 'candidates' have already died.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important figures whose death changed the political equation in Iran was president Ebrahim Raisi. There is a lot of speculation about the exact cause of the helicopter crash that killed him. While most sane observers gave little credence to the sabotage story, after the assassination of Haniyeh in a secure zone in Tehran and the death of Nasrallah in Beirut, some are pointing the finger at Mossad. There can be no doubt that the role of Ibrahim Raisi was considered very important, assuming the survival of the regime after Khamenei dies.

For many years, he was mentioned as a possible successor to the supreme leader. However, even if he was not going to take over himself, he would have played a significant role

in the nomination process and the subsequent transfer of power.

Of course, other important figures who could have played a decisive role were Nasrallah and, before him, Revolutionary Guards leader Qasem Soleimani, who was popular among internal and external supporters of the Islamic Republic until his death, at the hands of Israel, in 2020.

A couple of months ago, after Raisi died there were rumours in Iran that in the absence of an ideal Iranian candidate for the position of 'legal guardian' (*vali faghih*/supreme leader) of Shia Islam, there were no constitutional obstacles to Hassan Nasrallah (who by all accounts was also a fluent Farsi speaker) taking up the post.

All this explains the importance of Nasrallah for Iran's Shia clerics and Khamenei. It helps explain the ballistic missile attack on Israel launched on October 1 and why last week's Friday prayers were so significant.

## US-Israel

As Israel continues to pound Beirut and south Lebanon, the world awaits its next retaliation against Iran. Benjamin Netanyahu has postponed Yoav Gallant's trip to Washington. His defence minister was scheduled to meet his US counterpart, Lloyd

Austin. A Pentagon spokesperson denied any "tension" between the two defence chiefs: "You can have frank and direct conversations with your friends. It's not the case that you always agree on everything. But that doesn't mean there is tension."

In fact the Israeli media reports that it was Netanyahu who prevented Gallant's trip, as he himself wants to discuss Israel's plans with Joe Biden first. Not that they are kindred spirits. According to veteran journalist Bob Woodward, Biden once referred to him in the following uncomplimentary manner: "that son of a bitch, Bibi Netanyahu, he's a bad guy. He's a bad fucking guy."<sup>4</sup>

Of course, all this could be related to the US presidential race and the fact that the Kamala Harris is losing ground - not just among Arab Americans, but young voters too. When it comes to November's elections, Iran is a hot topic: for example, Donald Trump has blasted the Biden administration's attempts to restrain Israel from bombing Iran's nuclear facilities.

## Hot topic

Discussion of Israel's pending attack and its possible impact in triggering the downfall of the Islamic Republic has also become a hot topic among Iranians - in particular exiles. The royalists, who these days act as the Israel Defence Forces' fifth column, claim that Netanyahu's promise to make Iran "pay" will lead to people taking to the streets and massive demonstrations will sweep away the regime.

Those who entertain such delusions underestimate the regime's ability to control and repress protests. They also ignore the continued allegiance of a definite section of the population to the Islamic Republic. In addition, there is no doubt that an Israeli attack will inflame nationalist sentiments - already there are ever wider divisions among the supporters of the ex-shah's son. Many argue that, even if the expected Israeli attack succeeds militarily, in the absence of any seriously *organised* opposition, even if it were a bourgeois one, the country will face 'anarchy' and civil war, leading to the breakaway of some regions. National minorities will apparently see their opportunity for 'independence'. Others point out that, even in these regions - Kurdistan, Baluchistan, Azerbaijan, Khuzestan, etc - Iranian nationalism might well prevail and there will be no major support for independence. But there will be huge civil unrest.

All speculation, of course ●

## Notes

1. 'Itching for war on four fronts' *Weekly Worker* October 3: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1509/itching-for-war-on-four-fronts](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1509/itching-for-war-on-four-fronts).
2. See [agsiw.org/irgc-newspaper-demands-nuclear-bomb](http://agsiw.org/irgc-newspaper-demands-nuclear-bomb).
3. *Ibid*.
4. [www.haaretz.com/us-news/2024-10-08/ty-article/premium/hes-a-bad-fucking-guy-woodward-book-gives-unfiltered-view-of-biden-netanyahu-rift/0000192-6c66-d08e-ad9a-ce6fc0e30000](http://www.haaretz.com/us-news/2024-10-08/ty-article/premium/hes-a-bad-fucking-guy-woodward-book-gives-unfiltered-view-of-biden-netanyahu-rift/0000192-6c66-d08e-ad9a-ce6fc0e30000).