

# weekly **worker**



**Fall of Humza Yousaf: for too long  
much of left has been tailing Scots  
nationalists to disastrous effect**

- Letters and debate
- CPB's pro-Zionism
- Moshé Machover
- Sir Keir's flag

No 1489 May 2 2024

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

## Openly Jewish opposition to Gaza genocide

Solidarity Campaign

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## LETTERS



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

## Elections

I hardly expected that my brief comments as a member of the small audience on a recent Zoom webinar about communists running for election would form the basis for the lengthy lead letter in last week's *Weekly Worker* ... and be sent all the way from the land of the free, no less (Peter Moody in New Jersey). It must have been a slow news week!

Peter and I agree on one point, but on a second point I think he has misinterpreted what I said.

He writes: "Story isn't speaking nonsense when he says that communist electoral campaigns resulting in tiny votes (and lost deposits, in the case of British elections) can be demoralising. While there will generally be a core of committed activists eager to run such campaigns, running year after year to consistently gain only three-digit vote totals per constituency isn't going to be the most inspiring use of an organisation's time and resources." Here Peter has correctly interpreted what I said.

But his second point puts the wrong spin on it. He writes: "comrade Alan Story disagreed with the whole notion of communists running in elections, proposing as an alternative an active spoiled ballot campaign."

I did not say and don't believe that communists should *never* run in elections. But I do think that it needs to be part of a wider political strategy. It does not convince me to quote from Lenin's masterful work, *'Leftwing' communism: an infantile disorder* - as one Zoom panellist did - to try to refute my main point (I first read that text back in about 1968 and have just reviewed it again). Lenin repeatedly stresses the importance of basing tactics on a concrete analysis of concrete situations and asks whether or

not a tactic advances the working class struggle.

No-one in the Zoom webinar did that. And I fail to see how Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition chair Dave Nellist gaining 2.1% of the vote in a 2022 Birmingham-area by-election did that either. Remember, Nellist is a former MP, a credible speaker, the long-time head of Tusc (meaning he could tap the national resources of the Socialist Party) and this was a by-election (meaning activists could come in from other parts of the country - I know people living 100 miles away who canvassed for Nellist).

I know Nellist did beat nine other candidates - an outfit called 'Church of the Militant Elvis' got eight votes! - but the by-election resulted in an easy-peasy Labour hold with a 55.5% vote share. Who can be enthused by that? I ask, where have been the positive electoral campaigns in the UK in the past 50 years?

Meanwhile, I have read reports that up to 150 'indy' socialist and small 'left party' candidates may run in the upcoming general election. We really need to scrutinise whether socialists and communists should back them. A significant percentage of them will be of the 'the only thing wrong with the Labour Party is Keir Starmer' variety. I know I will not be assisting their cause. For a whole number of reasons, I doubt few will poll beyond 2% - or do what I would call effective socialist agitation either.

Of course, we will not break the general sense of despondency among what we might call 'left of Labour' forces merely by reading ... and not even by reading Lenin. But can I recommend to colleagues one piece resulting from a small group called the Learning Our History project. It looks at the rise and fall of the Scottish Socialist Party - which, it should be noted, given we are talking about elections, did get six members into the Scottish parliament in 2003 (and it was a positive electoral campaign).

Here is the link: [theleftlane2024.substack.com/p/socialism-in-scotland-lessons-from](http://theleftlane2024.substack.com/p/socialism-in-scotland-lessons-from).

The interview is a concrete analysis of a concrete situation. The person interviewed, Gregor Gall, alerted me to Peter Moody's letter in the *Weekly Worker* and I am sure he would respond to comments and criticisms anyone might raise.

Alan Story  
The Left Lane

## Vote WPB?

On April 30, George Galloway announced in a press conference in Parliament Square that his Workers Party of Britain (WPB) is planning to stand in (almost) "every constituency" in the forthcoming general election, including in Ealing Southall, where former England cricket player Monty Panesar will stand as the WPB candidate. The aspiration certainly is admirable and something the rest of the timid left could learn a lesson from.

But, in my opinion, socialists should be very careful before they throw their weight behind the WPB. I disagree with comrade Mike Macnair, who argued at the recent CPGB aggregate that, when it comes to any potential electoral clashes, "the Workers Party of Britain is slightly to be preferred to Tusc" ('Thinking through the options', April 25). At the time, it looked like there might not be (m)any clashes, as the Socialist Party's electoral campaign, Tusc (Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition), had been making a big effort to get Galloway to agree to at least a non-aggression pact - to no avail, it appears. Galloway has just stuck two fingers up to them.

Also, while the WPB says it will not stand against left-of-Labour candidates and is, for example, supporting Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North), Andrew Feinstein (who is standing against Keir Starmer in Holborn and St Pancras) and Tahir Mirza (contesting for Newham Independents in East Ham), it is, however, putting up a candidate against Zahra Sultana in Coventry South, one of the very few 'left' MPs in parliament.

Yes, Galloway's election victory in Rochdale was a victory for the Palestine solidarity movement. But the rest of his political programme is as uninspiring and problematic as you could expect from somebody to the right of the social democratic consensus. And, yes, it clearly is "his" election manifesto - it is decorated with a charming family portrait with his wife and two young kids ([workerspartybritain.org/manifesto-britain-deserves-better](http://workerspartybritain.org/manifesto-britain-deserves-better)). Next stop *Hello Magazine*?

Take away his support for Gaza and the Palestinians and the WPB programme is incredibly socially conservative and reeks of national chauvinism. While Galloway's opposition to a woman's right to choose an abortion did not make it into the WPB programme, many of his conservative views certainly have. There is, for example, a long section on 'Supporting the family', again decorated with a picture of the traditional 'husband, wife and two kids' combo - clearly aimed at what he believes is his conservative audience in the Muslim population.

The party promises to "ban

foreign interests from interfering in British culture untowardly". Sounds very sinister indeed - he mainly means the US, it appears, which apparently "imported racism" via "American troops in the Second World War". Right. So before that, Britain (the one running the empire, murdering and exploiting millions of slaves) was racism-free?

When it comes to the issue of 'law and order', the WPB declares: "We are not soft-hearted liberals who believe that everyone is capable of redemption." Oh. Some people are just beyond the pale - lost causes? That is a very odd thing to say for a self-declared socialist party.

Instead, the WPB wants to "overhaul liberal laws that weaken the ability of the police to protect the most vulnerable, while continuing to ensure appropriate civil liberties protections, increase police capacity in high crime areas, increase funding and capacity for operations targeting organised crime", etc. Of course, the police are all about 'protecting the vulnerable'.

Then there is Galloway's well-known and long-standing opposition to 'mass migration'. It makes for a very unpleasant read: "The Workers Party of Britain offers a migration policy that reflects the anxiety felt among the working class about an influx of migrants, which appears to be out of control. While some of this anxiety is stoked by the racist right, people are not wrong to worry about undue burdens being placed on local services, about disproportionate herding of migrants into poorer parts of the country, and about the cost of hosting escalating numbers of asylum-seekers." And on and on it goes.

He might have gotten rid of his openly Stalinist wing in the form of CPGB-ML (run by the Brar family), but his programme

still stinks of the same political national-chauvinist method.

Having said all of this, it is likely that the issue of Gaza and the oppression of the Palestinians will remain one of the key issues come the general elections. Socialists might well end up calling for a vote for the WPB, especially in areas where there are no (other) socialists standing. The WPB might also manage to get one or two MPs into parliament, from constituencies with a large and active Muslim population. But in reality Galloway's version of 'socialism' is actually 'no socialism at all'.

Carla Roberts  
London

## Privatisation

James Linney's 'Lights going out' was the usual sophisticated mixture of professional experience, insightfulness and factuality (*Weekly Worker* April 25).

However, maybe with the Labour Party's role as poisonous agency on behalf of the capitalist system, there's one facet not sufficiently investigated: where it's openly stated that ambitions to continue with privatisation of the NHS will achieve what the Conservatives are unable to do, given how the population are more acutely aware (and so more cautious) about their intentions and belief systems, etc.

This will be an *eventual* outcome, where Labour will secure a 'resigned' acceptance of US-style outright privatisation - appearing by then to be unavoidable, with no 'socialist' alternatives available. Thanks a million, Starmer and Streeter, and other members of your gang: true socialists will not forget if or when the tables are turned within some not too distant future conditions.

Bruno Kretzschmar  
email

## Fighting fund

## Good result!

Thankfully, my optimism paid off, when it came to our April fighting fund target. A further £473 was donated to the *Weekly Worker* in the final six days of the month, taking the total received to £2,404 - in other words, £154 above the £2,250 required.

Thanks very much indeed, everyone! There were quite a few substantial contributions, beginning with the excellent £100 from comrade BK. Then we had LM (£80), RG (£75), GT (£35), JT (£25), DG, MD, AB and PB (£20 each), CH and VP (£10) and DD (£8). All the above made their donations by standing order/bank transfer, while DB (£50) and IS (£10) made use of PayPal.

So a good result for April - but can we do the same again in May? Well, after just one day we already have £126! Our thanks go to comrades BK (£20), BG and MT (£15), TM (£13), MM (£11), AN, YM, DI and CP (£10), and finally DC and JS (£6 each).

Mind you, the start of each

month is when lots of those donations (mostly in the form of standing orders) come our way, and so far May has been no exception. So now we need other comrades to follow their example and keep things going, to make sure that April wasn't just a one-off!

Please go to the web address below to find out how to play your part - by bank transfer, PayPal or cheque. Better still, you too can set up a monthly standing order, so that the number of regular donors we rely on shoots up!

Please help ensure that the *Weekly Worker* can continue to play its essential role - campaigning and polemicising each week for the single, democratic Marxist party that our class so desperately needs! ●

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)

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday May 5 5pm  
General election 2024 and communist perspectives - discussion and debate between the Spartacist League and the CPGB

Use this link to join meeting:  
[communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register](http://communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register)

Organised by CPGB: [communistparty.co.uk](http://communistparty.co.uk) and Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk)  
For further information, email Stan Keable at [Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk)

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: [youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](http://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)



# PROTESTS

## Openly Jewish opposition

Around the world people are demonstrating against Israel's war on Gaza. At the same time, Zionist provocateurs and the rightwing media step up their campaign to brand the whole solidarity movement anti-Semitic and give the state the excuse it needs to clamp down. Ian Spencer reports

Yet again, in our thousands, in our millions, around the world, people took to the streets to show their solidarity with the people of Palestine. In London, once more, the April 27 march filled the streets in peaceful determination to show the British state - which is more than complicit in Israeli genocide - that we stand in opposition to what is going on.

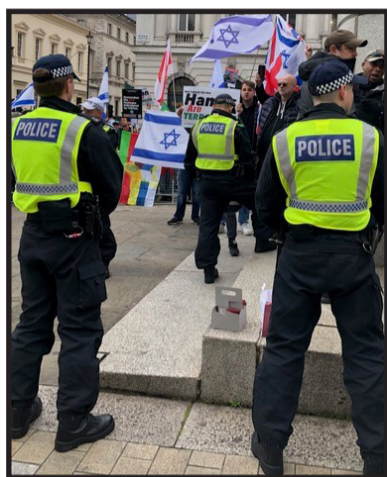
The demonstration was also taking place against the background of increased efforts by the friends of genocide to suppress dissent and provoke a reaction from those on the right. Given that they have been exposed as supporters of one of the most odious regimes on the planet, British Zionists are determined to provide the basis for the state suppression of solidarity marches.

On April 13, Gideon Falter posed as an innocent Jewish man trying to cross the road, but was allegedly prevented by Palestine solidarity demonstrators, aided and abetted by the Metropolitan Police. He happened to have someone filming the whole process, as you do. Then, on behalf of the Campaign Against Antisemitism, of which he is chief executive, he posted a short clip of a police sergeant preventing him, apparently on the grounds that he was "openly Jewish" (he was wearing a kippah). This is the sort of situation that can lead to the *Daily Mail* being spattered with cornflakes, coughed out in self-righteous indignation.

It was not long before the Met apologised for the 'unfortunate' turn of phrase. Predictably, Rishi Sunak expressed his outrage and the misnamed James Cleverly, wrote to the Met's commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, while Suella Braverman, the late and unlamented home secretary, among others, called for him to resign. The Met's original statement talked about a "new trend of those opposed to the main protests appearing alongside the route to express their views", despite "knowing their presence is provocative". However, after being criticised as 'victim blaming', the Met issued a second statement saying that "being Jewish is not a provocation" and apologising again.

Later, more video footage was released by various news agencies, showing that Falter had been continually trying to provoke a response from Palestine solidarity demonstrators by crossing the road repeatedly, usually in the opposite direction to the flow of the March. Just in case anyone thinks that is a foolhardy thing to do, it is worth noting that Falter had a few heavies in his entourage, presumably to rescue him if he did get thumped. At least one of Falter's bodyguards, Vincentiu Chiculita, is employed by SQR Group, which has provided security for the Israeli president, Isaac Herzog.<sup>1</sup> SQR Group is run by two former Mossad officers, Avi Navama and Shai Slagter, the former having been a security attaché at the Israeli embassy in London.<sup>2</sup> So, not quite the spontaneous wish to cross the road, having 'just come out of the synagogue', as a lot of the mainstream media would have had us believe in the days after the incident.

It is also worth remembering that the Palestine solidarity demonstrations have been



Zionist provocation

unfailingly peaceful and participants have certainly been wise to attempts to smear them as 'hate marches'. The thousands of Jewish protestors who participate, many wearing kippahs - not to mention members of Neturei Karta, resplendent in their Haredi dress - far outnumber the counter-demonstrators and were greeted enthusiastically by the rest of us.

This week's Zionist counterdemonstration, protected by a police cordon, was on Pall Mall, by the Crimean War memorial (another monument to imperialist brutality). The 50 or so Israeli flag-wavers, solicited little or no response from the thousands of those opposed to genocide. It was an object lesson in dignity and discipline against despicable provocation.

The counterdemonstrations are organised in part by the Campaign Against Antisemitism, established in 2014 - supposedly in response to an "increase in anti-Semitic incidents" after the Israeli attack on Gaza in that year. The CAA remains a registered charity despite complaints from Shahrar Ali, the Green Party home affairs spokesman, that it has failed to be 'independent of party politics'. Even Margaret Hodge, who was once an honorary patron of CAA, has weighed in with her criticism, saying, without a hint of irony, that "I am fed up with the CAA using anti-Semitism as a front to attack Labour". By contrast the CAA has been praised by Theresa May and Boris Johnson, who was, among others, very visible in his support for the demonstration organised by the CAA in 2023.

### Reaction

The campaign to characterise Palestine solidarity as a threat has been embraced enthusiastically by *The Daily Mail* (a paper that was once so appreciative of fascism), which on April 28 carried the headline, "Police are so cowed by the anti-Semitic mob, they even cover up the holocaust". This was a reference to the fact that a sheet of tarpaulin had been placed over the memorial stone in the holocaust memorial garden in Hyde Park. The Met subsequently released a statement which pointed out that "The decision to cover the memorial was taken by the park authorities, not the police", which happens during major events in the park, such as the screening of the 2018 World Cup, but the *Mail* has never been one to let the truth get in the way of a good story.

In the meantime, on campuses across the USA, students have gone into occupation and set up camps to

protest at the genocide in Palestine. The police have acted with violence against those at Columbia University, taking students into custody - 56 years after they acted with the same brutality against students protesting against the Vietnam war. Protestors at the University of Michigan have taken to wearing masks to hide their identity, in case the university authorities take punitive action against them. At Harvard the Palestine Solidarity Committee has suspended doing press interviews out of regard for student safety. People have lost their jobs over the support for Palestine, in the UK and US.

Concerns over retaliation and harassment are a feature of the campus protests. Pro-Israel activists have attempted to post demonstrators faces and personal information on social media as an act of intimidation. They have also violently attacked protestors at UCLA.<sup>3</sup> During Yale's protests a choir performed with masks to avoid being identified. Several US colleges have cited 'anti-mask laws', supposedly enacted in the 1950s to deter Ku Klux Klan rallies. In the UK police with cameras at demonstrations are now a general feature.

### Prevent

The CAA has made a point of trying to prevent meetings with pro-Palestinian speakers taking place in universities. In Germany, a peaceful congress with Jews and Palestinians was disrupted by 2,000 police and Jewish peace activists were arrested. Yanis Varoufakis, who was due to speak, has now been banned from Germany, but given no rationale, except that it was 'for reasons of national security'. German police have dragged away peaceful protestors calling for an end to German support for the Israeli war machine, in a camp outside the German parliament. Germany is the second biggest supplier of arms to Israel, after the USA and it has even banned Ghassan Abu Sitta - the British-Palestinian plastic surgeon, rector of Glasgow University and witness to Israel's genocide in Gaza - from addressing a conference.

Across the world, a movement to stop the slaughter of tens of thousands of innocent civilians is seen as a threat to the state. Those, supposedly on the left, who call for 'no platform' for racists, fascists or anyone else are only helping to support the development of the suppression of protest. Foam-flecked rightwingers, who rage against 'lefty, woke, cancel culture', are predictably silent when it comes to the suppression of protest against genocide and the merchants of death in the arms industry.

The increasingly authoritarian actions of the state will not be understood or resisted by calling it 'fascism'. Our response must be rooted in an understanding of the nature of capitalism in decline. That does not mean, as some groups seem to believe, that socialist revolution is just around the corner. But it does mean that the party of the working class must be prepared to resist, without rising to the bait of provocateurs, who have only one aim - the suppression of dissent ●

### Notes

1. www.sqrgroup.com/our-people-sqr.  
2. www.thejc.com/news/your-simcha-security-drilled-by-the-mossad-k63npev1.  
3. Al Jazeera May 1.

## ACTION

### Journalism is not a crime - free Julian Assange

**Friday May 3, 7pm:** Meeting to mark world press freedom day, Frontline Club, 13 Norfolk place, London W2. Speakers include Stella Assange and Matt Kennard (Declassified UK). Entrance £15 (£10). Organised by Frontline Club: [twitter.com/Stella\\_Assange/status/1785046037402423611](https://twitter.com/Stella_Assange/status/1785046037402423611).

### Boot the bailiffs out of Haringey

**Saturday May 4, 11am:** Public meeting, Living Under One Sun hub, inside Down Lane Park, Park View Road, London N17. Learn about the campaign to stop Haringey council using bailiffs for council tax debts. Know your rights if bailiffs come knocking. Followed by a picnic in the park. Organised by Acorn Haringey: [acorntheunion.org.uk/boot\\_the\\_bailiffs\\_out\\_of\\_haringey\\_public\\_event](http://acorntheunion.org.uk/boot_the_bailiffs_out_of_haringey_public_event).

### Brighton May Day march and rally

**Saturday May 4, 1pm:** Assemble The Level, Brighton BN2. March to Jubilee Square. Stop genocide; no arms to Israel; ceasefire now! Organised by Brighton Hove and District Trades Union Council: [www.facebook.com/events/1073732337057084](https://www.facebook.com/events/1073732337057084).

### Glasgow May Day march and rally

**Sunday May 5, 11am:** Assemble George Square, Glasgow G1. March to rally at Glasgow University Union, 32 University Avenue, Glasgow G12, with speakers, films and music. Organised by Glasgow Trades Council: [www.facebook.com/events/470767755613134](https://www.facebook.com/events/470767755613134).

### What it means to be human

**Tuesday May 7, 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 sensory ecology of deception in human societies'. Speaker: Will Buckner. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.facebook.com/events/1573248140130848](https://www.facebook.com/events/1573248140130848).

### Israel, Palestine, Iran - the threat of wider war

**Wednesday May 8, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Community Base (south entrance), 113 Queens Street, Brighton BN1. Speakers include John Rees (Stop the War) and Claudia Webbe MP. Organised by Stop the War Brighton and Hove: [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=848314953995201](https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=848314953995201).

### Exploitation and the decline of capital

**Thursday May 9, 7pm:** Online session in the fortnightly 'ABC of Marxism' course, presented by Ian Spencer. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: [www.whymarx.com/sessions](https://www.whymarx.com/sessions).

### Don't put Britain on the nuclear front line

**Saturday May 11:** Day of action with events across Britain. The return of US nuclear weapons makes the UK part of the US war machine and a target in any nuclear war. Protest to stop these bombs. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: [cnduk.org/dont-put-britain-on-the-nuclear-front-line-day-of-action](http://cnduk.org/dont-put-britain-on-the-nuclear-front-line-day-of-action).

### With banners held high

**Saturday May 11, 10.30am:** March and labour movement festival. Assemble Smyth Street, Wakefield WF1. A full day of trade union and community festival activities, this year marking 40 years since the miners' strike. Organised by With Banners Held High: [www.facebook.com/events/182181264957544](https://www.facebook.com/events/182181264957544).

### Race, class and revolution

**Saturday May 11, 11am to 5pm:** Day school, Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1. Showcasing Marxism as an important tool in the fight against racism, colonialism and imperialism. Entrance £10 (£5). Organised by Socialist Workers Party: [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1013959033633846](https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1013959033633846).

### Library open day

**Saturday May 11, 11am to 3pm:** Working Class Movement Library, 51 Crescent, Salford M5. Includes hands-on access to material in the upcoming 'Here we stand: the art of international solidarity' exhibition. Entrance free. Organised by Working Class Movement Library: [www.facebook.com/wcmlibrary](https://www.facebook.com/wcmlibrary).

### Stop the war in Gaza

**Tuesday May 14, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, SET Woolwich, Riverside House, Beresford Street, London SE18. Speakers include Lindsey German (Stop the War) and Andrew Feinstein. Organised by Stop the War Greenwich: [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10159527247741423](https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10159527247741423).

### Communist Culture Club

**Thursday May 16, 7pm:** Fortnightly online meeting. The Russian avant-garde with Roger Silverman. Also mass public singing in the early Industrial Workers of the World. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: [www.whymarx.com/sessions](https://www.whymarx.com/sessions).

### War, peace and Palestine - trade union issues

**Saturday June 8, 10.30am to 4.30pm:** Trade union conference, Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7. Facing up to the warmongers and sharing experiences of building pro-Palestine initiatives in unions and workplaces. Tickets £10. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events).

### CPGB wills

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



## CPB

# Distracting from genocide

In the midst of Israel's war on Gaza the 'official communist' CPB has launched a series of seminars on anti-Semitism. The problem is that the narrative comes directly from Zionist sources. **Tony Greenstein** investigates

'Anti-Semitism' has been the weapon that the Zionists have deployed to defend genocide in Gaza. Any manifestation of support for the Palestinians is deemed anti-Semitic.

Rishi Sunak has labelled Palestinians and their supporters "anti-Semitic hate marchers",<sup>1</sup> and former home secretary Suella Braverman described the slogan, 'From the river to the sea, Palestine must be free', as "an anti-Semitic chant", whilst calling for the marches to be banned.<sup>2</sup>

How is it that Braverman, whose "dream" consisted of the expulsion of refugees to Rwanda, was so concerned about 'anti-Semitism'?<sup>3</sup> And how is it that Donald Trump with his Muslim ban is nonetheless perturbed about 'anti-Semitism'?<sup>4</sup> To say nothing of his chief strategist, Steve Bannon, who, whilst not wanting his daughters to go to school with Jewish children,<sup>5</sup> was also very concerned about anti-Semitism?<sup>6</sup> Tommy Robinson too is equally opposed to anti-Semitism, he claims.<sup>7</sup>

The concerns of Braverman and Sunak about anti-Semitism contrast with their racism towards black people, Muslims and refugees. 'Anti-Semitism' is the false anti-racism of the right. Anyone pretending to be a socialist would question their motives.

Not so the Communist Party of Britain. It is currently holding a series of seminars for its members, entitled 'Understanding and combatting anti-Semitism'. You might have thought it would devote at least one session to exploring the *weaponisation* of alleged 'anti-Semitism' by the right and far right, but I am sorry to disappoint you: there is no such session. There is one, however, on what is called "the contested relationship between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism". Contested by whom, you may ask? Certainly not supporters of the Palestinians or anti-Zionists. We are quite clear: there is no relationship.

If you are an anti-Zionist, you are an anti-racist and you will be equally opposed to anti-Jewish racism. But if you are an anti-Semite then the chances are that you are also a Zionist. As Zionist novelist AB Yehoshua once said in a lecture to the Union of Jewish Students,

Anti-Zionism is not the product of the non-Jews. On the contrary, the Gentiles have always encouraged Zionism, hoping that it would help to rid them of the Jews in their midst. Even today, in a perverse way, a real anti-Semite must be a Zionist.<sup>8</sup>

If you did not know better, you would be forgiven for thinking that the CPB seminars had been organised by the Jewish Labour Movement. But no, they were organised by professor Mary Davis, the CPB's resident Zionist.

The question people need to ask is why it is that in the middle of a genocide the CPB is running a seminar whose sole aim is to bolster the Zionist narrative about anti-Semitism?

It has been a long time since the 'official' Communist Party was anti-Zionist. Following Stalin's about-turn in November 1947, when the Soviet Union supported the establishment of a medieval ethno-religious Jewish state in Palestine, communist parties have steadfastly refused to oppose Zionism as a settler-colonial movement.

The Russian workers' movement at the beginning of the 20th century saw Zionism as counterrevolutionary. The

founder of Poale Zion, Ber Borochov, was expelled from the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1901 when he founded a Zionist Socialist Workers Union in Yekaterinoslav.<sup>9</sup>

Anti-Semitism was one of the main weapons of the tsarist autocracy in its fight against the working class and its organisations. Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, was happy to parley with it. After the Kishinev pogrom of 1903,<sup>10</sup> Herzl's response was to warn the leaders of Europe that, if the Zionist project failed, "hundreds of thousands of our adherents would at one swoop change over to the revolutionary parties".<sup>11</sup>

In August 1903, barely four months after Kishinev, Herzl visited Russia, meeting with the anti-Semitic tsarist interior minister Vyacheslav von Plehve. Herzl was concerned that the Russian Zionist Federation should retain its legal status. As he began explaining the merits of Zionism, Plehve interrupted him: "You don't have to justify the movement to me. You are preaching to a convert."<sup>12</sup> Plehve subsequently described Zionism as an "antidote to socialism".<sup>13</sup>

Herzl asked Plehve: "Help me to reach land sooner and the revolt will end. And so will the defection to the socialists."<sup>14</sup> Herzl wrote to the German kaiser describing how "our movement ... has everywhere to fight an embittered battle with the revolutionary parties, which rightly sense an adversary in it. We are in need of encouragement, even though it has to be a carefully kept secret".<sup>15</sup>

Being a supporter of empire, the Labour Party was even more ardently pro-Zionist than the Conservatives. In August 1917, its 'War Aims Memorandum' supported a "return" of the Jewish people to Palestine, to establish a state there.<sup>16</sup>

All manner of reactionaries and social democrats supported Zionism, from Winston Churchill and Lord Balfour to Arthur Henderson and Ramsay MacDonald. In those days there was no pretence that opposing Zionism was anti-Semitic, because most Jews *opposed* it.

After visiting Palestine in 1922, Ramsay MacDonald wrote of how

The rich plutocratic Jew ... is the person whose views upon life make one anti-Semitic. He has no country, no kindred. Whether as a sweeper or a financier, he is an exploiter of everything he can squeeze. He is behind every evil that governments do and his political authority, always exercised in the dark, is greater than that of parliamentary majorities ... He detests Zionism because it revives the idealism of his race.<sup>17</sup>

This was printed in a pamphlet, produced by Poale Zion, the forerunner of today's Jewish Labour Movement!<sup>18</sup>

Zionism has always been a reactionary, racist movement. Yet still the CPB clings to Stalin's nostrums that Jewish people need a state. Alone on the left the CPB still adheres to the apartheid solution of two states. It is time that it started to wake up to the movement around it.

In view of all this, I wrote the following open letter to Robert Griffiths, CPB general secretary.

## Open letter

Dear Rob Griffiths

Today we are witnessing a genocide in real time in Gaza. It has been accompanied by clear statements of



Promoting Zionism

intent from Israel's leaders. Defence minister Yoav Gallant outlined what was in store: "We are imposing a complete siege on Gaza. There will be no electricity, no food, no water, no fuel. Everything will be closed. We are fighting against human animals and we are acting accordingly."<sup>19</sup>

Your party shrinks from making comparisons between Zionism and the Nazis, but the similarities are striking - from car bumper stickers saying "Finish them off"<sup>20</sup> to stickers saying "Exterminate Gaza!"<sup>21</sup>

On October 4 1943 Heinrich Himmler used exactly this phrase in a lecture to senior SS officers in Posnan, when justifying the holocaust. The Nazis, he explained, were "the only people in the world" to have taken a "decent attitude" toward animals and who would be equally decent towards "human animals".<sup>22</sup>

Gallant was not the only senior Israeli politician or military leader to make genocidal statements. South Africa's application to the International Court of Justice documented numerous such statements.

The current death toll is, when one includes those under the rubble, approaching 50,000, including perhaps 20,000 children. How has the Zionist movement justified this?<sup>23</sup> They have spread false 'atrocity' propaganda about October 7, on the one hand, and they have resorted to accusing their critics of anti-Semitism, on the other. Sad to say, the CPB and Mary Davis have joined in with this.

The final death toll for October 7 is accepted as 1,139.<sup>24</sup> Just two babies were killed, both accidentally.<sup>25</sup> Neither was burned or beheaded. Yet we had lurid headlines of 40 beheaded babies.<sup>26</sup> According to that well known paper of record, the *Daily Mail*, " Hamas terrorists massacred at least 40 babies and young children before beheading some of them and gunning down their families in a small kibbutz in Israel, horrified Israeli soldiers have claimed."<sup>27</sup>

I24 News quoted IDF major general Itai Veruv as saying: "It's not a war, it's not a battlefield. You see the babies, the mother, the father, in their bedrooms, in their protection rooms, and how the terrorists killed them, It's a massacre."<sup>27</sup>

When these claims were discredited, Israel's narrative changed to false allegations of mass rape. Naturally that faithful servant of imperialist propaganda, *The New York Times*, joined in with an article headed "Screams without words".<sup>28</sup> However, that has been completely discredited by a variety of different sources.<sup>29</sup> Even the BBC has abandoned plans to

run with the story.

The second line of defence has been our old friend, 'anti-Semitism'. In Britain we saw Gideon Falter's attempt to portray himself as the victim of anti-Semitism backfire, after a policeman misspoke. Falter had attempted to provoke a confrontation with pro-Palestine demonstrators.<sup>30</sup>

In the United States thousands of students have taken to sit-ins and protests against the genocide, and 'anti-Semitism' has been wheeled out by the right as an excuse to attack their peaceful demonstrations. Biden condemned what he said was "blatant" anti-Semitism at Columbia.<sup>31</sup> Even war criminals become sensitive, when it comes to 'anti-Semitism', these days!

The American state is demonstrating that underneath the sugar coating of democracy lies a highly repressive military-police apparatus. According to House speaker Mike Johnson, Republicans would "hold these universities accountable for their failure to protect Jewish students on campus".<sup>32</sup> Instead of attacking the student demonstrators as a threat to US imperialism's interests, Johnson and Biden articulate their concerns in terms of the 'safety' of Jewish students. The safety of Palestinian students is of no concern.

The vicious attack on Emory University professor Caroline Fohlin by police is unlikely to attract their attention.<sup>33</sup> Likewise the attack on history professor Steve Tamari at Washington University, which left him with a broken hand and ribs, shows us the real face of US capitalism. One doctor told Tamari that he was lucky to be alive.<sup>34</sup>

## Weaponisation

On February 23 2023 *Jeremy Corbyn - the big lie* premiered at Conway Hall with the guest speaker being Ben Chacko, editor of the *Morning Star*.<sup>35</sup> The film, which Starmer and the TUC did their best to prevent being shown, showed how false allegations of anti-Semitism had been weaponised in order to remove Corbyn as Labour leader.

I am astounded therefore that the CPB/*Morning Star*, which opposed the 'anti-Semitism' witch hunt, should be organising a seminar on 'anti-Semitism' which takes as its main sources those who led the 'anti-Semitism' witch hunt in Labour. The seminar has been organised by Mary Davis.

Last September I wrote a piece called 'Elephant in the room', which criticised Davis's article in *Communist Review*, entitled 'The contested relationship between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism'.<sup>36</sup> As readers of my book *Zionism during the holocaust*<sup>37</sup> will know, the only relationship that exists is between Zionism and anti-Semitism.<sup>38</sup> Both share the belief that the 'real home' of Jews is Israel, as Netanyahu told French Jews in 2015.<sup>39</sup>

When the Zionist movement began at the end of the 19th century, most Jews saw it as a form of Jewish anti-Semitism. Today neo-Nazis like Richard Spencer, organiser of the Unite the Right Charlottesville march, call themselves "white Zionists". Tommy Robinson and others of his ilk declare their support for Zionism. Davis would have to be stupid not to notice the support of the far right for Zionism (since she is a professor I assume she is not). There is no relationship, contested or otherwise, between *anti-Zionism* and anti-Semitism. Of course, there has been a

determined campaign by the Zionists to conflate anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.

Davis's CPB course, entitled 'Understanding and Combatting Anti-Semitism', makes no attempt to do either. Its real purpose is to perpetuate the myth that opposition to Zionism and the Israeli state derives from it being a 'Jewish' state rather than its actions.

Davis has been arguing that the left's opposition to Zionism is anti-Semitic for a long time. In July 2019 she wrote an article for the *Morning Star* in which she asked whether allegations of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party were "a fiction manufactured by a conspiratorial alliance between the Israeli government and anti-socialist forces seeking to discredit Jeremy Corbyn".

There were clearly conspiracies, as Asa Winstanley documented with the refounding of the Jewish Labour Movement in 2015. There is, however, no need for conspiracies, given that our mass media shares the same Zionist pro-imperialist agenda. Anti-socialist forces are always pro-imperialist and pro-Zionist. There is a consensus. It is a strange argument coming from someone who is allegedly a communist. Is the anti-communism of the press also a conspiracy and a product of paranoia?

The real question is whether the allegations of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party were true. I was the first Jewish person to be expelled in February 2018 - followed by Jackie Walker, Marc Wadsworth, Ken Livingstone and Chris Williamson. Were any of us guilty of anti-Semitism? All of us were caught up in the false 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign, yet the charges against us did not actually allege anti-Semitism.

Davis avoids any concrete examples to back up her claims. She prefers innuendo. Her clinching argument that there was a problem in the Labour Party is that "the leadership of the Labour Party itself has acknowledged that there is an anti-Semitic element within its ranks". What kind of argument is this? The fact that Corbyn was bullied into accepting the false 'anti-Semitism' narrative is proof of nothing.

Corbyn's general secretary, Jennie Formby, began expelling people at a rate that Iain McNicol, the previous general secretary, could only dream of. They believed that by expelling Palestinian supporters they could impress their enemies. It was claimed that their actions 'proved' there was an anti-Semitism problem - something Davis is happy to accept. She argues that there is an "anti-Semitic current" in the Labour Party, because after 2,000 years anti-Semitism "has penetrated deeply into mainstream thinking".

What Davis demonstrates is the poverty of her understanding of anti-Semitism historically. I realise that the CPB has an aversion to Trotskyism or even dissident Marxism, given its Stalinist antecedents, but the books that Davis does not mention are Abram Leon's *The Jewish question - a Marxist interpretation* and Maxime Rodinson's *Cult, ghetto and state*, which put anti-Semitism in a historically materialist context. Leon wrote that "Zionism transposes modern anti-Semitism to all of history and saves itself the trouble of studying the various forms of anti-Semitism and their evolution".

To Davis anti-Semitism is one seamless fabric. Zionism believes that



anti-Semitism is a 2,000 years constant - an unchanging virus that affects all non-Jews. This is both unMarxist and ahistorical. Anti-Semitism has changed, as society has changed and as the Jews have changed. Racial anti-Semitism represented a sharp break from religious or feudal anti-Semitism. Far from being widespread, anti-Semitism today is a marginal form of prejudice.

This seminar that Davis planned is a reactionary junket whose only purpose will be to reinforce the Zionist smear that anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism are one and the same.

IFCPB members wish to understand the reasons why British imperialism gave its backing to Zionism they should read Winston Churchill's 1920 article, 'Zionism versus Bolshevism'. It combines Churchill's support for empire with support for Zionism and anti-Semitism. He told readers:

In violent contrast to international communism, [Zionism] presents to the Jew a national idea of a commanding character ... In the Soviet institutions the predominance of Jews is even more astonishing. And the prominent, if not indeed the principal, part in the system of terrorism applied by the Extraordinary Commissions for Combating Counterrevolution has been taken by Jews, and in some notable cases by Jewesses. The same evil prominence was obtained by Jews in the brief period of terror during which Bela Kun ruled in Hungary.

Communist Jews were bad. Zionist Jews were good. Meanwhile Davis's attempts to marry Zionism and communism is a Sisyphean task. As David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel observed in December 1935, Zionism was a "bulwark against assimilation and communism".

## Reactionary

You only get an indication of just how reactionary is the furrow that Davis ploughs when you peruse her reading list. Included is a pamphlet, 'Campus anti-Semitism', from the Community Security Trust, which is funded by the home office and set up by Israel's Mossad (equivalent of MI6). The CST led the campaign to have professor David Miller sacked from Bristol University (an employment tribunal later upheld his complaints of unfair dismissal and discrimination). You can get a flavour of the CST's commitment to anti-racism from its choice of guest at its 2023 annual dinner - Suella Braverman!

At a time when thousands of American students are protesting against their universities' complicity in genocide in Gaza, what does Davis do? She backs those who assert that support for Palestine is a threat to the safety of Jewish students.

"Antisemitism on campus surges as agitators take over," shouts Fox News. It is a sentiment that the 'communist', Davis, agrees with. She never once asks why it is that opposition to 'anti-Semitism' is so popular with those who are racist to the core on everything else.

Davies's next recommended text is the CST's 2021 'Anti-Semitic Incidents Reports'. Tony Lerman, founding director of the Institute of Jewish Policy Research, was principal editor of the annual 'Anti-Semitism World Report'. Lerman described how he had been

pressurised by the London Mossad representative dealing with anti-Semitism into "either ceasing publication or merging our report with one that the then-new Project for the Study of Antisemitism at Tel Aviv University ... and part-financed by the Mossad, was

beginning to produce. I vigorously resisted the pressure ... I tried to persuade the Israelis to allow us to operate without interference, but was given short shrift by the Mossad representative at the Israeli embassy in London and by the Israel ambassador [Moshe Raviv] himself.<sup>40</sup>

Lerman lost the battle and what resulted is the CST, which Davis quotes uncritically. Why should Israel's equivalent of MI6 be interested in anti-Semitism statistics unless they are being manipulated to further the interests of the Israeli state?

We are given no clue as to who was to present the talk, 'Anti-Semitism and the Labour Party under Corbyn', but the title itself has framed the discussion. Davis has clearly embraced those who made false accusations by weaponising anti-Semitism.

The whole course is dishonestly selective. For example, 'The role of communists in the fight against anti-Semitism' during the 1930s and later is a mixed one. In Germany the Communist Party (KPD) described the Social Democrats as 'social fascists', thus destroying any possibility of a united working class front against the Nazis. Often they accepted the Strasserite equation of Jew and capitalist.

In 1923 KPD leader Ruth Fischer gave a speech to Nazi students, in which she said:

Those who call for a struggle against Jewish capital are already, gentlemen, class strugglers, even if they don't know it. You are against Jewish capital and want to fight the speculators. Very good. Throw down the Jewish capitalists, hang them from the lamppost, stamp on them. But, gentlemen, what about the big capitalists, the Stinnes and Klöckner?

Donald Niewyk describes the KPD appeal to the SA and SS in 1933: "You have shot enough workers. When will you hang the first Jew?" Between 1930 and 1933 there were no Jewish KPD deputies elected.

During the holocaust the Soviet Union adamantly refused to recognise that the Nazis were targeting Jews in particular for extermination.

Stalinism engaged in rewriting history, when it was argued that the Jews suffered no more than other groups at the hands of the Nazis. It enabled the USSR to gloss over the collaboration with the Nazis. As Samuel Moyn writes of Soviet-Jewish writer Vasily Grossman's account of Treblinka,

... the disproportionate victimhood of Jews was not ideologically useful from the perspective of Moscow ... From the perspective of official anti-fascism, 'humanity' had suffered, not one group within it more than the rest ... the Soviets could not accept that the victims had been predominantly Jewish.' Though Grossman's essay had already been circulated elsewhere, ... the plates of the *Black book* were destroyed.<sup>41</sup>

In 1952 there was the Slansky trial, when 14 Czech communists were accused of being Zionist agents - 11 of them were Jewish and 11 were executed. In 1963 Slansky was pardoned. Or the 'Doctors Plot', when (mostly Jewish) doctors were accused of conspiring to murder Soviet leaders. Fortunately Stalin died before their trial, after which they were released. Or the 'anti-Zionist' campaign in 1967 in Poland after the Six-Day War. It was led by party leader Władysław Gomułka, who conflated 'Jew' and 'Zionist' and blamed Jews for the era of Stalinist repression.

The failure by Davis and the CPB to examine honestly the history of their own anti-Semitic tradition marks out the course as a worthless propaganda exercise and an attempt to rewrite history.

## Holocaust

Under 'The Holocaust' there is a review of Jonathan Freedland's dishonest book about Rudolf Vrba, one of only five Jewish prisoners to escape from Auschwitz on April 10 1944. Freedland's book is the object of uncritical praise by Davis.

Vrba and fellow escapee, Alfred Wetzler, produced the Vrba-Wetzler Report, which revealed the existence of Auschwitz as a death camp for the first time. Prior to that Auschwitz was believed to be a labour camp. The report was given to the leader of Hungary Zionism, Rudolf Kasztner, at the end of April and was immediately suppressed by Hungary's Zionist leaders.

Suffice to say Freedland, an arch Zionist, glosses over much of this, including the Kasztner trial, which convulsed Israel for four years (1954-58). It led to the collapse of the second Israeli government under Moshe Sharrett.

If Davis knew anything about the background to the affair, she would know that Vrba's book *I cannot forgive* is a far more reliable guide to what really happened than Freedland's cheap thriller. Vrba's book describes in far more detail their escape from Auschwitz, but one suspects that Davis has not read any source books on the holocaust.

The other text on the holocaust is none other than an article by Davis herself on Holocaust Memorial Day. In her concluding remarks she quotes Blackface Badiel, saying that we must "strenuously rebut the notion that in the fight against racism Jews don't count."<sup>42</sup> Quite.

But the session on Islamist Anti-Semitism takes the prize. Today Zionism is the mainstay of Islamophobia. Davis links to Rakib Ehsan's article, 'The establishment has not been robust enough against Muslim anti-Semitism', in a paper that is an expert on the topic - the *Jewish Chronicle*, the anti-Palestinian rag which the ruling class loves so much that they run it in permanent deficit. We are told that "The existence of 'parallel societies' in Britain carries significant social risks which must be treated with the utmost seriousness by the UK government."

It is not often that Muslims write for the *Jewish Chronicle*, so who is Dr Ehsan? Well, he is a research fellow at the far-right Henry Jackson Society, one of whose founders and directors is William Shawcross, who in 2012 said: "Europe and Islam is one of the greatest, most terrifying problems of our future".

Another key figure in the HJS is associate director Douglas Murray. According to Nafeez Ahmed,

Behind the facade of concern about terrorism is a network of extremist neoconservative ideologues, hell-bent on promoting discrimination and violence against Muslims and political activists who criticise Israeli and western government policies.<sup>43</sup>

Murray is the author of *The strange death of Europe*, which espouses the 'White Replacement Theory'. According to a review in *The Guardian*,

Chapter after chapter circles around the same repetitive themes: migrants raping and murdering and terrorising; paens to Christianity; long polemics about how Europe is too "exhausted by history" and colonial guilt to face another battle, and is thus letting itself be rolled

over by invaders fiercely confident in their own beliefs.<sup>44</sup>

Murray is a fan of Enoch Powell. The HJS seems perfectly appropriate in the circumstances for Mary Davis's course on anti-Semitism!

Another prominent figure in the HJS is Baroness Cox, former deputy speaker of the House of Lords. In 2007, she told the Jerusalem Summit (an anti-Palestinian network) that "Britain has been deeply infiltrated" by Islamist extremists, who have converted the country into "a base for training and teaching militant Islam".

The *crème de la crème* lies in Davis's 'selected reading' for the course. I will only pick out one suggestion, and that is *The definition of Anti-Semitism* by Kenneth L Marcus.

In October 2017, Donald Trump nominated Marcus to be Assistant Secretary of Education for Civil Rights. Marcus was endorsed by a variety of Zionist groups, but opposed by groups including the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights and Jewish Voice for Peace.

In May 2020, nine civil rights groups filed a complaint against Marcus. Ian Lustick, writing in *The Forward*, deplored both Marcus's appointment, and his use of his office, arguing that:

Marcus came to his position not to protect and expand learning opportunities in American educational institutions, but to threaten and narrow them, especially when it comes to open debate about Israel and the Palestinians. And his use of accusations of anti-Semitism in order to silence debate about Israel is being done with the sanction of the president of the United States.<sup>45</sup>

Marcus's views on anti-Semitism would seem to be perfectly in tune with Davis's course. After all, who better to learn from than genuine anti-Semites?

The Zionist Organization of America is on the far right. When Trump was elected president, it invited Stephen Bannon to be its guest of honour at its gala dinner. Even the staunchly Zionist Anti-Defamation League took fright. In the end a large picket by If Not Now kept Bannon away. However, in November 2018 Bannon was re-invited and this time he attended.

Bannon was the editor of *Breitbart*, magazine of the alt-right. Its founder, Richard Spencer, organised the Charlottesville march, whose main slogan was 'The Jews shall not replace us'. Also in attendance at the event was Sebastian Gorka, a Hungarian émigré and supporter of the neo-Nazi, Vitézi Rend.

## Policy

Davis's course would not be complete without a restatement of official Soviet policy. Davis boasts of the support it gave to the establishment of a Jewish state in November 1947. This calamitous decision, which its satellites obeyed, led to the establishment of the genocidal, ethnic cleansing state of Israel.

Stalin's cynical about-turn had nothing to do with the holocaust survivors and everything to do with his wish to see an end to British imperialism in the Middle East. Through this decision Stalin helped destroy the strong communist parties of the Middle East in Egypt, Syria, Iran and Iraq. Davis is oblivious to all of that.

The CPB demonstrates why it is a dinosaur incapable of adapting to changed circumstances. The party boasts its support for a two-state solution, when it is obvious to all that Zionism is not going to concede even a mini Bantustan. Two states has been the smokescreen behind which the

West Bank has been colonised.

Two states is an apartheid solution. The CPB has never accepted that Zionism is a settler-colonial movement incapable of making peace with the indigenous population. So, when Israel is seeking to complete its ethnic cleansing project in Gaza through genocidal means, the CPB shamefully decide to focus on 'anti-Semitism' instead!

Yours fraternally ●

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## PALESTINE



# One-state, two-state illusions

Winning the Hebrew working class in Israel is vital; so is wider regional change. Towards that end we need a minimum programme of demands, insists **Moshé Machover**

I am not going to talk about one state or two states in the abstract: that is, I am not saying that at no point in the future some kind of resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict may happen, or that it may perhaps take the form of one state, two states or any other blueprint. Instead I want to address the so-called two-state and one-state 'solutions', as they are presented today - in the form that they are advocated by various people currently. I am going to argue that both are illusions, but for different reasons.

The 'two-state solution' is illusory because, even in the unlikely event that it is somehow implemented, it cannot provide a resolution of the conflict. If you look at the actual details of what is proposed, they can only mean a continuation of that conflict, albeit in a somewhat different form - but, in any case, it is almost impossible to imagine that it will be implemented. As for the 'one-state solution', if certain of its versions were implemented - if they *could* be implemented under present circumstances, that is - then it *may* resolve the conflict. The problem with it is that the present set of conditions that prevail in the Middle East *do not allow* it to be implemented. I think, however, before looking at this or that proposed solution, it would be best to address three points.

Firstly, what are the minimum conditions that a resolution of the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinian people must satisfy? Secondly, I am going to say something about the *nature* of the conflict, which is very often obscured in most mainstream discussion, and, thirdly, I would like

to address the issue of the necessary preconditions for a proper, long-term resolution of the conflict; how a resolution may be achieved and by what route.

## Conditions

So, first of all, let me formulate briefly a sort of 'minimum programme' - or a set of minimum conditions as to what would count as a resolution of the conflict. The minimum conditions will include equal rights for all, including equal personal rights, and, secondly and importantly, equal national rights for both groups involved.

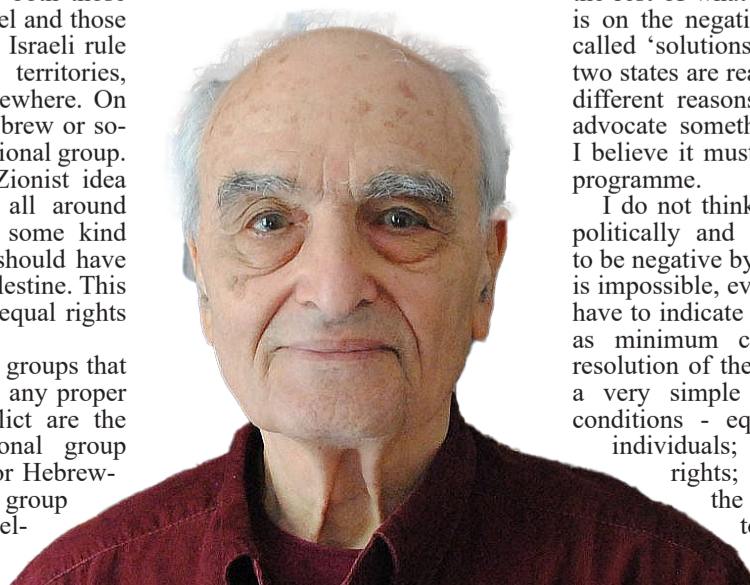
I would like to specify what I mean by the national groups involved, because this is often obscured to some extent by talking about 'Jews and Arabs' or 'Jews and Palestinians'. To be specific, on the one side we have the national Palestinian collective: that is to say, the Palestinian Arabs - both those who are citizens of Israel and those who are subjects under Israeli rule in the 1967 occupied territories, as well as refugees elsewhere. On the other side is the Hebrew or so-called Israeli Jewish national group. I exclude in this the Zionist idea of the Jewish people all around the world constituting some kind of national entity that should have some rights in Israel-Palestine. This is not what I mean by equal rights for two national groups.

I repeat: the national groups that should have equality in any proper resolution of the conflict are the Palestinian Arab national group and the Israeli Jewish or Hebrew-speaking national group actually present in Israel-Palestine.

Why do I insist

**Unlike South Africa, Israel is a colonial-settler project which necessarily involves the dispossession of the indigenous population**

**Moshé Machover: internal forces required**



on equal national rights for both groups? Simply because any situation in which one is denied equal rights, and is underprivileged or dominated by the other, cannot last and cannot be regarded as a resolution of the conflict. Any such configuration would provoke resistance - and the resistance would be met with repression, as it has in the past.

I would also add to this minimum programme the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland, from which they were expelled in the Nakba - this is quite simply an elementary right that is a basic concept of justice, as well as prescribed under international law: the right of refugees to return to their homeland. So anything that is far from (or even a little short of) this minimum set of conditions is simply not acceptable as a possible resolution of the conflict. Since the rest of what I am going to say is on the negative side - why so-called 'solutions' involving one or two states are really illusions, if for different reasons - if we want to advocate something positive, then I believe it must be this minimum programme.

I do not think it is a good idea, politically and educationally, just to be negative by saying this or that is impossible, even if it is true. You have to indicate what you advocate as minimum conditions for the resolution of the conflict, and here a very simple set of minimum conditions - equal rights for all individuals; equal national rights; and the right of the refugees to return to their homeland - is, I think, what we should

positively advocate. Anything that falls short of this does not qualify as a resolution of the conflict, whether or not it is possible.

## Nature of conflict

Secondly, I would like to say something about the nature of the conflict - which I think needs specifying, because there is a lot of misrepresentation and confusion about it.

If you look at the mainstream media, the way the conflict is represented is as two national groups fighting over some territory: that is to say, claiming possession of or rights over a piece of land. One of them may be stronger than the other (obviously Israel is a nuclear-armed state, has a formidable army, etc, and is by far the stronger of the two sides), but the conflict is presented as though it is between two nations like, let us say, France and Germany in the not so distant past - or the many other territorial wars fought in the last couple of centuries. Now the reason why this kind of misrepresentation abounds is because it has some surface plausibility and this is due to the fact that, although the conflict is basically a colonial one, as I shall argue, it is unique among all colonial situations, in that *both* sides - the colonisers and the colonised - have crystallised as national groups.

Let me explain what I mean by this: in modern times, since the end of colonial slavery there have been two kinds of colonisation. Kautsky used the following terminology.

First, a colonisation in which the main labour force, the main producers, were the indigenous people and in which the economy was based on their exploitation. This he called an 'exploitation colony', of



the type that was established mainly in Africa and was then abandoned - the most recently decolonised being South Africa. These are examples of where settlers built up their political economy on the exploitation of indigenous labour.

The other type, of which Australia is a very obvious example, is a colonial situation where the main direct producers were themselves settlers: that is to say, the colonial political economy was based on the self-work of some of the settlers. Kautsky called this type a 'work colony', but his terminology is based on what the settlers did: they actually worked and formed the main labour force. I prefer the term, 'exclusion colony', because it focuses on what the settlers did to the indigenous people: they excluded them.

In this type of colony the indigenous people were simply surplus to requirement. They were not needed, were regarded as a nuisance and indeed in some of these places they were completely or almost completely exterminated (eg, in Tasmania). As far as I know, there is no instance of an exploitation colony in which the settlers themselves formed a new nation: they remain a quasi-class. Eventually what happened was either the territory was decolonised and the settlers were ejected - as happened, for example, in Algeria, when the French settlers headed back to their metropolis and hardly any of them remained in the colony; or they may have merged with the indigenous population. This happened in several places, especially in Latin America: for example, in Brazil, which was partly a slave-based colony, but also one based on indigenous labour.

The general rule is that, where there was an exclusion colony, as in Australia and some parts of North America, the settlers formed the new nation. But in every case other than Palestine the indigenous people did not constitute a single national group. If you look at the situation in Australia, for example, the indigenous people consisted of a large number of groups with different languages - certainly nothing remotely like a single nation - and it was the same in North America.

The closest this ever came to happening outside Palestine was in New Zealand, where the indigenous people *did* have one common language. I am not an expert on New Zealand's history, but, as far as I know, while the indigenous people had one common language, they did not form anything like a single nation of the type existing in a modern state.

The only case in which not only the settlers form the new settler nation (as in Australia, North America and so on), but where the indigenous people also constitute a single nation, is Palestine. I will not go into the reasons here why this is the case: I simply want to state that this is evidently what happened. Because of this unique situation - where both settlers and indigenous people formed new nations - the colonial conflict appeared as a binary national conflict: one nation against the other. However, this is only the surface appearance.

It is not a *symmetric* conflict between two national groups, but it is - if you look at the actual history and nature of the conflict, as it has unfolded over more than 120 years - clearly a conflict between colonisers and indigenous people, which has assumed the misleading form of a binary national conflict. I think it is very important to keep this in mind, when considering what might count as a possible resolution of the conflict.

What conclusion do we draw from this clarification about the nature of the conflict? Since it is of a colonial nature, its resolution can only be one

of *decolonisation*: so we should look at any proposed resolution of the conflict in these terms. By the way, in this connection I would like to refer you to an article I wrote in the *Weekly Worker* entitled 'The decolonisation of Palestine',<sup>1</sup> which expands on some of the ideas that I will now discuss - including the exceptional nature of this colonial conflict.

## Two-state

Now let me address the two so-called 'solutions' that have been proposed - first of all, the two-state solution.

One of the many things that is wrong with it is precisely that it addresses the conflict on its superficial level, as a conflict between two national groups: let them each have a state of their own and that will resolve the conflict. Of course, this is based on a misapprehension of the real nature of the conflict. It is also a resolution that is in practice virtually impossible to envisage being implemented. Zionism is a work in progress, based on the claim of the Zionist regime (which is wed to the Zionist project of colonisation) to *complete* the colonisation of Palestine.

The Zionists claim to have a right to the whole of the territory of Palestine - at the very least between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. That applies to both main camps of the Zionist movement: the one originally led by Ben-Gurion, the so-called 'labor Zionism', which has now dwindled into insignificance; and the revisionist wing of Zionism, led by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, which is now the dominant power in Israel. Both of them claimed the right of the Jewish people - in their terms - to the whole of Palestinian territory in between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, except that the rightwing, revisionist Zionists also claimed a right to the *other* side of the Jordan - to what was the Emirate of Transjordan from 1921 to 1946 and is today the kingdom of Jordan. In principle revisionist Zionism claimed the right to colonise also the Transjordanian part of what used to be Palestine before it was partitioned by Churchill into Cisjordanian Palestine, under the British mandate, and the protectorate of trans-Jordanian Palestine.

Looked at like this, the Zionist project is still a work in progress, which is being extended into new domains through the colonisation by Israel of the West Bank; and the proposed, projected colonisation of the Gaza Strip is part of this project. That is to say to create a situation where Jews colonise the whole space between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. In terms of achieving this aim, Israel is not merely a product of Zionist colonisation, but an instrument, a means for its further extension and expansion. Israel has been colonising the West Bank furiously under governments dominated by labor Zionism and by the inheritors of revisionist Zionism.

At the same time Israel has been negotiating, on and off, and in bad faith, about the implementation of a two-state solution in response to pressure from the so-called 'international community', which really means the United States and its camp followers. Under labor Zionism the tactics was to engage in negotiations, and to drag them on endlessly by putting forward one condition after another in order to delay and prevent any kind of agreement about a two-state solution. This has been compared to two people negotiating over how to divide a pizza, while one of them is eating slice after slice!

And in fact if you look at the situation on the ground, there is nowhere where a Palestinian state alongside Israel could be instituted. There is simply no territory left which is contiguous and makes sense

as a territory for a state alongside Israel. Israeli governments have actually been very explicit in their outright opposition to any kind of Palestinian state, however emaciated or emasculated it might be. Benjamin Netanyahu is on record as saying simply 'no' to any Palestinian state, but no other major Zionist party has ever officially agreed to a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

People are under the false impression that former prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, in making the Oslo agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organisation, agreed to a two-state solution. That is quite false: that Oslo agreement had not a single word about a Palestinian state if you actually read its text. Moreover in presenting the Oslo agreement to the Knesset for ratification very shortly before he was assassinated, Rabin made it clear that what he was thinking of was not a Palestinian state, but "something less than a state" - in fact it could not be anything approaching a state in the proper sense of the word.

Currently there is very strong international pressure on Israel to implement a two-state solution, but it is very unlikely that the United States - certainly under Donald Trump, who is very probably going to be the next American president, or under the present regime of Joe Biden - is going to be able or willing to impose even the so-called Palestinian 'less than a state' on Israel. But suppose that the Biden idea of a two-state solution is somehow imposed on Israel, what would be the result? Well it would not be anything like an equal solution and it would be completely remote from the minimum conditions for a resolution of the conflict. You would have a nuclear-armed regional superpower, Israel, occupying most of the territory next to a demilitarised Palestine. The US has specified very explicitly that the Palestinian so-called state envisaged would be demilitarised.

So you would have a demilitarised Palestinian state with a big population of messianic Israeli settlers, because no Israeli regime is going to be able to evacuate the settlements from the West Bank. Such an evacuation would lead to civil war inside Israel, so no existing or prospective Israeli government could actually implement it. You would have the settlers remaining under so-called Palestinian state power, and they would do what they are doing now: that is to say, expand their settlements on Palestinian land and come into conflict with the Palestinian population surrounding them.

The Israeli army would still be in a position to come and intervene on their behalf, as it is doing now. In fact the situation that exists now between the settlers, backed by the Israeli army, would continue under this so-called two-state 'solution'. It would lead to what the occupation has led to in recent history: ie, what you would have in fact is not a two-state solution - you would have an Israeli state with an 'Indian reservation' next to it. That is what would result, even if that proposal could be implemented - which is, in any case, very, very unlikely. So, even in this unlikely outcome, what would be instituted is not two proper, sovereign states of equal power, but one Zionist state with a subsidiary next to it - a Bantustan, if you want to use the (somewhat inappropriate) South African analogy (I would prefer the analogy with the North American model of Indian reservations).

## One-state

What about the one-state 'solution'? Some versions that are being proposed actually do satisfy the minimum conditions I outlined earlier. They do presuppose the overthrow of the Zionist colonial regime, but the

question is: can this be implemented under present circumstances?

What I mean is that under the world system of capitalism that exists at the moment I think this is unlikely. Unfortunately, the overthrow of the Zionist regime - which is a precondition for the resolution of this colonial conflict - is, like the ecological crisis, something which cannot possibly be resolved under capitalism. The reasons for this I have elaborated on many occasions (I refer you to the article I cited, published in the *Weekly Worker* in June 2016). The problem with the decolonisation of Palestine is that the Zionist regime cannot be overthrown from the outside, as there is simply no force capable and willing to do so.

And internally the situation in this colonial conflict is very different from, for example, what existed in South Africa, in which the indigenous labour force, which was vital for the political economy of the country, was an internal force which had leverage to overthrow the apartheid regime. There is nothing like that in the existing situation in Israel-Palestine, where the overthrow of the Zionist regime cannot be realised without the participation and support of the Israeli masses themselves - primarily the Israeli Hebrew working class.

Under capitalism there is no way in which this overthrow of the Zionist regime can be expected to be supported by the Israeli Hebrew working class, for the simple reason that this would mean this class exchanging its present position of an exploited class, but with national privileges *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians, for a position of being a class still exploited by capital, but *without* the national privileges. This is not a deal that is likely to have support from the main force that can overthrow the Zionist regime.

The only chance of the Israeli working class supporting the overthrow of Zionism is in a situation in which we have a transformed region of the Arab east, which would offer the Israeli working class the exchange of its present position as an exploited class with national privileges to a class without national privileges, but being part of the *ruling* class of a socialist region. That is something that would make sense. I am certainly not saying that this is likely and is going to be realised any time soon. There is no sign of that - although we have seen a sort of preview of it, perhaps, in the big upheavals of the 2010-12 Arab Spring. But the actual overthrow of the current regimes in the region - the various reactionary Arab regimes as well as the Zionist regime - is not something that is going to be forthcoming very soon.

If we want to put forward something positive, then I think the best thing to do is to promote the minimum conditions for a resolution. I think it would be dishonest to advocate the one-state solution in the present situation, without saying that it presupposes a socialist revolution, which is not forthcoming in the immediate future; let alone the two-state solution, which is an illusion and a deception.

If we want to put forward something positive, then the message we can project is that of the minimum programme: we demand equal rights for all on the individual and national level, as well as the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland ●

This article is based on the talk Moshé Machover gave to Communist University in March 2024 - see video: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=62XWBz8v5gE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62XWBz8v5gE)

## Notes

1. June 23 2016: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1112/the-decolonisation-of-palestine](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1112/the-decolonisation-of-palestine).



## USA

# Ditch the constitution

America is in thrall to a dictatorship of the past. That Donald Trump is relying on the Supreme Court to establish his 'presidential immunity' from prosecution should act as a clarion call for mass action to achieve a genuine democracy, argues **Daniel Lazare**

Whatever its literary merits, Joseph Heller's satirical novel about World War II, *Catch-22*, at least introduced readers to a logical conundrum that is growing more and more relevant in terms of America's ongoing political meltdown.

It concerns an airman who pleads insanity to avoid going on a dangerous bombing mission. No problem, he is told. But there is a catch. The mission is so perilous that no sane person wants to go on it to begin with. So pleading insanity is the normal thing to do. It is proof that the airman is perfectly sane and must therefore go regardless. 'Catch-22' means he is screwed either way.

Whether or not the US Supreme Court judges weighing Donald Trump's claim of presidential immunity have read Heller, they are wrestling with essentially the same problem. During oral arguments last week, Trump's lawyer told the court that the once, and likely future, president cannot be charged with inciting insurrection, because, while he was impeached by the House of Representatives - a process akin to indictment - the Senate voted to acquit him by a vote of 57-43, which is 10 shy of the two-thirds majority required to convict.

## Unequal

Given that (1) the Senate is organised on the basis of equal state representation and (2) rightwing, pro-Trump states tend to be rural and under-populated, the 57 senators who voted in favour actually represented a significantly larger segment of US society - 62% to be exact. An overwhelming majority thus wanted to throw the book at Trump for attempting to overturn a democratic election back in January 2021. Yet an unchangeable 237-year-old constitution said no.

Now Trump is arguing that the Senate vote means he is also "immune" in the courts. Allowing him to stand trial, Trump attorney John Sauer argued on April 25, would violate the 'separation of powers', the constitution's most precious organising principle, by allowing politicians to threaten a president with judicial recrimination the moment he leaves office. Decision-making will collapse, since presidents will be so worried about going to jail that they will be afraid to make a single move.

"Could President George W Bush have been sent to prison for ... allegedly lying to Congress to induce war in Iraq?" Sauer asked. "Could president Obama be charged with murder for killing US citizens abroad by drone strike?"

Socialists say yes. But the ruling class says no, on the grounds that presidents must be free to drone or invade in order to perpetuate the capitalist system. Based on the lively judicial discussion at last week's hearing, it looks like the Supreme Court's six-three conservative majority agrees. Even if the justices do not toss the case out entirely, it appears that they will rule that Trump is entitled to at least partial immunity and that Tanya Chutkan, the federal judge presiding over the case in Washington, should scale the charges back accordingly. At the very least, the effect will be to delay



**The once and future president?**

the case until after the election, at which point Trump will be free to cancel the case entirely if he returns to office.

But this is where *Catch-22* comes in. If the constitution "requires impeachment to be a gateway to criminal prosecution", as justice Amy Coney Barrett, an arch-conservative Trump appointee, put it last week, then opponents must henceforth be careful to dot all I's and cross all T's by impeaching and convicting a president on Capitol Hill before prosecuting him in the courts. That is what the constitution seems to demand.

However, there is a catch here as well. As a lower-level federal appeals judge noted in January, impeachment is "quite a cumbersome process that requires the action of a whole branch of government that has a lot of different people involved".<sup>1</sup> Some 435 members of the House must gather and deliberate. A hundred senators must vote. Yet chances of a conviction are near zero, since a two-thirds Senate majority is all but unattainable.

So Congress must go through the motions, even though it is almost certain to fail. Americans must twiddle their thumbs, while waiting for the decisive action that never comes. Whether or not Congress votes to impeach, justice will be denied and a runaway chief executive will be emboldened. *Catch-22* says that "we, the people" are screwed.

## Democracy?

Constitutionally justified or not, the effect of such 'gateway' theory is to remove the last constitutional constraints on the executive branch at a time when newspapers are filled with speculation about the dictatorial plans Trump has in mind. If 'the Supremes' decide in favour of at least some degree of presidential immunity, there will be little to hold him back. He will be free to do whatever he wants with minimal pushback from the other branches.

The result is not an electoral dictatorship, as democracy is sometimes described, but the opposite: ie, electoral democracy turned on its head. Despite winning the Electoral College by 304-227, Trump was a minority president in 2016, since he otherwise lost by nearly three million popular votes. Considering that the contest now largely revolves around seven battleground states that together

account for less than 20% of the US population - Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin - the same could well happen in November.

If so, it will be with the assistance and encouragement of other minoritarian institutions that increasingly dominate the US system. These include a Senate that allows a majority that lives in just 10 megastates to be outvoted four to one by the minority in the other 40; and the Supreme Court. Of the court's six conservative members, for instance, five were nominated by minority presidents (ie, John Roberts and Samuel Alito by George W Bush; and Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Barrett by Trump), while four were confirmed by senators representing a minority of the population (ie, Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, Barrett, and Clarence Thomas).

Minority rule has thus spread from the Senate and the Electoral College to the Supreme Court and, from there, back to the presidency. Trump would never have struck out in such an authoritarian direction if an increasingly undemocratic constitutional structure did not encourage him at every step of the way.

Is there a way out of this mess? *Catch-22* says no, since a finely constructed constitutional structure has seemingly closed off all escape routes. But reality says yes, since there is no reason that a sovereign people should have to submit to a system of government that is undermining their rule.

But Democrats will be the last to lead such a struggle, since they have not only gone along with America's growing constitutional dictatorship, but have cheered it on at every step.

The process started in 1937 when the Supreme Court dropped its ultra-conservative opposition to Franklin D Roosevelt's New Deal and decided that the president had power to regulate wages and working conditions after all. This was the "switch in time that saved nine" (to quote the humourist, Cal Tinsley), which transformed the court from "nine old men" (to quote FDR) into sacred guardians of the republic. Constitution worship reached new heights during the Warren court of the 1950s and 60s, before attaining absolute apotheosis during the Watergate scandal of 1972-74, in which Richard Nixon met his downfall.

"My faith in the constitution is whole, it is complete, it is total, and I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction, of the constitution," Barbara Jordan, a black Democrat from Texas, declared during the Watergate hearings - this about a constitution that reinforced slavery before the Civil War and strengthened Jim Crow after. Elizabeth Holtzman, a liberal Democrat from Brooklyn, excoriated the president for never stopping to ask himself, "What does the constitution say? What are the limits of my power? What does the oath of office require of me? What is the right thing to do?" Morality, wisdom, and the constitution were one. Faced with the threat posed by Trump, Nancy Pelosi, the 84-year-old Democratic leader, condemned him for failing to subordinate himself to "the beautiful, exquisite, brilliant, genius of the constitution",<sup>2</sup> while a White House spokesman said in 2022 that criticising America's "sacrosanct" plan of government in any way whatsoever is "anathema to the soul of our nation and should be universally condemned".<sup>3</sup>

Presumably, the same applies to anyone who suggests that a Senate based on equal state representation is less than democratic. Ditto anyone who suggests that the impeachment process is in need of an overhaul or that a document dating from the age of silk knee breeches and wooden teeth is long past its sell-by date. All such notions should be damned, and their authors placed in the stocks. Rather than thinking about why US government is so dysfunctional and undemocratic, Americans should switch their minds off and obey.

## Rebellion

Nonetheless, there are signs that Americans are beginning to rebel. Elected officials still shower the constitution with hymns of praise, but they have no choice, since it requires them to swear to "preserve, protect and defend the constitution" as a condition of taking office.

But the general public is less constrained. *The New York Times* recently published a spirited op-ed by Aziz Rana, a law professor at Boston College, arguing that "liberals should not celebrate the constitution as our best bulwark against Mr Trump", because the document "has made our democracy almost unworkable".<sup>4</sup> After publishing *How democracies*

*die*, a bestseller in 2018, a couple of Harvard professors named Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt have published another book entitled *Tyranny of the minority*, dealing with the constitution's growing anti-democratic turn. It too has turned into a runaway bestseller.<sup>5</sup>

Two or three disgruntled academics do not a movement make. But neither does a broader shift in public opinion, since the constitution is dead set against public opinion by design. By requiring approval by two-thirds of each house plus three-fourths of the states, the amending clause set forth in article 5 allows 13 states representing as little as 4.4% of the population to veto any structural reform, no matter how minor. Public opinion be damned, in other words. The constitution says the people must wrestle with a series of intractable constitutional problems - the right to bear arms, a woefully malapportioned Senate, an unworkable system of checks and balances, etc - forever, whether they like it or not. No appeal is possible against an absolute dictatorship of the past. The will of the founders shall prevail, because legislating for the ages is what founders do. After all, who are we, the living, to say otherwise?

But no society has to submit to a plan of government that is against its interests. As no less an authority than the Declaration of Independence, adopted 11 years prior to the constitution, says,

... whenever any form of government becomes destructive ... it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

This is the revolutionary predicament that America now faces. To reform an undemocratic constitution, the masses must act not within it but from without. The specific mechanism is not a constitutional convention, as outlined in article 5 (a non-starter, since the article says that Wyoming and a dozen other mini-states will still be able to veto whatever it comes up with). Rather, it is a constituent assembly in which the people as a whole refashion the constitutional structure in its entirety, not according to some ancient two-thirds, three-fourths rule, but democratically through a straight-up majority vote.

Society can no longer rely on a piece of parchment that made little sense when it was drafted in 1787 and makes even less now. Led by the working class, it must democratise itself directly on its own ●

## Notes

1. [www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/dc-circuit-court-of-appeals-oral-argument-u-s-v-trump-1-10-24-transcript](http://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/dc-circuit-court-of-appeals-oral-argument-u-s-v-trump-1-10-24-transcript).
2. See 'America the robotic' *Weekly Worker* January 24 2020: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1283/america-the-robotic](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1283/america-the-robotic).
3. [www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/12/03/trump-constitution-truth-social](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/12/03/trump-constitution-truth-social).
4. [www.nytimes.com/2024/04/26/opinion/constitution-trump.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/26/opinion/constitution-trump.html).
5. D Ziblatt and S Levitsky *Tyranny of the minority* New York 2023. For a less than enthusiastic review, see [danielazare.com/2023/10/24/how-democracies-die-version-2-0](http://danielazare.com/2023/10/24/how-democracies-die-version-2-0).



## SCOTLAND

# Foibles, fantasies and failure

For too long much of the left has tailed Scottish nationalism. Yet Humza Yousaf's fall demonstrates that control is still exercised by Westminster. But it is not just about the legal limits of devolution: there is economic reality too, writes **Mike Macnair**

**O**n Monday April 29 Humza Yousaf announced that he will step down as Scottish first minister and as leader of the Scottish National Party. (The relationship is not as simple as it is in the UK parliament, because the Scottish first minister is formally elected by the Scots parliament, while the UK prime minister is appointed by the monarch on the basis of 'conventions'.)

The announcement has been predictable since, on Thursday April 25, Yousaf abruptly ended the SNP's coalition deal with the Scottish Green Party. The Scottish Tories promptly put down a motion of no confidence in Yousaf. Labour, the Greens and Alba's sole member announced that they would vote no confidence. Meanwhile, Labour also put down a motion of no confidence in the Scottish government as a whole. If passed, this would pretty much inevitably trigger an election to the Scottish parliament, since a Tory-Labour-LibDem-Green-Alba coalition, which would be needed for a majority (unless the SNP actually split) is seriously implausible. The Tories withdrew their motion in the light of Yousaf announcing his intended resignation, and the Greens announced that they would vote against Labour's no-confidence motion. On May 1 this was duly defeated 70-58.<sup>1</sup>

This will, in effect, give the SNP time to elect a new leader. The front runners are said to be Kate Forbes, representing the Christian right wing of the SNP (opposed to gay marriage, children outside marriage, trans rights, and pro-business and anti-green) and Nicola Sturgeon's former deputy, John Swinney (unsuccessful SNP leader in 2000-04), as the 'continuity candidate'. *The Times* on Tuesday April 30 carried a double-page story in support of a potential Forbes victory (or an SNP electoral defeat) under the headline, 'Scotland's business leaders crying out for help' (readers may imagine me demonstratively air-playing an imaginary micro-violin).

If we ask why Yousaf broke the coalition agreement, the answer seems to be that the Greens were likely to abandon it themselves after a consultation with their membership, in the light of the SNP's abandonment on April 18 of its 'net zero' target of a 75% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030. By taking the initiative, Yousaf at least may have expected to get control of the timing, and perhaps may also have hoped to 'face down' the Green MSPs and force them to accept a coalition deal without either the carbon emissions target or the bottle and can recycling scheme, already abandoned in the face of packaging companies' lobbying at Westminster. Behind the decision to abandon the targets was the March 20 announcement by the



**Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon: lucky, not brilliant**

all-UK Climate Change Committee that the targets were "no longer credible".<sup>2</sup>

The media 'narrative' has largely been that Humza Yousaf is personally incompetent as a politician. This is typical media personality politics, for which politicians are either brilliant leaders, incompetents or sinister villains. This personality-cult politics reflects the general principle of 'one-man-management' in bourgeois politics - as well as in modern monarchies, presidencies and so on.<sup>3</sup> Its purpose is to enforce corruption (easier in one-man-management regimes) and promote cronyism.

### Beyond

The reality is that Yousaf's position was already impossible for reasons beyond his control. The Tory party and its press turned on the SNP with the witch-hunting culture war round the Gender Recognition Act in early 2023, and have kept on with it since (most recently with the 'hate crime' legislation coming into force<sup>4</sup>).

The allegations of misuse of funds against Nicola Sturgeon and her husband, Peter Murrell, which originated in an SNP internal party row, hit mainstream media around the same time and have continued to crop up episodically since, with Murrell being actually charged with embezzlement on April 18.<sup>5</sup> What they are actually about is the financial manipulations involved in the SNP's pursuit of a second independence referendum against the UK government's veto, in face of the UK Supreme Court's decision that Scotland does *not* have the right to self-determination (on impeccable far-left grounds, that only oppressed countries have the right to self-determination and Scotland is not one)<sup>6</sup> and SNP unwillingness to actually go for illegality: resulting in murky finances.

More recently, the Tories have deployed the UK Single Market Act to insist on consistency across the UK of bottle and can deposit schemes, forcing delays in the interests of the

party towards a policy that presented it as a modernising European (or perhaps 'Nordic') social-democratic party, reflecting influence from the ideas of 'old New Left' writer, Tom Nairn. Independence was to be independence *within the European Union*.

This conception set the agenda for the devolved administration from the time that the SNP displaced Labour at Holyrood in 2007. It was to be regionalist (in the terms of the then current European Union ideas) and was to offer a *left* alternative to Labour. But not on the economic issues: on these, Salmond aimed rather for 'Celtic Tiger' status, alongside the Republic of Ireland. But on *social* issues the SNP was to march just a little ahead of Westminster down the common path to 'European modernisation' and rights that had been set by Blair and his co-thinkers already before 1997.

The 2008 crash put an end to the 'Celtic Tiger' idea. Cameron's 2014 referendum fraud defeated the idea of immediate independence, but, because his English nationalist knife in Labour's back on the day after the referendum smashed Scottish Labour, it gave the SNP the *appearance* of a large mass support that could allow pushing on with Salmond-esque politics and hoping for a second chance at an independence referendum.

In reality, however, Cameron's plebiscitary demagoguery *in itself*, and his English nationalist knife-artistry, reflected the beginnings of a turn away from the Tory adaptations to Blairism of Cameron's early years. Instead, nationalist demagoguery was to win the Brexit referendum *against* Cameron, and with it fell too the idea of 'independence within Europe' (unless the French and Germans had been prepared to make serious mischief for Britain by sponsoring Scottish unilateral independence). And with the Brexit referendum, the Tory drive towards imitating US Republican culture-wars frauds was on. The fall of Humza Yousaf is the latest stage in this Tory fraudulent operation to take down the Nats - and at the end of the day to get rid of devolution altogether, along with 'human rights' and the rest of Blair's innovations.

### Least resistance

The left has been characterised in the recent past by pursuing the "line of least resistance", as István Mészáros put it in his 1995 book *Beyond Capital*. But this "line of least resistance" offers at most the creation of exposed salients, which our enemy (capital and its states) can attack from all sides. More commonly, pursuing the line of least resistance leads to defeat at a very early stage.

The reason for this is that the left, pursuing the line of least resistance, *concedes* the right of capital to rule, but hopes merely for partial concessions. The history of the workers' movement shows very clearly that capital is led to make major concessions not by concessions to it, but by *threats* to its 'right' and ability to rule. And that requires the left to look beyond what seems to work right now and aim for what is needed.

Left support for Scots nationalism (and Welsh nationalism, and, and ...) has been precisely such a policy of pursuing the line of least resistance. It was always delusive, for the reason given above: the devolved administrations are financially dependent on the Westminster

government - partly straightforwardly because of population: 57.1 million in England, 5.4 million in Scotland, 3.1 million in Wales, 1.9 million in the Six Counties.<sup>11</sup> But it is also because of the fact that London and the south-east (in other terms, the London travel-to-work area) generates 36% of UK tax income.<sup>12</sup>

This role of London and the south-east reflects, as I have argued before, the radical dependence of the UK in the recent past on financial services supplied to the rest of the world, and on simply borrowing on the strength of being a tax haven, in order to pay for the food that we eat and the rest of the stuff we use.<sup>13</sup>

### Play games

The financial dependence of the devolved governments on Westminster allows the latter to play games with them: Cameron bigged up the SNP in 2014 in order to defeat Labour in 2015; more recently, Tory demagoguery has been aimed against the SNP (and the Welsh devolved government) in order to return unaccountable power to Westminster and crush possible sources of ideological opposition. But let us suppose, for a moment, that Scotland and Wales had *actually obtained* independence. The reality is that the financial dependence on Westminster would still be there - unless some other country was prepared to subsidise 'independent' Scotland and Wales.

To deal with issues of inequality, to plan for health service provision, for housing, for measures to deal with human-induced climate change, and so on - all these need *common action of the working class on a European scale* to break out of the coercive power of global capital and the capitalist states. 'Left' versions of nationalism produce, by contrast, complete ineffectiveness ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

### Notes

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2. www.theccc.org.uk/2024/03/20/scotlands-2030-climate-goals-are-no-longer-credible.
3. See 'Stuff "single person" leadership' *Weekly Worker* May 4 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1441/stuff-single-person-leadership.
4. 'Devolution non-recognition' *Weekly Worker* February 2 2023 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1428/devolution-non-recognition); 'Further criminalising speech', April 18 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1487/further-criminalising-speech).
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11. www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2022.
12. www.ons.gov.uk/economy/governmentpublicsectorandtaxes/publicsectorfinance/articles/countryandregionalpublicsectorfinances/financialyearending2020.
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## Communist University

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### End of line

Back in the 1970s-80s we on the left used to refer to the SNP as 'Tartan Tories'. Their base was mainly in rural and suburban constituencies, and their politics were fairly straightforwardly socially conservative. Forbes would represent a turn in this direction, and it is easy to imagine a Forbes-ised SNP in coalition with the Tories in Holyrood against a revived Scottish Labour.

Alex Salmond as SNP leader in 1990-2000 and 2004-14 steered the



## NATIONALISM

# Sir Keir flies the flag

Labour told candidates to mark St George's Day 'with enthusiasm'. Then there was the England jersey furore. **Carl Collins** examines the role of hegemony in today's culture wars

The word 'hegemony' derives from an Ancient Greek term meaning to 'dominate over'.<sup>1</sup> In the historical context, a hegemon was a force - most typically a state - that had a significant military advantage over another state or area and its population. Simply, if the weaker or smaller group failed to comply with the demands of the hegemon, they would be dominated militarily.

To simplify the theory of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, a class can also take the form of a hegemon, whilst using the state and its institutions to maintain the power relation of 'dominance' or 'coercion' over society.<sup>2</sup> This is followed by an indefinite period of achieving and maintaining 'consensus' (a sort of acquiescence to being dominated) through force, ideology or a combination of the two.

Marx and Engels explained this relationship in terms of 'base' and 'superstructure', which permeate and reinforce each other: ie, the mode of production determines the way the ruling class enforces its rule, in schools, through media, laws, etc. Those rules, laws and ideology in turn prop up the current capitalist mode of production:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will: namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

In relation to Britain, the point at which the dominant or hegemonic power - the ruling class - achieved power militarily, or by force, is a matter for debate. It may indeed be that this cannot be determined as happening within a particular period or event, if at all. What is certain, however, is that there is a ruling class - the capitalist class - and through the use of the state it is continually asserting its hegemonic power over society to achieve 'consensus' (in the Gramscian sense) amongst the population. Whilst open force is still used where needed - through the armed forces, the police, etc - the preferred contemporary mechanism of the ruling class is the dissemination of its ideology through peaceful, more subtle means. This includes the continual manipulation of what can be described as 'culture'. This is what Gramsci called 'cultural hegemony'.

### Ideology

A recent *Guardian* article claimed that Sir Keir Starmer had written to parliamentary candidates, demanding they mark St George's Day "with enthusiasm" and "fly the flag"<sup>4</sup>. As many on the left noted, this was an attempt to conform to what the ruling class has decided should be a



St George's Day: nation, not class

societal 'norm': pride in the flag and patriotism, irrespective (or indeed in spite of) any criticisms 'others' may have - be they simply about the flag itself (widely associated as it is with the far right) or what the flag symbolises and represents to them: nationalism, colonialism, etc.

The continued (at present, exaggerated) use of such symbols in certain contexts is designed to further the ideology the ruling class desires it to represent. If you create an enlarged feeling of patriotism, you can much more easily justify war, austerity - any number of things - as being 'in the national interest'. What is more, it creates the conditions by which the ideology begins to reinforce itself and be expanded upon. For instance, it is much easier to connect the changing of the design of the St George Cross on the England football jersey as being 'woke' - a common term in today's culture war - if certain 'feelings' are built up around the cross itself.

For me, many aspects of the 'culture war' - such as the England jersey 'furore' - demonstrate more the underlying weakness of the Tory Party, desperately looking for any short-term tactic to help it cling on to office, than a systematic furthering of an ideology in hegemonic terms. That said, there is a danger that, over time, such issues can start to dominate political discourse and in turn begin to resonate with the population. Starmer's Labour Party (being ever ready to put itself on the rightwing side of culture war issues) and a supine media happy to

dedicate endless column inches, can lead to a situation where the ruling class - the hegemon - is obliged to accommodate prevailing views in order to preserve its overall, long-term dominance over society. Such concessions to contemporary issues can be accommodated much more easily if they pose no danger of challenges to the generalised ideological status quo.

### Long-term

More often, however, it is the ideology of the ruling class that is passed down to society, rather than the other way around. And it is the more long-term, structural form of the culture war, the 'cultural hegemony', that I think should be better understood by the left, so that we can successfully challenge it. Yes, engage with the ruling class in the contemporary culture war, defending and proposing progressive views, but never lose sight of the more generalised, long-term ideological class war still taking place.

In 1980, whilst introducing the Housing Bill to the House of Commons, Michael Heseltine stated the following in his speech:

There is in this country a deeply ingrained desire for home ownership. The government believe that this spirit should be fostered. It reflects the wishes of the people, ensures the wide spread of wealth through society, encourages a personal desire to improve and modernise one's own home, enables parents to

accrue wealth for their children and stimulates the attitudes of independence and self-reliance that are the bedrock of a free society.<sup>5</sup>

Here we see the ruling class disseminating the general ideology of private ownership, against a backdrop of selling off public housing stock. It tells people, you are not 'normal', or not part of 'normal society', if you have no desire to own a home, as that should be an "ingrained desire". It asserts that home ownership produces wealth and that you do not have your children's best interests at heart if you do not own your own home.

This message, this ideology, is then further disseminated by any means possible. One of those means is through the popular media (often disguised as entertainment).

Following the Housing Bill being pushed through an institution of the state (ie, parliament), the ideology then finds itself introduced into TV programmes. We see the appearance of shows about the importance of buying a home; of the merits of buying a second home; buying a home in the country; a home abroad; swapping your home with somebody else for a week, etc, etc. The 'idea' of home ownership is portrayed as a lifestyle choice, to be desired and accepted even in television as 'the norm'. Further programmes force home the issue, insidiously or transparently, so that they filter into people's consciousness. Cookery programmes no longer show women

how to be better housewives (à la Fanny Craddock) - instead we have young, cool chefs in their expensive kitchens with all the mod-cons, emphasising the ideology of home ownership and the accompanying lifestyle as desirable.

Endless further examples can be given, if one looks hard enough. Shows such as *The apprentice* and *Dragon's den* delude people with the illusion of 'entrepreneurial spirit' being enough to open up a path of wealth, promoting capitalist ideology. Similar shows are regurgitated ad nauseam. The repetitiveness itself serves a further purpose - not only reinforcing the ideology, but creating a space of solace for the viewers in common, predictable, comforting outcomes. Furthermore, it serves the purpose of stymying more creative forms of media that might challenge the status quo, which usually manifest themselves through 'independent' producers who, in TV, are being hit by a lack of commissioning by broadcasting companies.<sup>6</sup>

### Programmes

What about those programmes that are not susceptible to any deeper meaning or ideology at work? Well, they simply act as 'bread and circuses' for the masses. We laugh at the poor souls making fools of themselves on *Britain's got talent*, hopelessly trying to achieve a quick route to fame and fortune, and never questioning whether such fame and fortune really is what should be desired.

Importantly, the ideas of the ruling class simultaneously permeate down through other institutions of the state, not just popular media. Universities now include sections on 'employability' built into course modules, showing them to be nothing more than a conveyor belt to exploitation in the capitalist market, rather than harnessing creative thought - which could challenge the status quo. The introduction of market forces into wider education through academisation creates a gateway for these ideas to be placed into an already pro-capitalist curriculum by the highest bidder. It is now quite common that primary school children are made to design and produce things in class that are then sold 'on the market' (ie, to their schoolmates) - an example of cultural hegemony being forced into the minds of young children.

Gramsci theorised that, in addition to what he called the 'war of manoeuvre' - the overthrow of the existing hegemon - there exists the 'war of position': ie, the winning over of a larger number of people to the view of the existing hegemon.<sup>7</sup> The state of contemporary political discourse makes one feel that 'the left' in Britain and internationally has a lot more positioning to do in order to make manoeuvring possible ●

### Notes

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2. [www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/prison\\_notebooks](http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/prison_notebooks).
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# REVIEW



# Raising no questions

Alex Garland (writer and director) *Civil war* general release

In 1969 cinematographer Haskell Wexler brought out a fiction-cum-documentary film, *Medium cool*.

This followed a media photographer negotiating a path through the conflicts and some of the US political groups of the 1960s, including shots taken outside the Democratic Party national convention in Chicago. It was there that Wexler found himself filming an actual police confrontation with young demonstrators opposing the war in Vietnam. His main theme, however, was the question of news photography and whether this profession distanced its practitioners from their subjects. Did journalists need to fully understand violent events in front of them? Or was clicking the shutter enough? A reviewer of the time called the movie a “cinematic Guernica ... exploding into fragmented bits of hostility”.<sup>2</sup>

*Civil war* is rather different: it invites us into a United States of the possible near-future that is torn by internal armed conflict, fragmented into groups big and small, and at least one lone sniper. The film is not so much an analysis as the offering of an experience. The premise is: *what if* the shining cities and rolling countryside of the USA were subject to a war, as in Syria or Somalia?

One of the largest rebel armies is the Western Forces, born of an alliance between the pink and blue states of Texas and California (or maybe just their billionaires and merged militias). The WF are about to head for Washington DC to capture the president, claimed to be a three-term “dictator”, but in effect a bog-standard politician. A small crew of press

reporters decide to set out from riotous Brooklyn to join them and try to get to ‘The Chief’, for perhaps his last speech. They are Lee Smith (Kirstin Dunst), a renowned war photographer, Joel (Wagner Moura), a Reuters journalist from Florida, and Sammy (Stephen McKinley Henderson), a veteran writer on the *New York Times*.

They all perform the war journalist differently. Lee is not so much indifferent as shattered: she barely wants to look at fighting, let alone take pictures, while Joel is eager to get a scoop: an interview with the president. Sammy, the veteran, though humane, is no longer impressed by anyone’s claims or justifications. Managing to join them is Jessie (Cailee Spaeny), a young woman who idolises Lee and aspires to be a war photographer too. She changes the most during the story. At one point she does not even look over at a friend who has been shot, so intent is she on going forward to capture one more ‘great’ photo.

This civil war has several rival fighters. The Western Forces, with its tanks and helicopters, is the one that looks most like a regular army. Others we see are informal paramilitaries and lone individuals. The press team meet all these along their way to the Capitol, as well as ‘uninvolved’ people, in a quiet town and a refugee camp. In the best scene, an irregular in fatigues and pink sunglasses (Jesse Plemons) does not take kindly to you if you are not “from America”. The tension peaks as to how the reporters will survive his deadly xenophobia.

We are not prompted to identify with any side. The president in DC is treated with contempt, but no one

leader in particular is suggested. He turns out to be just a feeble human being: he gets his speeches written, but his own words are what you might hear from anyone. There are many archetypes: the ‘soldier grunt’; the ‘capable woman who feeds you’; the ‘rednecks’. But most are isolated, “fragmented bits of hostility”. This time, though, they have big guns or they are hiding out. There is lots of action, with firepower and explosions of fire, but it is no superhero movie. Who can you cheer or gasp at in admiration? There is no reason to want anyone defeated. Nor do I think the anguish of this film will stop many in the US from “fermenting division”, like pursuing or defending Donald Trump.

Some critics have protested about the lack of political definition in the movie. In fact, it is more like an anti-war film than a ‘fascist vs anti-fascist’ movie; it is more in the tradition of *All quiet on the western front* or *Slaughterhouse five*. In *Civil war* the most prominent soldiers, the Western Forces, are not shown in a particularly bad light - they do not massacre civilians. Nor is there any allusion as to what could have possibly united Texas and California. The president may be a “dictator”, but you do not see much evidence of it.

These two opposing groups - the WF and the Washington defenders - might be interpreted by some as ‘warriors of liberty versus the king’, that simplest of historic American contrasts. Unlike in World War II or Vietnam war films though, spectators are not cognisant with a specific background. Some figures could be

associated with Trump or Biden, but it is very much the spectators’ choice. What we are mainly shown is a disintegrated and tooled-up society in which an anxious middle class group follows and takes news photos without choosing any side. Racism rears its ugly head, but of the broadest kind: xenophobia from the crazy in pink glasses. Everybody is either shooting or surviving. Nobody has any idea of a different society - either the kind without non-whites or minus billionaires.

The film is a thriller with lots of surprises and a feeling for the killed, but without a ‘good guy/bad guy’ narrative. It does not go very deep - it does not even allude to the antagonisms created by the withdrawal of concessions made to the working class post-1945. This is one of the primary roots of antagonism now, where those who felt themselves entitled find that they have been degraded and marginalised, but regard the source of the problem as migrants and modernisers.

That would be something to confront or at least wonder at. But here we have the middle class riding alongside - either working at being ‘professional’ or numbed into impotence; no longer interested in ‘reasons why’. *Civil war* gives you exciting, yet apolitical, action. Unlike *Medium cool*, it raises no questions ●

Mike Belbin

## Notes

1. Renowned for his 1967 film, *In the heat of the night*.
2. [www.nytimes.com/1969/08/28/archives/real-events-of-68-seen-in-medium-coolhaskell-wexler-wrote-and.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1969/08/28/archives/real-events-of-68-seen-in-medium-coolhaskell-wexler-wrote-and.html)

# 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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# Death in academia

Oxford University has finally closed down its Future of Humanity Institute. Paul Demarty explores the social limits of AI and the long-termist utilitarian ideology promoted by Nick Bostrom

On the face of it, it is a funny time to shut down a research project like the Future of Humanity Institute (FHI).

For the last couple of years, after all, we have had a succession of flashy product launches in the world of artificial intelligence. The media is abuzz with speculation about who is going to be made redundant by 'generative' AI - essentially programmes which produce various kinds of cultural output, given a prompt. That in turn has led to the revival of worries about what would happen if we got to general AI - machines that were just plain old intelligent, like us, but perhaps more so. It has been a staple of science fiction for many years (most famously perhaps in the *Terminator* film franchise), but its most compelling non-fictional treatment is the 'paperclip maximiser' thought experiment, in which a paperclip company directs a super-intelligent AI to increase production, leading inexorably to the extermination of the human race in pursuit of the traces of iron in our bodies.

The author of that experiment is Nick Bostrom, a Swedish philosopher and the director of the FHI. It is he who, along with his various colleagues, received his P45 on April 16, when Oxford University finally flipped the switch and shut the whole thing down.

It is difficult to get a clear sense of why. The outgoing FHI cites "headwinds" from the broader faculty of philosophy in which it sat. What kind of "headwinds"? Perhaps political: Bostrom is not the only individual to have suffered from youthful online indiscretions coming back into the public eye. In a 1996 posting on an obscure listserv, he affirmed his belief that, as a matter of empirical fact, "blacks are more stupid than whites", going on to lament that "For most people ... the sentence seems to be synonymous with: 'I hate those bloody n-----!!!!'" (sic).

This was discovered last year, and he immediately apologised: "It does not accurately represent my views, then or now. The invocation of a racial slur was repulsive." Exactly what *would be* an accurate representation of his views on the matter was not something he chose to divulge. He has also articulated the common eugenicist worry that lower-IQ persons are breeding at a higher rate than their intellectual betters.

The institute was already in trouble long before that, however. It has enjoyed generous donations from people who are, let us say, in bad odour at the moment, including Elon Musk and the disgraced cryptocurrency fraudster, Sam Bankman-Fried. Even before Musk's strange political transformation into a gibbering far-right lunatic and Bankman-

Fried's downfall, however, Oxford had frozen hiring for the institute and restricted fundraising. The question is then, perhaps, whether the strange interdisciplinary brew offered by Bostrom and company truly fit the profile of Oxonian philosophy, which has a rather fusty and sectarian commitment to the highly-technical end of the Anglophone analytic school of the discipline.

Few of the academics working at FHI, by the end of things, were even professional philosophers at all. They were fellow travellers in a particular ideology that stemmed, in turn, from a couple of audacious propositions originating in utilitarian ethics. These have come to be known as effective altruism and long-termism.

## Utilitarianism

Here, it is worth reciting the basics of utilitarianism itself - a creed that arose in the French, Scottish and finally English outposts of the Age of Enlightenment. Present in French thinkers like Claude Adrien Helvétius (whose books were denounced and burned in the dying days of the *ancien régime*), and to a lesser extent even in David Hume, it was the Englishman Jeremy Bentham who gave it its classic extended treatment. Crudely speaking, moral action was to be judged not by the intrinsic features of particular types of acts, but by their effects. The standard was the avoidance of pain and achievement of pleasure - we should aim to create the greatest good for the greatest number. Bentham produced a more complex model of this, which he called the "hedonic calculus".

There are many potential difficulties with this general principle, which have been discussed at inordinate length in the literature. One *particular* kind of problem is relevant here: how exactly is one to calculate the pleasure or pain generated? How far do we have a moral duty to truly maximise our hedonic output, so to speak?

Effective altruism arose as a specification that our overall conduct should be oriented to optimise our capacity to behave altruistically. We should ensure that resources expended on some philanthropic initiative are well-spent, by examining the results scientifically, so far as is possible. There is also nothing wrong, as Peter Mandelson famously said, with people getting filthy rich - after all, it is difficult to fund good works if you are flat broke.

Long-termism is, in theory, a separate proposition, but it tends to travel together with effective altruism. The problem with Bentham's original hedonic calculus (and later variations) is its bias towards the present. It does not take

into account the flourishing or suffering of future generations. Take the classic moral dilemma known as the 'trolley problem', where one has the choice to allow an out-of-control tram to kill five people on the track ahead, or divert it onto a side track to kill one person. The obvious utilitarian answer is to divert the tram. But suppose you knew that, if *five* people died, that would cause enough of an outcry to shame the city authorities into improving safety throughout the network, possibly saving hundreds of lives in the future. *Then* you would have to leave the trolley on its original course - and you would be thinking like a long-termist!

But the actually existing long-termists have rather grander vistas before them than that. What about changes now that will affect millions (or even billions) of people in the future? What, in particular, about the FHI's specialism of "existential risk": low-probability (we hope ...) events like all-out nuclear war or AI apocalypse? How is a one percent chance of human extinction to be 'priced', compared to the certainty of suffering in the present day? The long-termists attempt to produce meaningful heuristics to compare these sorts of outcomes.

There are objections to this whole project. One, on the face of it, relatively minor matter is that it seems to involve a reversion to the single most foolish proposition of Aristotle's ethics: that it was quite impossible for anyone other than well-brought-up gentlemen to acquire the virtues he proposed as essential to political life. In place of the virtues, we have instead these statistical conjectures, but it is difficult to imagine expecting the man on the Clapham omnibus making much use of them, all

things being equal.

That is the more fundamental problem: "all things being equal" - but do we suppose they will be, over centuries? A one percent chance of (say) nuclear war - under the present arrangements of states in the world system? Under consolidation into the rival empires foreseen by George Orwell's *1984*? After a descent into generalised warlordism? One then needs a perfect calculus for predicting social change, and the specific effects of climate change, and so on. Though these questions are discussed using the *form* of statistical probabilities, there is every reason to suppose that no effort in this direction amounts to anything more than numerology.

We are, again, not sure what exactly frightened Oxford's philosophy dons about all this. Yet it is clear that the abstruse technicalities of professional academic philosophy can get no real handle on this stuff. It can be discussed in the usual way, through abstract thought experiments and the consideration of rival absurdities from the point of view of moral intuition. To attempt to go on and somehow put it into practice violates the ordinary standards of rigour. In effect, it takes academic thought experiments and treats them *as if* they were real events, if only in the distant future.

## Social machinery

As Marxists, of course, we do not reject *tout court* the attempt to direct politics towards long-term ends. We favour planning, after all. Yet we favour *democratic* planning, precisely because the decisions never end. We do not have our thousand-year trolley problem to put in front of the supreme soviet to sort out once and for all. The *social machinery* of decision-making is needed.

There *is*, however, a kind of social machinery available to Bostrom and co, for which reason we do not suppose they will be joining the dole queues for long. That is ... precisely the self-regarding Silicon Valley set: Musk, Sam Altman, and whoever else you like. For these men (indeed, they are mostly men) the questions of existential risk have an urgent, but weirdly abstract, quality. There is a difficulty in interpreting their warnings of the dangers of runaway AI; are they sincerely scared, or is it all a weird, backhanded way of generating hype about their products, and perhaps a dash for capturing regulators?

It may well be both. The regulatory capture angle is real enough: the institutions best able to both shape and comply with new regulations will be powerful, well-staffed incumbents. Whether or not the hype angle survives depends, of course, on whether AI *does* rapidly achieve cognitive

escape velocity. At the moment, we are sceptical. The generative AI models that have been produced are laughably prone to errors. We have had a Canadian lawyer fined for filing an AI-generated brief that cited non-existent precedents. We have had an AI Catholic priest, 'Father Justin', rapidly defrocked when sceptical believers convinced it to actually absolve users of their sins. The list goes on.

Nonetheless, the *possibility* of a runaway singularity plays a crucial role in the *self-conception* of these men as bold pioneers standing on the threshold of the future, rather than what they really are: overgrown rich kids who have blundered into positions of great power. The singularity is a science-fiction story in which they are the protagonists. (The listserv to which Bostrom contributed his thoughts on the relative smartness of blacks and whites was *supposed* to be about science fiction.)

Even within this milieu, things are - let us say - in flux. Last November, Altman, the CEO of OpenAI which created ChatGPT and several other marquee-generative AI products, was sensationally removed from his post in a boardroom coup, before being reinstated a few days later. What on earth was it all about?

So far as anyone can tell, the story goes a bit like this: OpenAI, as its name suggests, was set up as a kind of social enterprise to ensure that the benefits of AI would not simply be hoarded by the big tech companies (its founders included both Altman and Musk). It is not a non-profit, but a *capped-profit* company. Its board is supposed to keep it on that course.

Yet the success of ChatGPT and friends has led to a strange situation. These products are not profitable - they are effectively given away for free, but are stupendously expensive to run. They are therefore completely in hock to the huge enterprises which pay to reuse their works in their own products - most importantly Microsoft. Altman is, at the end of the day, the 'business' guy, and the failed coup against him represents the total domination of blue-chip Wall Street over OpenAI.

Thus, as we have mentioned before, the strange unfreedom of tech barons. For all their riches, they have no real ability to make anything happen *outside of* the discipline of contemporary financial capitalism. That underscores a final basic problem with effective altruism and long-termism: even if one could scientifically deduce an optimal course, there is simply no available agent able to take it.

There are plenty of billionaires, however, able to fund worthless research in that direction - and we wish Bostrom every success in his next pointless sinecure! ●

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Nick Bostrom: many  
billionaire backers for his  
hype

