

weekly worker



Troublesome priest: just because he's American don't mean he'll put America first

- Letters and debate
- Kneecap speak out
- Louis Theroux's settlers
- Vietnam: 50 years on

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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FROM BALFOUR TO NAKBA HOW TO STOP THE GENOCIDE



LETTERS

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

Anarcho-Brexit

Paul Demarty assures himself that Brexit was a largely Tory affair ('Breaking the mould', May 8). I'm sure that seven out of 10 Labour constituencies voted 'leave', but doubtless he'll correct me. Certainly, in the rust-belt industrial towns and areas - coal, steel, heavy industry - 'leave' was the dominant trend.

Traditional left leaders of unions and the Labour left were very public 'leavers', while at the same time the whole of the establishment - from the Confederation of British Industry to the heads of all three political parties, the police, the EU, the International Monetary Fund - all wanted Britain to stay, as did Nato, the US president, etc. The conclusion that this Brexit lark was just a Tory scam and that the 'great and the good' wanted to stay within the EU wasn't the case up here, Paul - the CPGB ought to get out of London a bit more.

Meantime Jack Conrad gives us the latest on efforts of various lefty liberal groups with revolutionary titles, who are busy constructing a workers' party ('Programme 'n' chips', May 8). The structures are elaborated, a constitution hammered out, but the central ingredient is missing: the workers! Jack *et al* believe they can knock together a workers party in their London backyard - it will then be pulled out for 'the workers' to join. This, like the Hillman Avenger of old, is 'the car you've all been waiting for'.

Pardon me (an anarchist and no lover of parties), for commenting, but surely a truly working class organisation must be built by the workers themselves, and be fashioned from their demands. The new lash-up will strike little more resonance with the industrial, traditional working class if it offers more of the liberal, eco, climate panic, and anti-industry, identity-obsessed politics of the current London left.

Apart from Labour's utter betrayal of trust of the relatively small number of working class voters who took a chance and sang 'Just one more chance' and despite themselves voted for Starmer and his outfit of misfits and oddballs, all true socialists and anti-war MPs have been kicked out or left.

Reform is picking up huge swathes of working class votes because its slogans are the ones the workers themselves are demanding. Scrap 'net zero', rebuild industrial infrastructure, return to steel, coal, build on oil and gas, etc - these slogans may be cynical on Farage's part, but they are the ones which the industrial worker wants advancing. Nobody except Galloway is saying it. This, much more than immigration, is what's striking a cord. But with immigration too, we cannot keep telling people to shut up, to stay quiet, do what you're told.

So without any consultation, without any consent, widespread changes - which are affecting people's families, their streets and society - are taking place all round them. They are rendered utterly powerless, while the biggest changes in their lives are happening all around them. We can look at this philosophically, ideologically, but this doesn't wash with many - they demand a say. It does no good adopting the Socialist Workers Party response and shouting 'Racist scam' and 'Fascist' at bewildered working class communities.

So don't be too surprised at recent election outcomes. The only trip wires

I see for them is the open political identification with Thatcher and the rightwing Tory brand - that would be a step too far for working class voters. At present they are voting for slogans and policies which make practical sense. Try and sign them up behind the banner, 'Regroup the right, unite the right', and they may blow it!

Dave Douglass
South Shields

Neo-Maoists

Over the last 10 years or so, the Belgian Workers Party (PVDA-PTB) has been making steady headway. It currently holds 10% of the seats in the national parliament, and even stronger representations in the Wallonia and Brussels assemblies. The party's rapid growth seems to be drawing the attention of many soft-left parties in Europe, including most recently the British ex-Corbynista left, as offering a credible road to building a party left of Labour. This is, of course, based on a fundamental ignorance of the party's background or its practice.

The PVDA-PTB was founded in the 1970s as a Maoist organisation under the name, All Power to the Workers, and managed to become one of Europe's largest groups of that political shade. Its political activity was heavily based on drawing people into front organisations and campaigns, notably through its network of free healthcare centres (which is still being maintained to this day). Whereas most similar groups, like the Dutch Socialist Party, abandoned Maoism in the 80s, the PVDA-PTB held on to its hard-line position until well into the 2000s.

However, in 2008, the party held a 'reform congress', which abandoned the more orthodox positions and embraced what they call a 'neo-Marxist' position. In practice this meant cutting its more openly problematic ties with foreign organisations such as the North Korean Workers' Party. Further, it redefined its programme to focus on 'Socialism 2.0' and formulated an approach that was 'closer to the position of the working class'. Effectively this meant adopting a reformist programme and language more in line with other European left populist parties.

The PVDA-PTB finally broke through in national politics in 2014, winning a small number of seats in the Belgian parliament. At the time, it led an electoral coalition from a wide range of small left formations, including the Communist Party, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (Mandelites) and its Flemish equivalent, the SAP, as well as drawing support from Belgian branches of the International Socialist Tendency and the Committee for a Workers' International. This meant the party effectively ended the electoral splintering of the far left, but this coalition was promptly abandoned after it served its purpose of springboarding the PVDA-PTB to national prominence.

Although it focuses officially on building roots in workplaces, communities and social movements, this does not mean that the party is a collection of bottom-up initiatives or has any other kind of federal or democratic structure. Instead, it adheres to a strictly centralised apparatus and a model of bureaucratic centralism where individual members are discouraged from expressing independent thought. There is no right to form public factions, no open debate of political differences.

In terms of its programme, the party positions itself strongly in favour of the unity of the Belgian state and identity against the particularism of the Flemish and Wallonian

parties - which means the PVDA-PTB is the only unified party in the Belgian parliament, representing both Flemings and Wallonians.

While maintaining an official 'neo-Marxist' moniker, the current programme is supposed to be a clever tactical and strategic approach to develop the class struggle: the party focuses on 'bog-standard' left-reformist demands like the need for higher taxes, the strengthening of workers' rights, increasing pensions and decreasing the retirement age to 65, and supports expanding the welfare state.

In reality, however, this leads to an ebb and flow of contradictory positions. Especially in the Wallonian press, the party is not afraid to use terms like 'Lenin' and 'communism' from time to time, though it also distances itself from the Soviet Union, when pressed by bourgeois journalists. Its international relationships too reflect this ambiguous political stance - the party continues to maintain relations with the Communist Party of Cuba and via the campaign, 'Cubanismo', is openly in solidarity with that 'socialist' country. On the other hand, when it comes to some other countries, it has dropped the 'official communists' in favour of more palatable, and relevant, alternatives: ie, in Germany it has dropped the German Communist Party in favour of Die Linke; in the Netherlands the NCPN for the Socialist Party. In regard to Britain, the party is happy to play both sides - hosting Corbyn at its official events, whilst at the same time sending general secretary Peter Mertens to speak at events organised by the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain.

In the last few years especially, various European parties have been looking at the PVDA-PTB as a model. During the most recent election campaign in Germany, Die Linke borrowed heavily from its playbook and, for example conducted a 'listening exercise' (during which it knocked on tens of thousands of doors), which led it to pose left, but not really moving much in that direction. Similarly, the Austrian Communist Party is making increasingly large breakthroughs on the regional level, deploying a strategy of coalitionism and 'base building' closely resembling the earlier breakthrough moment of the PVDA-PTB.

The party is sensing that it is experiencing a moment in which it has the opportunity to reshape the European left. Last week, it officially joined the Party of the European Left, after a long 'back and forth' period. The chances are that understanding the party's character and origins will become more and more urgent, as it leads the charge in a new wave of left populism - a very long way indeed from what is actually needed.

Bart Harnett
Communist Platform, Netherlands

Korean solution

Despite the passing of the Leasehold and Freehold Act in 2024 by the last Tory government and promises of more reforms - even the abolition of leasehold by the present government - leaseholders continue to be ripped off and cheated by freeholders, giant property monopolies and dodgy property management companies.

Really the best solution to the leasehold problem is for all urban property not owned by its occupier to be nationalised without compensation - leasehold would be abolished at a stroke. Any repairs or works could be taken care of by the state at a nominal cost or free of charge. This should be the demand of the left!

An excellent example of socialist housing is People's Korea, which is building mega-streets of new housing and giving it to its citizens free of charge.

Dermot Hudson
email

Tony's senses

Cliff Connolly describes himself as a Marxist and Protestant, seemingly oblivious to the contradiction between the two world views (Letters, May 8). True, the founding fathers of Christianity supported the idea of communism almost 2,000 years before Karl Marx and other modern communists before him. For instance, in Acts 2: 44-45 we are told: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold their property and possessions to give to anyone who had need."

Holding property in common and distributing according to need is clearly a communist principle, but we can't ignore important differences between Marxism and Christianity. Also Connolly doesn't seem to be aware that Catholicism and Protestantism, whether consciously or unconsciously, have suppressed the fact that Christianity's founders practised an early form of communism.

Both Marxism and Christianity are based on the idea of the coming downfall of the present system. In Christianity this is symbolically referred to as the fall of Babylon the Great in the book of Revelation. For Marxism it is the downfall of capitalism, but this is where any similarities between Marxism and Christianity end. Marxists believe that humanity can solve its problems on its own, whereas for Christians an outside agency or intervention will be necessary to prevent humanity from destroying itself.

The *Bible* and Christianity are essentially about a coming extraterrestrial intervention in human political affairs, which is presented as a religious narrative by the biblical seers, Christians and bible scholars. According to Christian eschatology, this intervention will come after the end of the church age, which began with Pentecost around AD 33 in the 1st Century, and ends with the Rapture, which is the removal of the followers of Christ from the earth, so they don't have to experience the horrors of the tribulation period, which will last seven years.

Christians believe the Rapture can happen at any time now. Please don't ask me how the Rapture is possible, because I am unfamiliar with the technology behind it. For Christians, the extraterrestrial intervention, or the second coming, takes place in the latter part of the tribulation period, which will threaten the very existence of human life on this planet with nuclear war: ie, Armageddon. The return of Christ, or the 'second coming', is to put an end to Armageddon, and establish rule from heaven: ie, from space.

Unlike Christians, the Marxists don't have any idea of an extraterrestrial intervention in human affairs and only future events will prove whether the Christians are correct about the extraterrestrial element. The fact that they present the prophesied otherworldly intervention as a religious narrative is secondary to the actual content of the intervention itself. Obviously the ancient seers and bible writers had no option other than presenting an extraterrestrial, alien intervention as a religious narrative.

During World War II, when the Americans set up bases in Papua New Guinea to fight the Japanese, the native peoples, who had never

seen aircraft landing and taking off before, actually started religious cults to worship the airmen, who they regarded as gods. These became known as cargo cults. This is how ancient people would have regarded mysterious flying objects, whether viewed directly or through precognition.

Essentially, everything depends on whether you think the prophecies in the bible will come true or not. In other words, the question is whether prophecy is fact or fiction. Prophecy scholars argue that bible prophecies have come true in the past, so why should those relating to the future not come true as well? The bible writers combined prophecies with religion and here you have the foundation of Christianity and the other related religions. But what needs to be understood is that prophecy - ie, foretelling the future - and religion are two different things.

The *Encyclopaedia of biblical prophecy* by J Barton Payne lists 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 prophecies in the New Testament - a total 1,817. According to prophecy scholars and *Bible* commentators and students, many of these prophecies have already come to pass. Cliff Connolly is not wrong to dismiss the 'opium of the people' theory of religion as superficial, but he does this without making any attempt to transcend religion.

If you are a hardened philosophical materialist, you may not want to take prophecy seriously. But, in my view, the type of philosophical materialism on which Marxism is based has long been semi-obsolete. Lenin's statement in *Materialism and empirio-criticism* that "matter is that which is given to us in sensation" has long been refuted by science. Today we know that realities exist beyond the frequency range of the human senses. We are unable to see, feel, smell or sense in any way even something as common as radio frequencies.

19th Century philosophical materialism was based on the absolutisation of the human five senses. Today, this position is untenable. Marxists need to update their views. The same applies to Christians in relation to biblical prophecy. If the biblical seers saw an extraterrestrial intervention in our future, we no longer need to present this as a religious narrative.

Tony Clark
For Democratic Socialism

Style and tone

Mike Macnair's warnings around any insistence upon use of soft language and flabby attitudes, etc are completely correct, insofar as that constitutes an indirect, but still entirely real, *complicity* in the distractive techniques relied upon by capitalism ('They come with thorns', May 8). In its time-honoured watering-down and neutering via sly manipulation (or periodically even by brute force), it engages in diverting, coopting, commanding any potencies available from both *undiluted* focus and *unfettered* class-consciousness.

My own style in wording here, of course, has an underlying tone that I regard to be an absolutely essential ingredient in the development of worldliness - ie, in distinction to any insulated and comfortable parochialism - arguably indeed a laughably 'feather-bedded' view of what in fact is that cruellest conceivable reality created by the prevailing structures of power and control.

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

PALESTINE



Not the volume, not the naughty words

Saying it loud and clear

Targeting Belfast rap group, Kneecap, over alleged terrorism, is part of the campaign to silence anyone who dares speak out against Israel and its Gaza genocide, writes Anne McShane

Having received an invite to perform at Coachella, one of the biggest music festivals in the USA, Kneecap took the opportunity at the final concert on their American tour to feature a stage backdrop condemning Israel and its US backers for the genocide in Palestine. It read: "Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinian people. It is being enabled by the US government, who arm and fund Israel, despite its war crimes. Fuck Israel, Free Palestine." The crowd erupted in support and the band ended the concert chanting "Free Palestine", with fans joining in enthusiastically.

Immediately professional celebrity Sharon Osborne took to social media to express her horror and demanded that the band members' US work visa be immediately revoked. As the wife of Ozzy Osborne, one of the most infamous rock musicians of the 1970s - a man who bit the head off a dove and a dead bat in his concert performances - it is fair to say she was not upset about the swearing. No, it was the "aggressive political statements" against Israel she found so offensive.

Dead Tories

In Britain, unknown persons were busy trawling through old Kneecap videos and came up with two instances where Kneecap were allegedly offensive. One was at a 2023 concert where a band member is reported to have made the old joke, "The only good Tory is a dead Tory". In 2019 Amanda Morris, Eastbourne Lib Dem candidate made the same joke in her election leaflet. Morris apologised for any offence caused and that was the end of it - she remains a councillor today in Eastbourne Old Town. In contrast, Kneecap's apology has emboldened its detractors. The families of Labour MP Jo Cox and Tory MP David Amess - both killed in random attacks - refused to accept it.

The 2024 video which was dug up purports to show a group member shouting 'Up Hamas, up Hezbollah'. Kneecap has clarified in a statement that it does not support either organisation. This again did not satisfy their critics and the group is now under investigation by counter-terrorism police in London for allegedly inciting violence against elected officials and supporting terrorism. As supporters of Palestine in the Labour Party have learned, apologies do not appease your enemies - in fact the opposite happens.

Meanwhile, the BBC dishonestly reported that the 2023 and 2024 complaints had just emerged, rather than being unearthed and decontextualised in an attempt to frame the group. Kneecap members are widely known as being mouthy Irish republicans and for their refusal to tone down their political statements and satire. It was only last December that the BBC was praising the group for its "unruly energy" and "punky defiance". The biopic *Kneecap* recently won a Bafta film award for being an "outstanding debut" and narrowly missed out on an Oscar nomination. The film is a brilliant portrayal of how a group of three Belfast punks, rooted in republicanism, decided to challenge the system through hard-hitting, funny and irreverent lyrics.

Hated as much by dissident republicans as they are by the Ulster Defence Association, members of Kneecap refuse to kowtow to demands to temper their language and satire. Using mainly Irish-language lyrics with some English thrown in, they take the piss out of everyone, even Bobby Sands. Once the darlings of the liberal media for their audacity, they are now presented as dangerous and hideous.

The BBC then sent a reporter to West Belfast in search of Kneecap fans who had turned against the group - and found none. Instead young people from across the political spectrum said they were enthusiastically looking forward to seeing the group live. Initially it seemed that they would be out of luck, as cancellations began with the Eden Project gig promoters in Cornwall buckling under pressure. Some German concert dates were also scrapped. Leader of the House of Commons Lucy Powell demanded that the group should be dropped from the Glastonbury line-up, and declared that "no-one in this house" would want to see them at Glastonbury - "We'll all continue to say so loud and clear."

Thankfully her arrogant attempt to punish the group for speaking out against Israel seems to have backfired. Sales of their music soared by 103% in two weeks. A number of musicians, including members of Pulp and Paul Weller, signed a letter protesting against the "clear and concerted attempt to censor and ultimately deplatform" Kneecap. The letter accused senior British politicians of being "openly engaged in a campaign to remove Kneecap from the

public eye". Concerts in Belfast, London, Scotland, Wales, as well as across Europe, are now back on schedule and look likely to sell out. Glastonbury has not been cancelled. All tickets to 18 concerts in the US this autumn have sold out. It is unclear at the moment whether the US government will revoke the group's visas - but it is certain that the attempt to intimidate their fans has failed.

Kneecap's real crime is its popularity and young fan base, and the fact that its members have refused to be silenced. Their manager, Daniel Lambert, said that suggesting the rappers' message at Coachella was offensive would be "buying into moral hysteria" and that the real issue was the tens of thousands of people being killed by Israeli forces in Gaza.

Pressure

Lambert stated in a recent interview that, despite receiving death threats and coming under huge pressure from music promoters, politicians and police, members of the group "have the bravery and the conviction - especially given where they've come from in post-conflict society - to stand up for what's right, and are willing to do that despite the fact that it may harm their career, despite the fact that it may harm their income." He added "If somebody is hurt by the truth, that's something for them to be hurt by. But it's really important to speak truth, and thankfully, the lads are not afraid to do that."

Kneecap members are serious people, with a political agenda to question and challenge the dominant ideology. All of them are native Irish speakers, having been part of the Irish language movement in the Six Counties. Irish has always been significant in the republican movement, particularly among its prisoners. The fight for its recognition only ended in 2022, when it was given legal status as a minority language by the British government. Now Irish is going through a resurgence nationally, largely because of groups like Kneecap and Lankum, and folk musician Eoghan Ó Ceannabháin, who are using the language in a new way - with music that is challenging, both politically and artistically.

Kneecap is expressing the views of an international mass movement in support of Palestine and against the Zionist genocide. That is inspirational ●

ACTION

Nakba 77: free Palestine, end the genocide

Saturday May 17, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Embankment tube station, London WC2. Commemorating the 1948 expulsion of Palestinians. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: stopwar.org.uk/events/national-demonstration-for-palestine-nakba-77.

Stop PIP and benefit cuts

Saturday May 17, 12 noon: Demonstration and rally. Assemble City Hall, St Peters Street, Norwich NR2. End Labour's war on disabled people. End austerity cuts to mental health and social care. Organised by Norfolk Disabled People Against Cuts: www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=717431720640716.

Abolish rent

Monday May 19, 6pm: Book event, Institute of Geography, Drummond Street, Edinburgh EH8. Co-author Tracy Rosenthal from the Los Angeles Tenants Union discusses her book *Abolish rent: how tenants can end the housing crisis*. Registration free. Organised by Living Rent and Lighthouse Books: www.livingrent.org/abolishrent_booklaunch_may192025.

What it means to be human

Tuesday May 20, 6.30pm: Series of talks on social and biological anthropology. This talk is online only, via Zoom: 'The meanings and dividends of man, the hunter'. Speaker: Vivek Venkataraman. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/1032190032102719.

Defend the right to protest

Wednesday May 21, 6.30pm: Protest outside Scotland Yard, Victoria Embankment, London SW1. Protect the right to protest, demand the police drop charges against Palestine protestors. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: stopwar.org.uk/events/defend-the-right-to-protest-drop-the-charges.

The role of Stalinism in Britain post-1945

Thursday May 22, 6.30pm: Online session in the series, 'Our history'. Peter Kennedy introduces 'The role of Stalinism within the left in establishing social democratic reform and class containment in Britain, post-1945'. Organised by Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

The German peasants' war 500 years on

Thursday May 22, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: x.com/CCSoc/status/1905326245493059865.

Lewisham divest now

Thursday May 29, 6.30pm: Organising meeting, St Mary's Centre, Ladywell Road, London SE13. Plan the next steps to force Lewisham council to divest from funds that support genocide. Organised by Lewisham Palestine Solidarity and Lewisham CND: x.com/LewGreenwichCND/status/1921902248814092644.

Disclosure: unravelling the spycops files

Friday May 30, 7pm: Book launch, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Kate Wilson introduces her account of police infiltration of activist groups, including sexual relationships and spying without warrant on hundreds of innocent civilians. Then the 20-year struggle to uncover the truth. Tickets £4 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: housmans.com/events.

It's the people versus the developers!

Saturday May 31, 1pm: Demonstration. Assemble Peckham Square, London SE15. Homes for people, not for profit; council housing, not luxury flats; stop overdevelopment. Organised by Southwark Housing and Planning Emergency: www.ayleshamcommunityaction.co.uk/SHAPE.

Rethinking the roots of British communism

Monday June 2, 5.30pm: Online seminar. Author Tony Collins references his book, *Raising the red flag: Marxism, labourism, and the roots of British communism, 1884-1921*. Registration free. Organised by London Socialist Historians Group: www.history.ac.uk/events/rethinking-roots-british-communism.

Derby silk mill lockout festival

Saturday June 7, 10am: Procession and family festival. Assemble Market Place, Derby DE1, and march to Cathedral Green for rally. Commemorating the silk mill workers, locked out by their employers in 1833 for refusing to accept pay cuts and give up their trade union. Organised by Derby Silk Mill Festival: www.facebook.com/events/1749378975673078.

Bargain books

Saturday June 7, 11am: Book sale, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Get your hands on Marxist classics and rare pamphlets. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/497.

Welfare, not warfare; stop the cuts; tax the rich

Saturday June 7, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble at Portland Place, London W1. March to Whitehall for rally. Labour's cuts target the poorest, most vulnerable in society. Demand funding for welfare, wages and the NHS. Organised by the People's Assembly: thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Printworkers and the 1986 Wapping dispute

Thursday June 12, 7pm: Online and onsite lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speakers Ann Field and Matt Dunne provide details of this defeat for the working class. Registration free. Organised by General Federation of Trade Unions: www.facebook.com/events/966566215671025.

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.

PALESTINE

From Balfour to genocide

Starvation, denial of aid, the current military escalation of Zionist violence into attempted genocide should be viewed in the context a century of colonial dispossession, writes Yassamine Mather

On May 13 - just two days short of Nakba Day - Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's assertion that Israel must "finish the job" in Gaza underscores a commitment to a comprehensive military campaign aimed at a highly controversial military plan to seize full control of the Gaza Strip and maintain a permanent military presence there.

This development marks a sharp escalation of Israeli operations. The plan encompasses complete territorial dominance, centralised control over any aid, and surely the forced displacement of all or at least most Palestinians from Gaza. Naturally, therefore, no timeline for withdrawal has been announced.

What is happening in Gaza today will happen on the West Bank tomorrow. Liberal critics, including major human rights organisations and senior UN officials, have condemned the plan as a grave violation of international law and a contributor to an unfolding humanitarian disaster. Emmanuel Macron, David Lammy, even members of the British Board of Jewish Deputies have shed crocodile tears. Meanwhile, Donald Trump and his administration seem quite content to let Netanyahu's far right coalition get on with genocide.

Since the latest round of conflict began on October 7 2023, at least 52,000 Palestinians have died. Famine is spreading, clean water is scarce, and most of the population are effectively homeless. Gaza has been described by UN experts as a "zone of death", with some two-thirds of its buildings flattened. Understandably, Palestinians see current events as a second Nakba - Arabic for 'catastrophe'.

British mandate

The roots of the ongoing crisis can be traced to the imperial rivalries of World War I. In 1916, Britain and France secretly signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement, dividing much of the Arab provinces of the collapsing Ottoman Empire into zones of control. This agreement is now widely viewed as a defining moment in Middle Eastern colonialism, laying the groundwork for many of today's conflicts. Palestine was designated for international administration, effectively sidelining the political aspirations of the local Arab population.

Under the terms of Sykes-Picot, France was to control coastal Syria, Lebanon and parts of southeastern Turkey, as well as exert its influence over inland Syria and northern Iraq. Britain would dominate the oil-rich south of Iraq and the Mediterranean coast from Haifa to Acre. Jerusalem and surrounding areas were to be governed as an international zone. The lines drawn ignored ethnic, sectarian and tribal realities. The agreement was kept secret until published by the new Soviet government in 1917. As intended by the Bolsheviks this not only exposed the culpability of the Menshevik-Right SR Provisional government. Russia was to get Constantinople and the Dardanelles. It roused anger in Turkey and the Arab world and fuelled the rise of anti-colonial resistance.

A year later, on November 2 1917, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration. Foreign secretary Arthur Balfour declared British support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the



More and more Jews reject Zionism and with it Israel

Jewish people", on the supposed condition that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities". British capitalism wanted a Jewish Ulster in the Middle East and for the Zionists this imperialist sponsorship was a strategic breakthrough. Without a powerful imperialist backer they knew their project was hopeless. But for Palestinians, of course, who formed the overwhelming majority of the population, it was a betrayal.

Britain had made vague promises of Arab independence in the Hussein-McMahon correspondence on Arab independence during World War I. This got Arabs on side against Ottoman Turkey during World War I, but it was pure cynicism. The Balfour Declaration, a short letter, transformed Zionism from a utopian dream into a political reality, it also guaranteed an explosive Zionist-Palestinian conflict.

Following World War I, the League of Nations awarded Britain the mandate over Palestine. So Britain now had the dual role of 'colonial administrator' and 'mediator' between two increasingly antagonistic national movements: the first, an oppressive movement, initially led by Labor Zionists such as David Ben-Gurion, the second, the Palestinians, a movement of the oppressed, which first emerged as a response to Zionist colonisation and expansionism.

During the 1920s and 30s, Jewish immigration surged, driven by European anti-Semitism, Zionist lobbying - and later by World War II, the holocaust and mass displacement. Finding countries such as America and Britain blocked to them, many Jews fleeing Europe arrived in Palestine. Zionist organisations such as the Jewish Agency consolidated land purchases and rapidly established quasi-state structures. Histadrut, the so-called Jewish trade union, acted as a colonial vanguard.

Jewish migration often displaced Arab tenant farmers and heightened Palestinian fears of becoming guest workers in their land. Resistance grew. Riots erupted in 1920, 1921 and 1929, and culminated in the Arab Revolt of 1936-39. Palestinians demanded an end to Jewish immigration, land sales and colonial rule, and called for independence. Britain responded

with overwhelming force, crushing the revolt, executing leaders and weakening Palestinian political institutions. In 1939, the British government issued a white paper limiting Jewish immigration - a move that enraged Zionists, but failed to stabilise British rule over the indigenous Arabs.

Stalin suited

After World War II, understandably sympathy for European Jews grew. This suited Labor Zionists who reinvented themselves as an anti-colonial movement, rather than how it once, more honestly presented itself, ie, as a colonial movement. It also suited Stalin. Weakening the British empire was considered a strategic aim of Soviet foreign policy. He not only provided diplomatic backing, but, albeit indirectly, arms supplies. Britain struggled to maintain control amid the growing independence movement in its Indian and African colonies, in Palestine it faced attacks from Zionist militias like Irgun and Lehi.

In 1947, the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab zones. The plan was accepted by Zionist leaders and rejected by Arab ones, who viewed it as an outrage. War inevitably followed.

On May 14 1948, the state of Israel declared independence. The next day, Arab states invaded, leading to the first Arab-Israeli war. During the conflict, over 700,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled, and more than 400 villages were destroyed or depopulated. This mass displacement is now remembered globally as the Nakba and marks the beginning of the Palestinian diaspora.

The Nakba's consequences endure. Millions of Palestinians and their descendants remain stateless, living in refugee camps across the region. Israel has denied them the right of return, despite UN general assembly resolution 194 affirming that right. For Palestinians, 1948 is not merely history - it is an ongoing reality of exile and loss.

Since 1948, Israel has fought repeated wars and expanded its control over more and more territory. The 1956 Suez crisis saw Israel, Britain and France invade Egypt after Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal. In 1967, Israel launched

what it called a pre-emptive strike against Egypt, Jordan and Syria, capturing the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, Sinai and the Golan Heights. These victories solidified Israel's regional dominance, but intensified Palestinian dispossession.

The 1973 Yom Kippur war led to a temporary Arab advance, but Israel quickly reversed its losses. Peace negotiations followed, including the Camp David Accords. In 1982, Israel invaded southern Lebanon to expel the Palestine Liberation Organisation. Meanwhile, Palestinians in the occupied territories launched uprisings - the First Intifada in 1987 and the Second in 2000, protesting against military rule, settlement expansion and daily humiliation.

In 2007, Hamas won Palestinian legislative elections and eventually took control of Gaza. Since then, Gaza has faced a strict Israeli blockade, repeated military incursions, and severe isolation. Major assaults occurred in 2008-09, 2012, 2014 and 2021. Each left hundreds or thousands dead - mostly civilians. Israel cites security concerns; Palestinians and many human rights groups call it 'collective punishment'.

Across these decades, the power imbalance has widened. Israel, backed by US imperialism and key western allies, maintains overwhelming military superiority. International criticism has been frequent, but largely ineffective. Between 2015 and 2024, the UN general assembly passed 164 resolutions critical of Israeli actions. In 2024 alone, 17 such resolutions were adopted - none of which Israel has implemented.

Echo of history

The current plan to occupy Gaza indefinitely, with control over its territory and aid distribution, is widely seen as part of a longstanding strategy of displacement and demographic control. Israeli officials have openly discussed re-establishing settlements and removing Gaza's population in whole or in parts.

The century-old questions remains: Whose land? Whose rights? And what kind of justice is possible, when history is written in cycles of erasure, violence and dispossession?

Instead of seeking dead-and-buried pro-imperialist resolutions, such as the two-state 'solution'

or utopian notions that ignore the realities of the current situation, we must present a challenge to the existing structure, demanding:

■ Equal rights for all: There must be full and equal rights, both individually and nationally, for everyone in Israel/Palestine. Currently, such rights do not exist.

■ End the occupation: Israel must withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territories. While Israel shows no intention of doing so, the demand itself is crucial - it exposes the reality of occupation.

■ The right of return for Palestinian refugees: This is a just and progressive demand that places Israel in a defensive position. Zionists oppose it because it 'threatens' Israel's Jewish majority. But did they consider this when they colonised Palestine? When did they erase its original Arab character?

■ Oppose the myth of Jewish 'return': Zionists assert a Jewish 'right of return', claiming they were expelled by the Romans. In reality, this never happened - it is a historical fabrication. Yet their ideology insists on a 2,000-year-old 'right', while denying Palestinians the same justice after just 70 years of displacement.

As I have tried to explain in this article, the history of the Palestinian conflict is directly connected to colonial and post-colonial manoeuvrings in the region. That is why the conflict cannot be solved by looking at Palestine in isolation. In addition, because of the unique nature of Zionist colonisation, the power dynamic is overwhelmingly in Israel's favour - especially with the backing of its imperialist sponsor - while the Palestinian people remain at a severe disadvantage. This imbalance cannot be corrected within the current framework.

Genuine liberation for Palestine will only become possible through a revolutionary transformation of the broader region: an Arab revolution, led by the working class, that overthrows repressive regimes, unites the Arab east and breaks free from imperialist control. Such a revolution can create the conditions for the overthrow of the Zionist regime by the Israeli masses.

This regional dimension is not only essential for how the conflict can be resolved, but also shapes what that resolution will look like ●

ZIONISM

When Louis met Moloch

Josh Baker (director), Louis Theroux (presenter and writer) *Louis Theroux: the settlers* BBC 2 2025

It was not too long ago that Louis Theroux lamented his looming alopecia: he had, after all, built a career on raising his eyebrows, and what was he to do without the eyebrows?

Fortunately, it has not come to that quite yet and, if ever there was a case for painting eyebrows back on in thick, smudgy pencil, it would be this. His latest documentary, *The settlers*, which somehow snuck through the censors at the BBC, is, apart from anything else, an exemplary demonstration of the man's artistry, which flows unusually directly from his personality. He is friendly, but awkward. He always stands up bolt-straight, as if he is worried that he has forgotten something important. Even if you have heard of him, even if you know his way of doing business, he is disarming. And so people talk to him, and talk too much.

Long ago, he used his apparent guilelessness for comedy. People older, or slightly younger, than 40 may remember his *Weird weekends* series, in which he visited various marginal communities of American eccentrics and presented them for the consideration of sceptical British viewers. As time has drawn on, his tone and subject matter have grown more serious, but his technique has undergone no more than slight refinements. "How do you do? I'm Louis," he says to cranky survivalists, polyamorists, true believers of the Westboro Baptists ('God hates fags' and all that), and now - for the second time - Israeli settlers. He offers them the same stiff, jerky handshake. He offers them no threat. His subjects may be condemned or, after a fashion, redeemed; but always out of their own mouths.

Protagonists

This time around, his subjects are, as the title suggests, Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank. Perhaps 10 have speaking roles in the hour-long film, with two Palestinian men additionally interviewed effectively to illustrate what life is like in a world carved up by Israel Defence Forces



Louis Theroux (presenter and writer)

checkpoints. Among the Israelis, two enjoy the most screentime - a Texan, Ari Abramowitz, who runs a corporate retreat centre on occupied land and is, in true Texan fashion, never to be found without an assault rifle slung over his back; and Daniella Weiss, who was at least born in Palestine to Zionist settler parents, and who has been at the vanguard of the settler movement more or less since the 1967 occupation began.

Both are, to put it politely, real characters, and indeed it is the virtue of the Therouxian method to show them as such. Abramowitz boils over with rage every time Theroux talks about the Palestinians *per se*: he has a strange, twitchy reaction to the word itself. They are not a real nation, they have no rights, they are a genocidal death cult. Theroux pushes back a little: "It seems to me there's a danger with that characterisation of Palestinians. You define them as eliminationist and hateful and genocidal."

Abramowitz rushes to 'correct' him: "Yeah, I used the words 'death cult' also - as a death cult." He did not want that missed out. Theroux is not a man to disoblige him on

that point. During the interview, the camera alights on a holiday present, presumably for one of Abramowitz's children. It is a cuddly toy. It has the same assault rifle as daddy's draped over it. Were he not involved in heinous crimes, it would be difficult not to pity this man, clearly a thuggish idiot who found, in his immigration (*Aliyah*), an all too suitable outlet for his stupidity.

Winning smile

Weiss is a whole different kettle of fish - a veteran political operator, introduced as the godmother of the settler movement. Were this a fiction film, Weiss would be a captivating anti-hero. She has a winning smile (whether it is that of an amiable grandmother or a hungry shark depends on the moment and the target). She is extremely articulate. It is notable that the first public speech of hers in the film - near the border with Gaza, urging the settlement of the territory - is in English (Itamar Ben-Gvir, also present, makes much the same speech in Hebrew).

She consents to not less than three separate interviews, in which she is remarkably and compellingly candid about her plans. "Gaza is not something beyond reach," she says:

The October 7 [attacks] naturally made people more receptive to the idea of the great Israel. But the next step - Jewish settlements in Gaza - is a very difficult step that demands a lot of work. You have to influence the leftists, the government, the nations of the world, using the magic system, Zionism. You redeem the land, you establish communities, you bring Jewish families. You live ... live Jewish life. And this will bring light instead of darkness. And this is how the state of Israel was established. And this is what we want to do in Gaza.

When Theroux challenges her about settler violence, she objects that there is no settler violence. To prove the point, she shoves him, hard. Theroux, understanding the point, states that he will not shove her back. But, even if he does not, she says, this is all that is going on. The Palestinians provoke violence, and get what they deserve in return, but a rigged media only shows the reaction.

Weiss is compelling as a screen character, because she makes her point by assaulting Theroux - not dangerously or maliciously, but that is her whole argument. She seems almost disappointed that he *doesn't* fight back (perhaps she has not seen any of his previous documentaries).

Abramowitz, for all his firepower, seems pathetic in comparison: a shouty American male of the usual type with a gun instead of a pair of balls. Weiss, by contrast, is a pure product of the whole history of Zionist colonisation - something cold and hard like a piece of metamorphic rock.

For both, and other interviewers, the stakes are plainly religious. Yet we meet not the god of the whole universe, whose sunnier aspect is glimpsed in the prophetic writings of the bible (the lion will lie down with the lamb, and all that), but of 'Eretz Israel' - a local potentate at best: something like the cults of Baal and Moloch that were, according to the Tanakh, struck down with such force once upon a time. Such cults have a way of reviving when there is a restive population to be displaced to make room for self-dramatising Texans.

Reaction

The reaction to the documentary has been in some ways predictable. It is, to be honest, hard to raise oneself even to the level of anger towards its various Zionist critics, so perfunctory has their performance been. Many accused Theroux of what is, sometimes, called 'nut-picking' - selecting a few lunatics and taking them for the whole. Perhaps these critics might highlight some bleeding-heart liberal settlers for future journalists to interview, but let's be honest: we are dealing with the tip of the spear here, and spear-tips tend to be sharp. Weiss gloats about forcing the government to back her movement by creating facts on the ground. She may have some megalomania about her, but on this point, nothing about the past 68 years gainsays her. The purpose of the machine, as Stafford Beer said, is what it does.

There were even some who denounced Theroux for picking on a poor, defenceless 'Jewish grandmother' - a response that needs to be rejected above all for its condescension towards a woman who is quite clearly in command of her own destiny and betrays no weakness in the face of Theroux's pious invocations of international law. With five such 'poor Jewish grandmothers' at our disposal, we feel that the revolution would be taken care of in a matter of months.

The fact that it was the BBC who commissioned and broadcast the film has led to a new wave of accusations of "anti-Israel bias" against the corporation; again, it is scarcely worth bothering contending with such arrant nonsense, when the Beeb has been so utterly loyal to the most important partner of the US in the region, to the point that the one man with the veto over all its Middle East news coverage, a certain Raffi Berg, is a dedicated fan of Benjamin Netanyahu and admiring historian of the Mossad's various exploits.

More interesting are the criticisms from the Palestinian side. We mentioned that, among his time with the Israeli settlers, Theroux met with some West Bank Palestinians. One was Mohammad Hureini, a young man from the area of Masafer Yatta, whose villages are assailed by settlers; the crew hide in Hureini's home from aggressive IDF incursions. Hureini later wrote an article for *Mondoweiss* complaining that his account of his family's history since 1948 - "how my grandparents were violently uprooted from their homes in 1948 by Zionist militias during the Nakba" - was "left on the

cutting room floor". "Instead," he wrote, "the documentary chose to use a small clip of me talking about recent events in my village. It's as if they wanted to show the surface of the crisis, without digging into its roots."¹

Gloomier still is the account of leftwing Israeli Dimi Reider in the *New Statesman*:

Theroux's film doesn't pause to explain that the locations of these settlements don't merely threaten a future Palestinian state - they have already made anything recognisably state-like physically impossible on the ground. They have isolated the West Bank permanently from the rest of the Arab world by largely depopulating and *de facto* annexing the Jordan Valley, which runs between much of the would-be Palestinian state and Jordan. And the accelerated expulsion of entire Palestinian communities from the West Bank over the past year and a half exposes any pretence Israel would cede control over it to a Palestinian entity.

Palestinian statehood isn't threatened by settlement expansion: its demise is a *fait accompli*, and refusing to acknowledge that actually offers the leeway Weiss and her accomplices need to move onto the next goal - annexation and expulsion.²

These criticisms are, I think, fair. The documentary remains imprisoned in the increasingly ridiculous framework of a 'two-state solution' - increasingly ridiculous for precisely the reasons laid out by Reider's useful article. Daniella Weiss has only recently, in the grand historical sweep of things, been aligned with the outward and official policy of the Israeli government. But hers has always been the policy of the Israeli *state*; and it has been pursued with considerable success.

That said, if one wanted to make a documentary that brought all this out, one would not send Louis Theroux. Yes, the film stays on "the surface of the crisis", as Hureini alleges. Yet this is not all bad. Theroux is a genius precisely at examining the surface of things, and the surface is also interesting in its own way. A more serious historian would not have captured so well the religious nationalism of the settlers, who are, right there and then, waving guns around and shooting people (and we do get to see someone actually getting shot).

It is more a criticism of all the films the BBC is *not* making. *The settlers* would find its ideal place as part of a treble bill with a film about the Nakba, and another about the disasters of 1967 and after. Within such a framework, of course, its pious legalism would have to be dropped. No law that permitted the things here depicted could be binding. No doubt other things would seem similarly ridiculous. I submit that friends of the Palestinian cause should be grateful for what *is* there: a straightforward account of the menace of Zionist colonisation, in the words of its remarkable and not-so-remarkable frontline protagonists ●

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Notes

1. mondoweiss.net/2025/05/i-was-in-the-bbc-documentary-the-settlers-this-is-the-part-of-my-story-they-didnt-tell.
2. www.newstatesman.com/international-politics/2025/05/louis-theroux-west-bank-settlers-israel.

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Sunday May 18 5pm
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VIETNAM

Fifty years on

Left organisations, writers and academics alike have been drawing the wrong lessons. They think Vietnam can be repeated in Palestine ... anywhere. Direct action by isolated small groups and broad fronts have become their common coin, argues **Mike Macnair**

American combat troops finally withdrew from Vietnam in late March 1973, and Saigon, the capital city of the southern regime, fell two years later, on April 29-30 1975, 'ending' the long-running war (US sanctions, a form of siege warfare, were imposed, and the Chinese punishment intervention in 1979 in support of the Khmer Rouge, which gained US support, can, though, be seen as forms of continuation of the war).

The 50th anniversary of the fall of Saigon has been marked by several left groups, concerned not only with the history but also with modern-day lessons. The left's lessons, however, are largely wrong. It is necessary to begin with an outline narrative of the war to see why.

The Vietnam war began effectively in 1946, and US involvement in 1950. During World War II, the existing French colonies and protectorates in Indochina had been occupied by the Japanese, and the Allies had supported national resistance groups led by the Communist Party of Vietnam.

When the war came to an end, the British occupied southern Vietnam, disarmed the resistance groups and handed the country back to the French. The north was occupied by Chinese Kuomintang troops, which did not disarm the resistance movement; the CPV-led resistance movement was able to declare independence, the formation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and a Viet Minh (Vietnamese Revolutionary League - a nationalist front led by the CPV) provisional government.

French defeat

The French invaded the north in 1946 and were able to obtain effective control of the cities and towns, but not the countryside. After the Chinese revolution in 1949, the DRV/Vietminh began to receive significant military matériel from the newly formed People's Republic of China, and from 1950-51 they were able to develop a conventional army under the leadership of Vo Nguyen Giap. The Chinese revolution led the USA, which had been lukewarm or hostile towards French recolonisation of Indochina, to support the French. US matériel and military advisors began to arrive from October 1950, and by 1954 the US was paying 80% of the costs of the French war effort.

The next four years saw a complex mixture of guerrilla and conventional warfare, culminating in 1954 with a major *conventional* defeat inflicted on the French at Dien Bien Phu. Afterwards, diplomacy briefly took over. Under the 1954 Geneva Accords, the French conceded Viet Minh control of northern Vietnam, while the Viet Minh conceded to the French temporary administration of southern Vietnam. A declaration called for all-Vietnam elections in 1956 to decide on unification.

In fact, the USA now forced the French out of the south and gave its support to a government led by Ngo Dinh Diem, a Catholic nationalist who had collaborated with the Japanese. Substantial US resources were put



South Vietnamese troops operating with US air support

into building up the Diem regime and the 1956 elections were never held.

From 1957 the CPV began guerrilla activity in the south with military support from the DRV. The scale of this activity gradually built up, and the Diem regime's armed forces proved unable to contain it. In 1960 the CPV formed the National Liberation Front (NLF) in the south. The US in 1961 moved beyond CIA resources to the direct use of US troops as 'advisors' to the southern army - by 1962 there were 14,000 of them.

The NLF controlled about a third of the territory of the south by 1963. Recognising that the situation was deteriorating, the US now sanctioned a military coup that killed Diem and overthrew his regime. The South Vietnamese generals had, however, great difficulty in forming a stable political leadership, and political crisis continued through 1964 and 1965 until the emergence of Nguyen van Thieu as the USA's preferred protégé.

In February 1965 US troops officially went directly into action, and by the end of the year the US had over 100,000 troops in Vietnam. By 1966-67 the number had risen to 300,000 and by January 1968 to 498,000. The DRV and NLF, which had begun to shift from guerrilla to conventional warfare, were forced back to guerrilla methods.

Also in 1965 the USA began an enormous air onslaught on the DRV, with the aim of destroying the north's willingness to support the NLF. This failed in part because of the DRV government's mobilisation of the population to repair damage, conceal operations, etc, but also because the USSR supplied the DRV with MiGs and sophisticated anti-aircraft missiles, while China maintained a steady supply of lower-level arms. It was later estimated that around 1,400 US aircraft were lost over the DRV between 1965 and 1968.

The US seemed to have restabilised the situation. It was therefore an enormous shock to Washington when in February 1968 the NLF launched a major offensive against the regime in the cities and towns of the south. The attacks were beaten off, but US general William Westmorland's request for another 200,000 troops was rejected; in November 1968 the bombing campaign against the DRV was halted, and in January 1969 peace

talks began in Paris. The US began to adopt a policy of 'Vietnamisation' - a retreat *in theory* to US troops playing only an advisory and back-up, rather than a front-line, role.

Nonetheless, the war was to drag on for another seven years before the final collapse of the southern regime in 1975. The US now put major resources into training and equipping the regime's army and building up paramilitary forces, though its confidential documents continually complained about the problem of these forces avoiding direct combat with the NLF and developing into local protection rackets.

The number of US troops in Vietnam began falling in 1969: from 542,000 in 1968 to 336,000 in 1971 and down to 45,000 in July 1972. In spite of the avowed policy of 'pacification' and 'Vietnamisation', US troops continued until 1970 to be employed in aggressive 'search and destroy' sweeps against the NLF, with massive use of firepower that devastated peasant villages without eliminating guerrillas. An American invasion of Cambodia in 1970 and a southern regime invasion of Laos in 1971 - both aimed at eliminating guerrilla 'sanctuaries' - were both failures.

By 1971-72 the US army in Vietnam was experiencing a crisis of morale and discipline, with large-scale drug use, fragging (assassination) of officers and NCOs, the trebling of absent-without-leave and desertion rates, and an approximate doubling of mutinies and refusal of orders between 1965 and 1971.

In 1972 the DRV launched a large-scale conventional offensive, across the north-south border, which after early successes was beaten back by the southern army with massive US air support, the DRV gaining only limited territory. This apparent success for 'Vietnamisation' enabled the US administration to save its face enough to sign a ceasefire agreement in Paris in January 1973 and the last US combat troops left Vietnam in March.

President Richard Nixon, meanwhile, was fighting for his political life in the face of the Watergate scandal, and was unable to resist when on June 30 1973 Congress voted to cut off funds for all US military activity in Indochina. The Congress went further, cutting the funds for resources for the southern

regime's army by 50% from 1973 to 1974 and again by a third from 1974 to 1975. The results for the southern army were disastrous. Trained in the US style of massive use of firepower, they were now subject to enormous cuts in ammunition supplies and their ability to use air support - in November 1974 they were down to 85 rifle bullets per man, per month - a tiny figure. In January 1975 the DRV opened a new conventional offensive, and the southern regime now collapsed rapidly.

An account sympathetic to American objectives and conduct of the war, Guenter Lewy's *America in Vietnam* (Oxford 1978), concludes that the USA in the end was never able to construct in South Vietnam either broad political consent to the regime or a state not radically weakened by corruption. But he also argues that this was not in itself decisive: rather what caused the Thieu regime to fall was the US abandonment of its ally in 1973-74. He attributes this latter, as well as the collapse of US morale around 1970 and after, to the (as he sees it) malign role of anti-war activists.

Opposition

The successive administrations never had overwhelming support for their Vietnam policy and until 1964-65 US involvement was largely covert. A 1964 poll showed 53% of university graduates willing to support the sending of troops to Vietnam, but only 33% of those with school education (a rough parallel for class, indicating less support for the war among the working class). Polling in August 1965 showed 61% in favour of US involvement in Vietnam - a clear majority, but not large enough to marginalise opposition. That opposition was strongest among blacks, women and the over-50 generation that had lived through the depression and World War II. By 1971 the polls showed a clear, but equally not overwhelming, majority of 61% against the war.¹

The active anti-war movement in the US began on a small scale in 1965 and grew at least in part out of the experience of the black civil rights movement that had been going on since the mid-1950s. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, one of the lead organisations in the civil rights movement, called for withdrawal

from Vietnam in early 1966, and SNCC members began engaging in non-violent direct action against the war that year.

From 1967 the movement began to snowball, with perhaps two million involved in one or another form of demonstration on the October 15 1969 day of action, and continued into the early 1970s: in 1971 20,000 people took part in a sit-down protest in Washington and 14,000 of them were arrested, while demonstrations nationwide continued to attract hundreds of thousands. Non-violent direct action was clearly learned from the civil rights movement, which had used such tactics in its campaigns against segregation and for black voter registration.

The US was fighting in Vietnam with a conscript army. Although it had previously only used conscription in full-scale wars, selective conscription - 'the draft' - continued through the Korean war and into Vietnam. The officer corps was traditionally supplied in small part by the military academies, but more extensively by the Reserve Officer Training Corps on the university campuses.

Draft refusal as a mode of protest against the war had been first suggested in 1964. Burning draft cards or handing them back became a clear symbol of organised refusal. By mid-1965 there were 380 prosecutions of draft refusers, but by the end of 1969 there were reported to be 33,960 offenders. In May 1969, 2,400 of the 4,400 who had been summoned to the Oakland, California draft induction centre failed to turn up. Meanwhile, the draft board offices and induction centres became the targets of protests. Those against ROTCs led to their removal from over 40 campuses, and between 1966 and 1971 ROTC enrolment fell by two-thirds.

Individual acts of overtly political resistance by US servicemen and women began as early as 1965 and became more common as the war went on. A servicemen's anti-war movement developed, with more than 50 underground anti-war newspapers circulating in US military bases by 1970. Refusal to fight spread to the troops in Vietnam, especially among blacks.

The race question also had a more direct impact on the willingness of the US administrations to continue the escalation and attrition strategy of 1965-68. 1967 saw enormous riots in the black ghettos. The group advising president Lyndon Johnson on general Westmorland's request in early 1968 for another 200,000 US troops commented:

This growing disaffection [the anti-war movement] - accompanied, as it certainly will be, by increased defiance of the draft and growing unrest in the cities, because of the belief that we are neglecting domestic problems - runs great risks of provoking a domestic crisis of unprecedented proportions.

His advisors clearly judged that the US faced not merely non-violent

resistance, but the risk of riots turning into full-scale insurrection. This was reflected elsewhere in the US regime in exemptions from the Civil Rights Act 1968 for police and armed services members engaged in “suppressing a riot or civil disturbance”, and in a substantial stepping up of the FBI’s *agent provocateur* activities against black organisations and the left.

The idea that the US risked full-scale revolutionary crisis if it continued with escalation in Vietnam may well have been false; but it was this fear as much as the simple fact of the anti-war movement protests that determined the decision to de-escalate from 1968.

Another factor was the beginning of the reflection of the movement in the high-political terrain. Johnson’s decision to de-escalate (and not to seek re-election) was partly informed by the strong result of anti-war candidate Eugene McCarthy in the New Hampshire presidential primary election on March 12 1968.

Local direct actions were organised by a wide variety of bodies, but the big demonstrations and nationwide days of action needed broad coalitions, since there was no party capable of fully taking the lead in the movement: the Communist Party of the USA, for example, though much larger than its Trotskyist and Maoist/New Left competitors, was not able to act on its own.

Inspired partly by the American movement and partly by the common lines of the ‘official’ CPs, the Maoists and Guevarists, and the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International wing of the Trotskyists, Vietnam solidarity movements sprang up in 1966-70 in a wide range of countries and in particular in Europe and Japan. These were not important to the American defeat in the way the US anti-war movement was, though they may have lent aid and comfort to it.

Vietnam provided the first opportunity for the groups of the far left to appear as leaders of an actual movement; thus, for example, members of the International Marxist Group (whose remote descendant is today’s Anti-Capitalist Resistance) and International Socialists (today’s Socialist Workers Party) were prominent in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in Britain, which mobilised 100,000 in London in October 1968.

American defeat

It is traditional on the left to say that the US was defeated in Vietnam by the heroic and prolonged resistance of the Vietnamese people and the growth of the mass anti-war movement in the US - which also involved considerable courage in acts of direct action and resistance in the face of police repression, though protestors never met the scale of violence that was inflicted on the Vietnamese people. This is a partial truth, but it would be more accurate to say that the US could not have been defeated without these elements.

Much more, however, was also needed. Guerrilla struggle has been carried out by the Palestinians now for nearly 60 years, with support from a substantial international solidarity movement, without defeating the Israeli state and its US backer. But the defeat of the US in Vietnam involved a series of very specific elements.

In the first place, the Vietnam war has to be understood in the context of the cold war and the Sino-Soviet split. The US was not prepared to contemplate immediate full-scale war with the USSR or China. But the lesson of the French defeat in 1954 was that this also excluded the

reconquest of the DRV: resupply across the Chinese border had allowed the Viet Minh to maintain guerrilla and conventional forces that tied down French forces and ultimately defeated them at Dien Bien Phu. The reconquest of the DRV would require open war with China - and, as general Douglas MacArthur had suggested in Korea and Westmorland was to suggest in Vietnam, the use of nuclear weapons, risking a general nuclear war.

On the other hand, the Sino-Soviet split led Beijing and Moscow through the late 1950s and 1960s to posture to each other’s left as supporters of the colonial revolution. As a result, the DRV obtained substantial support from both powers. In particular, the Soviet supply of air defences, though it did not neutralise American air superiority, made its exercise seriously costly, while general resupply limited the military effect of US strategic bombardment of the DRV. The result was that the US could only have won the war politically, by stabilising the southern regime, not by militarily destroying the ability of the DRV or the NLF to fight.

Secondly, the US had committed itself, by virtue of the doctrine of ‘containment’, to defending a proto-state created in the southern half of Vietnam out of a combination of émigrés from the north, former collaborators from the French regime, and local pre-feudal elites. The resources poured into this entity understandably did not produce a transition to capitalism (as it did in formerly feudal South Korea), but vanished into the pockets of state actors. The southern Vietnamese regime never became anything more than a corrupt, predatory entity, and this character was reflected in the relative ineffectiveness of its armed forces and its inability to make itself appear more attractive to the masses than the Stalinism to its north.

For the US to win the war, South Vietnam had to become something like South Korea, where America had imposed land reform and supported state-led industrialisation. The US kept applying pressure for land reform in order to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the peasantry; the regime delayed, adopted half measures, and so on, while the regime’s troops operated large-scale looting and protection rackets in their own interests - and those of landlords and officials who paid them off.

Thirdly, the US suffered from a sharp internal contradiction in the postwar period between, on the one hand, its reliance on democratic ideology to legitimate itself both internally and internationally and, on the other hand, its reliance for its state core (officer corps, security apparatus, etc) on a ‘party of order’ characterised by anti-democratic ideologies and nostalgia for the pre-Civil War slaveocracy. This contradiction adversely affected its ability to coerce the local elites in southern Vietnam and give effect to stabilising policies.

It also exploded in internal US political life in the form of the black civil rights movement, which in turn shaped the US anti-war movement. In this context, the fact that the US was relying on a conscript army became politically fatal, by giving opponents of the war a clear political focus and allowing mass opposition to the war to become directly reflected in the armed forces.

Radicalisation

Elements within the US state drew a number of lessons from their defeat in Vietnam. Most fundamentally, the fall of Saigon and the contemporary (1974-75) defeat of Portuguese colonialism in Africa and revolutionary crisis in Portugal led core elements to conclude

that the policy of ‘containment of communism’ adopted in around 1950 had failed and that it was necessary to adopt a new policy of ‘rollback’.

The new policy began with the ‘human rights offensive’ launched by president Jimmy Carter (1976-80), and was continued by Ronald Reagan’s massive military build-up in the 1980s, which aimed - successfully - to break the capacity of the USSR to sustain military competition with the US and thereby, by removing the Soviet military umbrella, to give the US a free hand throughout the world.

Another lesson that was rapidly carried into effect was the end of the draft. The French used its foreign legion and colonial troops rather than conscripts from an early stage in Vietnam, and the British abandoned conscription rapidly after Malaya and Cyprus - evidently conscript armies are untrustworthy for ‘counter-insurgency’ purposes. The US followed suit after Vietnam. All the more reason for communists and republicans to demand universal military training and a popular militia!

An associated change has been a shift from long-term military and covert operations in order to support regimes, as in Vietnam, to short-term interventions to destroy resisting regimes, leaving chaos behind (Lebanon, Somalia, ex-Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya ...).

The linkage between the crisis of military morale, the growth of mass opposition to the war and the race issue led leading political and some military actors in the US to make a serious attempt to develop a black middle class and a black element in the officer corps through ‘affirmative action’ and other measures. The American right never fully accepted this project and has been engaged since the late 1970s in efforts to roll it back. With Trumpism there is now a sharp shift in this direction.

Meanwhile, the lessons the left drew from Vietnam were simple and disastrous. The first was that a combination of colonial guerrilla insurgency with a solidarity movement in the metropolises based on direct action could defeat the projects of imperialism. It is from the high point of the Vietnam war, as much as from the dissemination at the same period of Che Guevara’s falsified account of the Cuban Revolution, that the infatuation with guerrillas, individual terrorism and ‘minority direct actions’ took its starting point.

What was omitted in this story was, first, the fact that the US anti-war movement emerged from a mass radicalisation on the issue of race - the civil rights movement, which had already made the US state paranoid about internal threats; second, the role of conventional military action in the Vietnam war; and, third, the role of Soviet and Chinese military support to the DRV - especially the anti-aircraft assistance that made the US bombing of the north so costly, but also the more general supply of arms and resources.

The problem was that the New Left’s (understandable) hostility to the USSR led it to downplay the actual role both of the USSR and China and of the overall international situation in the US defeat in Vietnam. The ‘official’ CPs had their own reasons for wanting to assert the ‘purely national’ character of the Vietnamese movement. The left thus failed to think internationally, even when it was engaged in ‘international solidarity’.

An associated idea was the centrality of forms of ‘direct action’. Proponents of this - chiefly coming from the Maoist, anarchist and pacifist traditions - have never quite realised that the reason for the

centrality of direct action in the US movements of the 1950s-early 1960s (Civil Rights Movement) and later 1960s (Vietnam) was the presence of targets that were easy to hit by direct action: segregation in the Civil Rights movement, and the apparatus of the draft and the ROTCs in the anti-war movement.

Outside this context, ‘direct actions’ like those of Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil, etc - unless they really become *mass* actions, involving the activity of millions - achieve only publicity stunts, not immediate blows to the regime and its projects. But, on the other hand, if they *did* become the action of millions, they would be an immediate insurrectionary threat to the state, in the way in which the direct actions of the 1960s were not. They would thus pose the question of political alternatives.

Another problem was the idea of small, committed groups swimming in the sea of broader fronts as being the road to political hegemony for revolutionary politics. This too came from the Maoist and Guevarist arsenal; but it seemed to be confirmed by the fact that the anti-war movement in the US was built by a combination of coalitions and local initiatives of very diverse groups.

What it neglected to mention was, first, that the Vietnamese and Chinese CPs were already mass parties *before* they began via their guerrilla operations to “swim like fish in the sea of the people” (Mao).² And, second, the anti-war movement in the US, though its effects *helped* the US state to reach the decision to ‘Vietnamise’ and withdraw, did not in itself achieve political victory. Subsequent broad mass movements and fronts have mobilised very substantial forces, which have, however, dissipated as soon as the immediate crisis has come to an end.

Commentary

I have not systematically searched out all the left commentary on the 50th anniversary of the fall of Saigon. But some of the coverage is in a limited way illuminating (cast in descending order of political prominence in Britain).

The *Morning Star* carried on April 30 two very different articles. The editorial for May Day - ‘As imperialism and militarism threaten human progress, workers of the world, unite’ - is excellent: it emphasises the character of the working class as an international class, and opposes efforts to confine trade unions to national boxes or to ‘pay and conditions’. It opposes people who claim that CPV leader Ho Chi Minh urged national roads, quoting his insistence that “the strength and perseverance of the Vietnamese originate primarily from the solidarity and support of world peoples”. The same issue, however, has an article by Vietnam specialist Kyril Whittaker - ‘The legacy of Ho Chi Minh’ - which is a classic Soviet fellow-travelling piece, elevating the cult of the personality of “Uncle Ho” and celebrating Vietnamese progress.

Socialist Worker’s Instagram and Facebook pages on April 30 pointed not to a current article, but to one from November 26 2023: by former *Socialist Worker* staff writer Sophie Squire, ‘Lessons for today from fight against Vietnam war’. The ‘lesson’ offered is an unmodified version of the left ideas I have criticised above: “It was the resistance of the Vietnamese people, combined with a mass anti-war movement in the US, that had made it impossible for the warmongers to continue. That amalgamation of forces is what’s needed today to end Israel’s assault on the Palestinians.” This is delusional.

The Fourth International’s *International Viewpoint* had on April 29 a retrospective by its long-time Indochina specialist Pierre Rousset: ‘Vietnam, 30 April 1975 - 50 years ago, a historic victory, but at what price?’ Rousset has considerably more on the aftermath of 1975. He recognises the role of Soviet and Chinese military aid; notes the extent to which Vietnam paid a heavy price for its victory. He considers the Khmer Rouge regime “at best embryonic” and argues that “in such a borderline case, it is best not to brandish concepts”. On strategic lessons, he stresses - as his tendency always has - flexibility:

There are strategic ‘models’. However, a strategy must take into account the evolution of the situation, the reactions of the enemy force, the results of previous phases of the struggle ... In reality, a concrete strategy evolves and often combines elements that belong to different ‘models’. The Vietnamese never stopped adapting their strategy.

RS21 on May 9 has a ‘long read’ (over 5,000 words): ‘Vietnam, 1968 and what lies ahead of us’ by Jonathan Neale, who was a participant in the later stages of the US anti-war movement and published a history of the war from 1960-75 in 2001. Largely narrative, Neale’s account relatively downplays the conventional warfare and the geopolitics of US defeat, stresses the character of the war as a class war (“Air wars between great industrial powers and poor peasants are always class wars”), and has nothing to say about what happened after 1975. He emphasises the anti-war movement, making the point that:

It was also a proxy war in the global civil war. The capitalist United States backed France, and communist Russia and China backed the Viet Minh guerrillas. People often get confused about proxy wars these days. The thing to remember is that every proxy war is simultaneously a bloodbath between the actual combatants. And the people on the ground are not necessarily fighting and dying for the same things their sponsors value.

I would *guess* that this is addressed to arguments that the war in Ukraine is a proxy war between Nato and Russia. But the point is not made explicit. What would its implication be if it were?

Neale’s actual conclusion is from personal experience. In 1968 he still supported US policy, and as an overseas student refused to go to the London anti-war demo. By 1969 he had severe doubts and in 1970 was active in the US anti-war movement. So “remember always: great movements change the world, because people change. The way you change the world is not to unfriend the people who disagree with you. It is to change the minds and hearts of the people who do not agree with you, so that together we can change the world.” This is an entirely valid and important point.

The problem remains the continued illusion of a repetition of Vietnam. Clearest in the SWP, it is still present in the other left commentators ●

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Notes

1. This and the subsequent points are from H Zinn *A people’s history of the United States* London 1996.

2. Various forms of the tag are in circulation, but the following is rather less dramatic: www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1937/guerrilla-warfare/ch06.htm.

TURKEY

Watershed moment

Abdullah Öcalan's huge moral authority predictably prevailed. **Esen Uslu** comments on the many questions that arise following the PKK's historic decision to lay down arms and end its armed struggle

Much-anticipated, the 12th Congress of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was held simultaneously in two separate locations last week, this while Turkey's military operations continued. Nonetheless, the government provided a communications link for the PKK's jailed leader, Abdullah Öcalan, to participate in the proceedings from his İmralı Island prison in the Sea of Marmara.

Obviously this was designed to overcome any opposition to his proposal to disarm and disband the PKK, an organisation that he helped found and within which, despite being held captive since 1999, he remains a towering moral authority. Apart from Apo, no one could convene a congress and get it to agree to lay down arms and convince PKK militants to consent.

However, the exact details of the communications he enjoyed have not yet been made public. But according to the scant reports, the congress duly approved Öcalan's proposals outlined in his letter to the organisation and the general public, which was released at a meeting in Istanbul in January. As the full report, including agreed resolutions, has yet to be published, it is difficult to say with certainty what was agreed during the prolonged secret negotiations between the PKK and the government. However, based on the limited press release and the speeches of the PKK leaders, it seems that the agreements, whatever they may be, are being put into effect.

The process by which a successful 50-year-old guerrilla movement will be disarmed and dissolved is still unclear, as is the regional scope of the decision. Would the armed forces of the People's Democratic Union (PYD), which formed the backbone of the Syrian Democratic Forces, be part of the deal? Or will the agreement signed between the SDF and the newly installed Syrian



Abdullah Öcalan, comrade Apo

government, which accepts the integration of Kurdish forces with the new state security organisation, continue, while the SDF maintain its arms and structure? Initial reports from Syria suggest that the adopted resolutions do not cover this at all. Time will tell.

From the standpoint of Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan,

the process did not start from a position of strength, or a need to democratise public life. On the contrary, the driving force was the fear of the impending collapse of the established order in the Middle East, and the redivision of spheres of influence under US and Israeli hegemony.

Syrian border

In practice, Turkey now has a new 'land border' with Israel through a now US-friendly regime in Syria. Donald Trump, of course, met with interim Syrian president Ahmad al-Sharaa in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday in Saudi Arabia. Under the nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Golani he had a \$10 million US bounty on his head. Now sanctions have been lifted and Trump praises him as a "young, attractive guy. Tough guy. Strong past. Very strong past. Fighter."

Nonetheless, Israel daily encroaches on Syrian territory. To bolster the new Syrian regime, Turkey needs to bring round the Syrian Kurds. Turkey is also acutely aware that the Syrian regime, which is based on a shaky coalition around al-Sharaa and his Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), could not withstand any threatened Israeli onslaught.

The HTS regime has proved incapable of winning the consent of the Druze and Alawite minorities living in the south and west of the country. The ongoing massacres perpetrated against them by forces aligned with HTS have demonstrated that the regime is unable to rule without resorting to terrorism. This 'justifies' an Israeli intervention under the guise of 'protecting minorities' from Islamist fundamentalists. Therefore, winning

the Syrian Kurds away from their alliance with the US would be a big plus for Turkey.

The growing opposition to Erdoğan's regime, with its one-man rule, is putting pressure on the coalition between his Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP). The traditional approach has been to increase pressure on the opposition through the security forces and the judiciary. The injustices and fabricated charges used to imprison opposition leaders have become so extreme that maintaining even a semblance of 'democracy' in the eyes of international public opinion is becoming near impossible. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the pretence that the regime's aggression is merely a response to "terrorist activity".

Öcalan was fully aware of these facts, and was prepared to take risks by ending all armed resistance and 'continuing the struggle' through

unarmed politics, despite the limited democratic options available in Turkey. The move he initiated may secure some concessions from the regime, particularly with regard to amending the constitution before the next general election. For example, it would be regarded as problematic to imprison opposition leaders on the pretext that they are supporters of a 'terrorist organisation', when that organisation no longer exists.

However, expecting the AKP-MHP regime to democratise the state and society, as some in the press have prophesied, is nothing but a pipe-dream. Neither Erdoğan nor the state security apparatus has changed: they do not believe in peace, nor the will of people. They refer to their approach as the 'consolidation of inner fortifications'.

Differences

A detailed analysis of the PKK press release and Turkish politicians' speeches could shed some light on the apparent differences of opinion despite the general agreement. However, it is too early to read much into any of this.

Ertuğrul Kürkçü, a former MP and the honorary leader of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), issued a statement after the congress. He declared:

These calls and resolutions are fuelled by the determination that new social relations and new states of consciousness have emerged in this half-century in the context of claiming rights. According to this determination, in the context of historical, social and political changes that herald the turning of an epoch, frontal warfare may not be the only path to freedom from a sociopolitical regime based on inequality, exploitation and domination.

It needs to be ascertained whether a new state of consciousness or a new set of new social relations has indeed emerged, as claimed. It also needs to be established whether a peaceful struggle is truly "the only path to freedom" from "inequality, exploitation and domination".

In any case a watershed moment has passed, and we are now all eagerly awaiting the details of how the general agreement will be implemented, without letting down our guard. Will the Kurdish freedom movement be able to adopt a new organisational structure suitable for cooperating with working class forces in the coming struggle? Could the Turkish left contribute to the process in any way? ●

Fighting fund

Top it up!

After last month's success, when we soared past our new £2,750 fighting fund target on the very last day of April (!), things have not started well in the first half of May.

And, incredibly, I'm saying that after a couple of brilliant donations to the *Weekly Worker* received in the last week: first, a cheque for no less than £200 from US-based comrade AP, and, secondly, £100 contributed via PayPal by comrade MF. Then there were some handy standing orders/bank transfers from PB (£70), DV and NH (£30 each), PM and CC (£10 each).

More PayPal gifts came our way from another US comrade PM (£50), ST (£20), Italian-based MZ (£10), JV (£7) and AR (£5), while comrade Hassan didn't let us down, handing his usual £5 note to one of our team. All that came to £547, taking our running total up to £1,025 after exactly two weeks.

But, of course, that means

we're quite a bit behind the going rate, so we could really do with more comrades and readers playing their part. If you fancy being one of them, why not make a bank transfer or - better still - set up a standing order. Or, if you'd rather, make a PayPal payment or even send us a cheque! For more details, see the information below.

Let me add that, for those readers whose resubscription is due, we'd love it if you could top up your payment a little bit. I'm talking about a donation on top of the newly increased sub rate, of course.

The *Weekly Worker* relies on you, our readers and supporters - and we know you won't let us down! ●

Robbie Rix

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

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COVID

Living with a nightmare

Why has long Covid gone unrecognised, untreated and dismissed as a psychosomatic illness? **James Linney** looks at the problems of a medical system beset with chronic underfunding and without democratic control

It is only five years on from the Covid-19 pandemic, but already memories of those times of mass hospitalisations, daily death counts, social distancing, furloughing, etc are taking on an unreal, dream-like feeling. This is perhaps exacerbated by the fact that governments across the globe are doing their best to pretend it never happened. The death of over seven million people, it would seem, does not provide enough motivation to encourage them to work cooperatively towards ensuring another such outbreak does not result in similar devastation.

Of course, in reality, Covid is still very much with us. People are still grieving the loss of loved ones; there are still significant numbers of circulating infections and the regular emergence of new variants. Thankfully, the combination of the continued effectiveness of vaccinations and the fact that newer strains result in less severe symptoms (so far) means that currently acute infections are mild and the immediate global risk remains low. But we are only a minor, more deadly mutation of the virus away from being thrust back into the horror show of 2020.

There is a group of people for whom the devastating legacy remains a living nightmare: people suffering with long Covid - it is estimated that globally as many as 400 million people are living with it.¹ According to a survey in the UK last year, two million people have self-reported as experiencing long Covid symptoms.² Of these, 1.5 million state that their symptoms adversely affect their day-to-day functioning. Despite this huge number being affected, the already inadequate resources and care on offer for people living with long Covid have started to be withdrawn. A study recently found that of the 120 long Covid clinics in operation in the national health service in 2022, only 46 now remain,³ with further closures likely in the near future. Despite Labour's promises to reinstate funding within the NHS, huge numbers of people are being abandoned, left without help and living with a chronic, severely disabling condition.

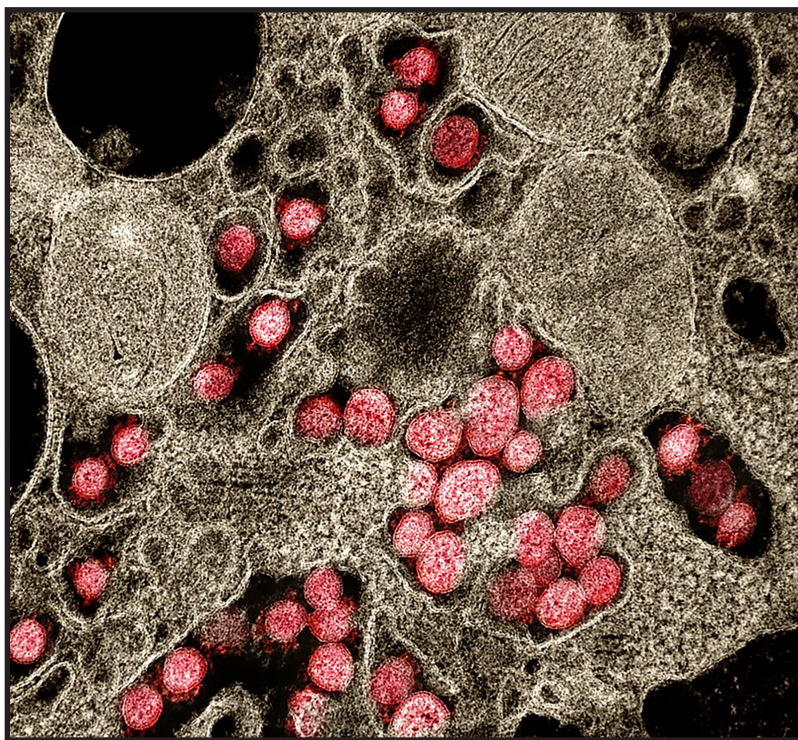
It is worth looking at how people with long Covid have been let down from the start by medical institutions and consider what this mistreatment tells us about how certain marginalised groups - and the working class in general - are still excluded from engaging meaningfully in medical science.

Symptoms

The World Health Organisation defines long Covid as "the continuation or development of new symptoms three months after the initial SARS-CoV-2 infection, with these symptoms lasting for at least two months with no other explanation".⁴

Long Covid is a post-viral syndrome, in that certain symptoms persist after the initial infection and contagious phase. How it affects people varies widely. The more severe and dominant symptoms tend to be profound fatigue - which classically becomes worse following physical or mental exertion - shortness of breath and cognitive impairment. But there are many other potential symptoms, such as dizziness, palpitations, sleep disturbance, chronic pain, loss of or change in smell or taste, headaches, among many others.

Long Covid can be complicated by organ damage that occurred in the 'acute infective' phase, such as lung



Electron micrograph image of SARS-CoV-2

clots or damage to kidneys, heart, bowels or lung tissue. However, the degree of acute Covid infection does not always correlate well with the severity of the symptoms - meaning that some who only experienced a mild acute infection can have life-changing symptoms.

The course of the illness also varies from person to person. For most, it will have started soon after the acute infection. Some experience a few weeks of a 'honeymoon' period, where they feel they are improving before long Covid symptoms develop. The majority will experience several months of often severe symptoms, but will slowly recover (partially or fully). However, for some, the condition does not show much improvement, or they suffer severe relapses. Millions live with this condition without any idea if they will recover.

It is important to emphasise that, although people suffering with long Covid are described as having 'fatigue' and 'brain fog', these terms do a disservice to the severity of their suffering. Often, the fatigue means people are unable to function independently on a day-to-day basis, struggling to leave the house and relying on carers for basic tasks like shopping or self-care. The 'brain fog' can mean a devastating impairment of cognitive processing and memory - similar to that experienced by people with mild to moderate dementia.⁵ People with these symptoms are often unable to work and become increasingly reliant on family members for care. They often become very isolated, which unsurprisingly has a devastating impact on their mental health.

People with long Covid are not only having to deal with their illness and disability in the context of the recent defunding of their care: they also often have to struggle to be heard and taken seriously by the medical profession. There are still many who doubt the truth of the disease. In her recent bestselling book, *The age of diagnosis*, Dr Suzanne O'Sullivan, a UK-based neurologist, makes the case for long Covid being a psychosomatic illness. That is, instead of having any real biological basis, it leaves people projecting historical stress or trauma onto the diagnostic label of long Covid in order to subconsciously validate their own suffering.

O'Sullivan's views are shared by other influential medical and mental health professionals, who prefer to believe that instead of suffering from a multi-organ, post-viral syndrome, millions of people are sharing some kind of mass hysteria - not so much making up their symptoms, but misinterpreting mental suffering as long Covid.

Suffering

Let me be clear: people who suffer from mental health conditions can experience severe physical symptoms and in no way should their suffering be seen as any less valid. In fact there is not in reality a black-and-white separation between psychiatric and biological conditions: the situation is more nuanced. For example, people with anxiety suffer both psychological and physical effects, driven by stress hormones that the body releases. But O'Sullivan's dismissal of patient experiences is contrary to the most robust, up-to-date research. It amounts to a kind of medical gaslighting.

This distrust and disbelief by some medical professionals has a previous precedent. Another illness sharing similar symptoms with long Covid is myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) - a chronic, serious debilitating illness with symptoms of extreme tiredness and cognitive impairment.

Guardian journalist George Monbiot, who himself has suffered from long Covid, was drawn by his own experience of being dismissed to write about how ME/CFS sufferers are also mistreated - a situation he called "the greatest medical scandal of the 21st century".⁶ He discussed how ME/CFS sufferers were also told their condition was "all in their head", and how this psychosocial approach became embedded in research and government policy.

One prominent study expounding these views was the 2011 PACE trial, which concluded that ME/CFS sufferers should be treated with graded exercise therapy (GET) and cognitive behavioural therapy.⁷ It was later revealed that the study's methodology was profoundly flawed, and its conclusions biased. GET, it turns out, is actually very harmful for people with ME/CFS, and its recommendation has now been withdrawn. But the damage had

already been done - in the loss of patient trust and the persistent belief that ME/CFS sufferers simply need to change their attitude, exercise more and generally pull up their socks.

The PACE trial was partly funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, and it is no coincidence that one of its legacies is the idea that people with chronic illnesses are 'harmed' by being offered financial support and should be encouraged to 'get back to work'.

Now, the same group of influential professionals is trying to reframe long Covid as purely psychosomatic and therefore equally undeserving of long-term support or benefits. One such person is Michael Sharpe, professor of psychological medicine at the University of Oxford and founder of a long Covid clinic, who has claimed that long Covid could be triggered in psychologically vulnerable people simply by reading about it. For insurance companies, which benefit from long Covid not being recognised as a chronic disabling illness, this is just what they were looking for.

History

To understand how we got here, it helps to consider how long Covid originated and its journey to gradual recognition.

'Long Covid' was first used by Elisa Perego, an academic from Lombardy, Italy - an early Covid-19 hotspot - who tweeted the phrase in May 2020 to describe her persisting symptoms. That term was quickly picked up and shared by a growing social media community with similar experiences.

This grassroots patient-led movement has historical precedents. In 1975, in Lyme, Connecticut, USA, people started developing severe neurological symptoms. After years of being dismissed by doctors, patient-driven research revealed the cause to be *Borrelia burgdorferi*, a tick-borne virus - now known as Lyme disease.

The dismissal of patient experience is often justified because it is not seen as 'proper' science. While patient reports are not the same as double-blind, randomised controlled trials, they should not be dismissed. When large numbers of people report unexplained symptoms, doctors and researchers should take their concerns seriously.

Early in the pandemic, the number of people reporting symptoms beyond the expected two weeks made it hard to ignore. Many of them were medical professionals themselves, exposed on the front lines. Even so, the medical and research response has been slow. Long Covid does not have a single diagnostic test. Specialist investigations exist, but are expensive and not widely available. Its symptoms are often vague and variable, making diagnosis difficult and delayed.

Modern healthcare systems are not well set up to deal with patients with complex problems. Even before the NHS's current staffing and funding crisis, most GPs had only 10 minutes per consultation - barely enough time to address straightforward issues, let alone multifaceted physical and mental health conditions.

Another reason for resisting the recognition of long Covid as a distinct disease is the lack of a clear underlying cause. Several theories are under investigation: persistent viral proteins, latent viral reactivation, autoimmune responses and chronic inflammation. All of these may help explain the

multi-systemic symptoms and the lack of a 'one size fits all' treatment.

New tests, such as functional MRIs and immunological assays, may help in diagnosis. These have given weight to the evidence that there are real biological, pathological processes occurring: studies have identified that people with long Covid were twice as likely to have these viral remnants in their blood as people with no lingering symptoms,⁸ that there are persisting inflammatory processes in the brain⁹ and that people with long Covid show evidence of mitochondrial dysfunction.¹⁰

But effective treatments remain elusive. For now, symptom management is the focus, and the most beneficial approach for many patients remains simple: being listened to, supported and allowed time to rest. Doctors can struggle with uncertainty. Faced with illnesses they cannot fix, some may reject patients' experiences rather than admit gaps in their knowledge. This tendency - disbelieving patients and causing further harm - is a systemic issue.

Historically, medicine emerged from the petty bourgeoisie and was built to protect privilege. Until the 1960s, being comfortably well-off, white and male was a virtual requirement to become a doctor. This bred a culture rife with chauvinism, racism and disdain for the working class, who were often treated with condescension or disregard.

Of course, modern medicine has evolved. The NHS now includes a diverse workforce, with many health professionals striving to provide compassionate, evidence-based care under immense pressure. It may not be controlled by the working class, but it is sustained by their efforts and it is all the better for it.

Still, long Covid shows how certain legacies persist. More troublingly, it exposes neoliberal efforts to reframe illness as individual failure of resilience. If chronic disability can be reclassified as psychosomatic, government can deny the social, financial and medical support sufferers need. This fits conveniently with Starmer's recent repugnant disability benefit cuts.

Though medical science has progressed, the working class remains largely excluded from shaping its priorities. As a result, profit often comes before patient care. The only way to stop this cycle of harm is for the working class to take democratic control of health services and medical research - so everyone, from doctor to patient, can work together to alleviate suffering, not generate profit ●

Notes

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2. www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/selfreportedcoronaviruscovid19infectionsandassociatedsymptomsenglandandscotland/november2023tomarch2024.
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CHURCH

Much like the old one

Just because he is an American do not expect him to put the interests of America first. Leo XIV heads a multinational institution that has its own unique interests, writes **Eddie Ford**

Even before his name was announced, with the white smoke billowing from the Sistine Chapel, the crowds below were chanting “Viva il papa!” After the fourth ballot of the papal conclave on May 8, the man to replace Jorge Mario Bergoglio, known as ‘Francis’, was announced - Robert Francis Prevost a Peruvian bishop originally from Chicago.

At a ‘young’ 69, he had become the 267th occupant of the throne and the first ever American to fill the position. Even more important was the traditional *Habemus papam* Latin proclamation made by the cardinal protodeacon from the central loggia of St Peter’s Basilica, declaring Pope Leo XIV to the public for the first time - some claiming it was a heavenly inspired choice.

His official papal name is significant, of course. Leo XIII was head of the church from February 1878 until his death in July 1903 and developed Catholic social teaching in his 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum*.¹ Here he outlined the rights of workers to a fair wage, safe working conditions, and the formation of trade unions, while at the same time affirming the rights to private property and free enterprise - rejecting socialism as a sin. With this famous encyclical, he became falsely known as the ‘pope of the workers’ - a transparent lie, as shown easily by the fact that the fascist dictatorship in Portugal in the 1930s incorporated many key ideas from the encyclical into Portuguese law - the ‘Estado Novo’ (‘New State’) promulgated the idea of corporatism as an economic model, especially in labour relations.

Social Catholicism

This form of Catholic social teaching resonated with an older political culture, which emphasised natural law tradition, patrimonialism, centralised direction and control, and the ‘natural’ hierarchies of society - and the *Rerum novarum* created the foundations for modern thinking in the social doctrines of the Catholic church, influencing Leo XIII’s successors like Jorge Mario Bergoglio. A world where, to borrow the words from an Anglican hymn, everyone knows their place: “the rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, god made them, high or lowly, and ordered their estate”.²

According to a cardinal from Chile, Leo told him that the choice of name is based on his concern about the “world’s cultural shifts”; therefore we need “a type of Copernican revolution” involving artificial intelligence and robotics - which has a certain irony, given the original profoundly hostile reception to Copernicus’s teachings from the Catholic church. His *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* remained banned till 1835. However, as an institution the Catholic church is nothing but adaptable - perhaps the key to its success and Prevost was likely due to the increased numbers of African and Asian cardinals, or conversely a European to act as a counterweight to America’s status as superpower - whose image in the world, in the words of one theologian professor, “simply is too powerful”. Others wanted a man who was more ideologically aligned with his predecessor, not further away, and could speak truth to American power papal-style - hence Robert Francis Prevost was deemed the man for the job in dealing with the new order ushered in by Donald Trump.

As it happens, Prevost’s name had been circulating as a possible compromise candidate to succeed Francis, and some had speculated about him being a possible *papabile*, an Italian word loosely translated as ‘pope-able’ - meaning that certain cardinals are considered more likely to become pope than others. In practice though, conclaves have not always chosen one of the *papabili*: eg, the Polish Karol Józef Wojtyła, who was not in the running prior



Waving from the loggia of St Peter’s Basilica in his first public appearance as pope

to the conclave that elected him in October 1978.

Laughably, at the time, there were ‘official communists’ who idiotically thought that John Paul II gave proof of the growing power of the ‘socialist bloc’. They imagined JP II lending his moral authority to push forward the programme of peace and socialism. Actually, his election was a gift for the Jimmy Carter-Ronald Reagan roll-back doctrine. The papacy channelled \$50 million of CIA funding into Poland and the coffers of Solidarność (cheered on at the time by the likes of today’s Anticapitalist Resistance, SWP and Counterfire). Under John Paul, the Catholic church played the same sort of counterrevolutionary role in Africa and Latin America. Liberation theology was crushed and death squads were blessed.

Some Vaticanologists have suggested that attempts to predict the conclave’s outcome are pointless. They are ... not least because they are usually completely wrong. Anyway, betting on papal conclaves has a long history and several gambling companies had put the Chicago man’s odds at less than 1%.

There was even a ‘fantasy pope league’ (like fantasy football) constructed specifically for the 2025 conclave, *Fantapana*, where the sole payout was “eternal glory”. But most observers seemed to think that either a non-European pope was likely due to the increased numbers of African and Asian cardinals, or conversely a European to act as a counterweight to America’s status as superpower - whose image in the world, in the words of one theologian professor, “simply is too powerful”. Others wanted a man who was more ideologically aligned with his predecessor, not further away, and could speak truth to American power papal-style - hence Robert Francis Prevost was deemed the man for the job in dealing with the new order ushered in by Donald Trump.

There are those who, like the ‘official communists’ of 1978 and John Paul II, think that because Leo is American by birth he will act in cahoots with Donald Trump and his new world order. This shows an elemental failure to understand the Catholic church and Prevost himself.

In some ways he is as much a cardinal from Latin America because of the many years he spent in Peru. Yes, Prevost rapidly moved up the ranks of the local church, whose hierarchy was, by all accounts, split between ‘progressives’ influenced by liberation theology and the arch-conservatives who look back to the imagined certainties of 13th century doctrine.

Prevost himself does not seem to have been ‘tainted’ by liberation theology, though he does not appear to have an ideological affinity to the arch conservative wing - so you could call him with reservations a ‘centrist’. You could also describe him as the pope from two Americas and some within Peru like to claim his as one of their own. He has three passports: US, Peruvian ... and Vatican.

Unsurprisingly, Prevost caught the eye of Francis, who appointed him as a bishop in 2015 and quickly promoted him. He summoned Prevost to Rome in 2023 and appointed him prefect of the powerful Dicastery for Bishops and president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, making him a cardinal the same year. Being head of the dicastery for bishop appointments allowed him to build networks across the global Catholic leadership.

Troublesome?

What you can say with confidence is that he is in charge of an institution that is truly *multinational*, not the CEO of a transnational corporation - let alone some national organisation. The concerns of the Catholic church are certainly not those of the birth-nationality of this or that pope: so not

Polish, not German, not Argentinian and certainly not American. So Leo is unlikely to bless a greater America and turning Canada into the 51st state, incorporating Greenland, retaking the Panama canal or conflict with China.

The website, *Crux*, that “offers the very best in smart, wired and independent coverage” of the Vatican and the Catholic church, has ventured the view that the new pope would have to walk a tightrope between defending Catholic social teaching and keeping Washington and its influential “Maga” Catholics onside.³ *Crux* argues this means that Pope Leo XIV will have to “navigate between clearly defending” his values, however defined, and establishing a working relationship with the Trump administration.

There is, however, little doubt that Leo can pass the ‘Vatican test’ of being a progressive. Damn it, he would even past muster with the SWP’s six ‘socialist’ principles it envisages for election candidates! That will not go down well with Trump ... nor the Catholics who sit around his cabinet table (JD Vance, Sean Duffy and Marco Rubio, indeed over a third of them are *conservative* Catholics).

A lot like Francis, the new pope supports “real action” on climate change, Palestinian rights and human rights in general, and is opposed to austerity - so far, so *Socialist Worker*. OK, he does not support the right to abortion - no wing of the church does - and has no plans to officiate at gay weddings or introduce female bishops. LGBTQ+ Catholics have expressed concern about hostile remarks made a decade ago by Prevost, in which he condemned what he called the “homosexual lifestyle” and “the redefinition of marriage” as “at odds with the Gospel”.⁴ But we can assume that Leo will preach tolerance and be ecumenical about gays attending services, ceremonies and other such

gatherings of the faithful.

Will Trump want to rid himself of this “troublesome priest”? Henry II of England allegedly said this in 1170 about Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury ... just before four of his knights cut him down and made a martyr of him.⁵ Unlikely, but you never know. The CIA is more than capable of arranging a ‘natural death’ ... or an assassination by a conveniently Islamic fanatic. Already we have seen JD Vance, a Catholic convert, clashing with the papacy over Augustinian teachings about caring for others. The vice president says care for friends and family *first* and in effect to hell with black and brown foreigners. There are many other potential areas for conflict between the new pope and the Trump administration.

Shrinking

Pope Leo XIV will have many things in his in-tray, amongst them the shrinking size of the Catholic community in America. This year an article by Eric Sammons appeared in *Crisis Magazine*, a neo-conservative Catholic publication, entitled ‘Catholics are rapidly losing ground’, which quoted passages from a recent definitive Pew Research Center report.⁶ Sammons wrote that “for every 100 people who join the Catholic church, 840 leave”. So, when you rejoice seeing folks become Catholic at Easter, you should “remember that more than eight people have left by the back door for each one who’s come in the front”.⁷

He goes on to say that no other religion has “nearly as bad” a join/leave ratio. For instance, he cites how, for every 100 people who become Protestant, 180 leave - from which he concludes that “the status quo that has reigned over the past 60 years must become a thing of the past”. Of course, out of tune with the new pope, Sammons suggests junking the reforms of the 1960s by promoting homeschooling among Catholics, halting all interreligious activities, shutting down parish sports leagues that play on Sundays, making the traditional Latin mass much more widely celebrated, etc, etc.

But nonetheless it is an amazing statistic, as you would have thought that millions of Latinos coming from the south would greatly boost numbers. Though it would require a longer article to go into the details, a separate study four years ago reported that two-thirds of US Hispanics/Latinos identified as Catholic, but that has seen a significant drop, as a more recent survey revealed that only 55% think of themselves as Catholic.

Nevertheless, it would be absurd to write off the influence of Catholicism in America. After all JD Vance is just a heartbeat away from being president. ●

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SINGAPORE

Small island prospects

As expected the ruling party has just been re-elected. However, what are the chances for the left and the working class within the confines of a tiny authoritarian city state with an AAA credit rating that serves as a financial hub and tax haven? Billy Clark gives his take on things

On May 3, the city-state of Singapore elected its 15th parliament, returning a massive majority in favour of the ruling People's Action Party, as it has in every election since 1959. The 'centre-left' Workers' Party remains the only other party with elected representatives, maintaining its 10 seats across three contiguous constituencies from 2020. It has also gained two non-constituency MPs.¹ The turnout was 92.5%, which sounds high in Britain, but is actually a record low.²

The 12 seats out of 97 for the WP sounds fairly dismal. But it might appear more of an achievement, when seen in the context of Singapore's history since separation from the Malay Federation in 1965: PAP (once a broad, anti-colonial party, which benefited from its prominent leftists and links with trade unions), in order to consolidate its grip on power, largely succeeded in expelling and muzzling its own left and those outside its ranks - and working class independence with it.

From 1966-81 there were no opposition politicians in parliament at all, and before 2020 there were never more than single figures elected. Historian PJ Thum defines Singapore as a "parliamentary dictatorship", and often makes the point that, although Singapore ceased to be a 'British subject' in 1963, the government has never moved on from colonialism.

Gerrymandering helps understanding the results. Instead of placing constituency boundaries around obvious, natural communities, they are drawn up in a way that helps the ruling party. The Electoral Boundaries Review Committee announced its changes for the 2025 election as late as March 11. Combined with the usual early election call, this meant parties did not have long to find suitable candidates and campaign in the new boundaries. The EBRC allows no public consultation and is not transparent about how exactly its decisions are made.

First past the post elections also favour a two-party system, and the fact that PAP has 90% of seats with 65% of the votes demonstrates the problem. Furthermore, the high election deposit cost and high threshold to keep it discourages smaller parties from fielding candidates.

Singapore now consists of 14 single-member constituencies (SMCs, electing one MP), and 16 'group representation constituencies' (GRCs), in which a party stands a slate of up to five MPs. The use of GRCs - ostensibly to improve representation of minorities (ie, non-Chinese) in parliament - is just another aspect of gerrymandering. The former SMC of Bukit Batok is a good illustration. In 2020, Chee Soon Juan of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) received 45% there, and it was assumed he would come even closer to winning if he stood again. But Bukit Batok was absorbed into a new GRC, dominated by previous PAP strongholds, and the result was a 76% victory for the PAP slate.

The strategy of other parties - which is not based on seeking to form a government, but on creating a more robust minority and a "more balanced parliament" - appears to have failed. It was clear to voters that no party was standing in enough places to get anywhere near winning a



Election rally of so-called Workers' Party

majority (WP had the most opposition candidates with only 26). The recent increase in taxation has been very unpopular, but voters knew that there was little point in voting for the so-called opposition parties against the incumbent government.

Elimination

So far I have not talked in terms of left versus right, but of government versus opposition. This reflects the content of the different parties' campaigns. All parties and independent candidates have released manifestos, but their messaging was mostly about increasing the opposition, rather than the policies they intend to introduce. The fact is, there is no left presence in Singapore.

The crackdowns on the Barisan Sosialis and PAP left in 1963, the detainment without trial of those suspected of involvement in a 'Marxist conspiracy' in 1987, and the elimination of independent and left unions have led to a situation where few dare to endorse socialism of any sort.

Nevertheless, it may be useful to think about what the political priorities might be for an emergent organised left.

One of these must be the abolition of the death penalty - which is mandatory for drug trafficking. There are some particularly egregious cases in Singapore's recent history. Nagaenthran K Dharmalingam was hanged in 2022 for attempting to smuggle heroin. He had a learning disability and claimed to have been forced and threatened into doing so, but appeals against his execution were rejected.

Polling from 2024 shows that over three quarters of Singaporeans approve of capital punishment. An even larger majority believe it to be an effective preventative, though this is far from clear. What is more, lawyers working for death row prisoners and activists against the death penalty are subject to state harassment and censorship. Most recently, the advocacy group, Transformative Justice Collective, has been prohibited from using its website or social media accounts until December 2026. No party is opposed to capital punishment outright, and only the WP opposes the mandatory death penalty, although even this has not featured in its campaigning.

Then there is immigration. Singapore's cleanliness, its attractive public housing, and its seamless, efficient public transport are the product of the exploitation in particular of the migrant workforce, whose plight is largely concealed from the resident population. These workers - there are some 250,000 of them - are

drawn from other Asian countries to build up and maintain the city and their position must be addressed in a socialist programme. 90% of Singapore's non-resident workforce are these low-wage, temporary migrant workers, who cannot change their jobs, bring in their family nor stay for more than two years typically. Making a complaint or trying to receive compensation involves so much bureaucracy that few workers are successful - if they are not first put off by the fear of sudden deportation, lorded over by their bosses.

Life for male workers is characterised by cramped dormitories, while the isolation of women in domestic work means they are unlikely to learn about their rights or find a way to address abuse on the job. Laws have been passed to protect migrant workers from the worst employment practices, but the best of these are only sporadically applied, while others have led to employers imposing additional fees on the worker, stagnating their wages. Far from returning to Bangladesh wealthy, migrant workers are more often left vulnerable to debt bondage, and unable to achieve the milestones they had dreamt of.

Spontaneous actions by migrant workers have joined older events like the Hock Lee riots of 1955 in being used to justify the government's 'racial harmony' policy, used to prevent public debate around racism and religion. Workers need to reclaim such events as a part of their own history. In 2012, 131 bus drivers from China struck against dormitory conditions and unequal pay. They were deported without trial, but their action had the effect of improving living conditions for bus drivers at this company, and establishing equal pay for all non-resident drivers.

How migrant workers are perceived is subject to the whims of the elite: depending on current immigration policy, politicians can fan the flames of xenophobia one year and condemn it the next. Temporary migrant workers cannot vote, of course, and have no avenue for involving themselves in politics. It is no wonder that such workers feel they have no stake in Singaporean society.

Political freedom

The PAP's willingness to flip its rhetoric on migration and race is a symptom of the fact that there is no logically consistent bourgeois approach to immigration and free movement. Working class Singaporeans, who have no minimum wage, correctly see the reliance on migrant workers as suppressing their wages. Measures that reduce

competition between workers, such as the right to collective bargaining in independent unions and a living wage based on maximum hours, are the only way forward.

Another priority for socialists must be increased political freedom: this will not be achieved by having more dissenting MPs, but would necessarily constitute a challenge to the state form. With the election date announced, Kirsten Han used her newsletter entitled *We, the citizens* to define various institutions that are supposed to be distinct, but are often used interchangeably: state, government and party. Confusion is understandable, as only one party has ever governed and most of its new candidates are recruited from the civil service and military.

Civil Service

One feature of a partisan civil service is that there is no distinction between public and party money. PAP is hostile to welfare, but leading up to elections it used state reserves to introduce a popular measure. A scheme in Bukit Panjang, which provided monthly \$1 meals, explains why the SDP received only 38% in a constituency where it expected to perform well. The prime minister and others can credibly make threats that voters will lose various funding if they vote the wrong way. Such rhetoric is always abundant in the campaigning period, but it seems to have not bothered those who actually live in WP-controlled areas.

This level of political and ideological control means dissent is easily and tightly policed. Even the meekest of actions can be met with arrest and possible prosecution. This includes a recent "no-person protest" in memory of those murdered in Gaza, which involved arranging shoes in front of a university building, and resulted in a raid on the homes of the students involved. A 'speakers' corner' was tokenistically introduced in 2000 as a 'free speech zone' - provided the actual 'free speech' is first registered with the police.

Workers in Singapore have no genuinely independent trade unions at all - every so-called union comes under the government-controlled NTUC, whose aim is the maintenance of "harmonious industrial relations".

Singapore has all the artifices and procedures expected of a so-called bourgeois democracy, but has never had a free and fair election (the closest it came was 1955, when still a British colony), and a proper separation of powers ●

Notes

1. Non-constituency MPs have the same voting rights as those elected and at present these positions go to the two losing opposition candidates with the highest vote percentage.
2. Singapore has a compulsory voting system. Anyone who does not vote and cannot prove a good reason is removed from the electoral roll and must pay a fine to be re-entered.

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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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More papal
conclave than
beginnings of a
democratic party

Corbyn is coming

Hints are being dropped here, there and everywhere. But exactly what is going on remains a closely guarded secret. As for programme, everything tells us it is going to be on the soft end of the soft left. **Carla Roberts** provides an update

Charlie Kimber informed us last week that at a “conference of resistance” on May 10 “Jeremy Corbyn *almost* declared a new left challenge to Starmer”.¹ This *almost* made us laugh out loud, seeing as it is so very indicative of Corbyn’s *modus operandi*. It is also somewhat amusing, because Charlie fails to mention that this conference launched yet another, altogether different, grouping - namely the People’s Alliance for Change and Equality, “a new movement bringing together community campaigns, trade unionists and social movements in Kirklees”² ... maybe because it is not run by the SWP.

Before you ask - no, Corbyn is not about to launch the Collective party that has been simmering away on ever lower heat for the best part of a year. Pamela Fitzpatrick, company director of ‘Justice Collective Ltd’, might have declared only a few short months ago that the new venture was about to take flight, while internal working groups were drawing up all sorts of constitutional rules and documents. Alas, Collective looks like it is not going to hatch - there were just too many weird and wonderful organisations, wanting to have a say on the programme and structure of a new party. Can’t have that.

It’s a date

Some of the groups involved, however, have been allowed into secret, second-tier discussions. At Counterfire’s weekend school on May 9, Corbyn said that in the recent local elections

... a whole lot of people have been elected as socialists, as independents, and the important thing is to bring them together. The Peace and Justice Project is in intense contact with all of them. I want all of these groups to come together ... There’s no point looking inwards in small rooms: we have to be out there on the various demonstrations. Let’s go for it and do it.³

But the interesting thing here is that Corbyn finally seems to have decided that some kind of new organisation will be launched - and “before the English local elections in May 2026 - earlier if possible”. That is at least how *Socialist Worker* reports his PACE speech.

The next day, Corbyn collaborator Andrew Feinstein told us a bit more about the secret negotiations taking place. “We can’t just build another political party”, he said, because that just “does not appeal to people who do not already think like us and come to our meetings”. Instead, he wants to “bring all these local community initiatives together”: ie, “the Preston Independents, the



Many place their hopes in him

Liverpool Community Independents, a group in Newcastle, the about to be announced Camden Independents and many, many others across the country”.

He tried to explain why these talks have to take place in camera:

I have to apologise. I know that people are very frustrated but I want to assure you, and I can’t say more than this, there have been extensive discussions/conversations/engagements going on, on the left, for a few months now and they are intensifying.

I wish they were just open and transparent conversations, but there are people who are in very sensitive positions that makes it very difficult to make public some of the conversations that are taking place, but what I can say to you is that we together - not as a small group of leaders or self-appointed saviours, but as communities - we’re going to create, in this country, a national movement, that, when strategically appropriate, will decide to become a national party, before the next general election and we’re going to introduce to this country a totally different type of politics.

We need to ensure that every metre in this country, every local community, has its own independent organisation that is driven by the community, for the community and then, once we have spent a small time doing this organising, we need to have a launch congress for a new national party.

Why do it in that way? Because if it is not democratic and accountable from the outset, it will be just another political party.

Comrade Feinstein went on to praise the Workers Party of Belgium, a former Maoist organisation, which he seems to want to emulate (also see letter ‘Neo-Maoists’ on page two):

The BWP has gone from a little grouping - some might even say a cult - of a few hundred people to having the second most representatives in Belgium’s legislatures. And how have they done it? By ensuring, firstly, that their representatives give a percentage of their salaries back to their communities, so that careerists are immediately excluded. Two, by not contesting an election in a community until they have been present and working with that community for at least two years. Three, by ensuring that it is the communities that hold representatives to account.⁴

Forgive us, comrade Feinstein - but that does not look like a “totally different type of politics” to us - and it does not sound particularly democratic or accountable either.

Democracy?

The first question to ask is, *who exactly* has decided on this particular strategy? Was it perhaps “a small group of leaders or self-appointed saviours” in what presumably were “small [Zoom] rooms”? There is nothing wrong with democratically elected leaders making

such decisions on behalf of their members. That is, after all, how our communist fusion process currently operates. However, there is a massive problem if you do so entirely in secret and without publishing any reports or minutes of your meetings. Because that means there is no way to question or challenge you and the other ‘non-leader leaders’ on your strategy and tactics - let alone get you to change them.

The argument that you have to protect people in “sensitive positions” does not really hold water either. Presumably we are not talking about sitting Labour MPs, but possibly some of those who have had the whip withdrawn by Sir Keir Starmer anyway. Maybe a couple of trade union bureaucrats. Why can’t they openly argue for what is necessary - and at the same time make the process open and democratic? This method of organising sounds in fact even *less democratic* than the many, many incarnations of Corbyn-without-Corbyn ‘parties’ we have seen in the last few years. The working class will simply have to wait to be presented with the finished product.

What about the possible programme of such an organisation? Obviously, there is nothing public - yet. Corbyn mentioned his usual recipe of “justice, peace and wealth re-distribution” - ie, don’t frighten the horses with talk of socialism or the necessary overthrow of capitalism.

Comrade Kimber writes that the SWP campaigns for it to become an “umbrella organisation”, in which candidates would sign up to six ‘socialist’ principles: “These could

be no austerity, refugees welcome and fight racism, LGBT+ liberation, welfare not warfare, free Palestine and real action on climate change. Candidates would accept these, but could go further than them if they wanted to.” Allegedly that is how vague you have to keep things, so as to not repel the “independents” and “the communities”. Indeed it is hard to imagine the late pope, Francis, or even the current pope, Leo XIV, having any particular problems signing up to the SWP’s six ‘socialist’ principles (precisely because they aren’t ‘socialist’ principles, but vacuous banalities).

Cart and horse

A real party of the working class would, of course, organise in “the communities” - but Corbyn and Feinstein want to put the cart before the horse. Or at least that is how they are trying to dress up this new initiative. In reality, it is a bit of a stretch to claim that the various “independent” groups that are part of these secret talks are “community initiatives”: After all, Preston is where Counterfire member Michael Lavallette has just been re-elected as a councillor - for the fifth time, incidentally. He admits quite openly that he won five times “with five different hats on”, including Respect and the Socialist Alliance⁵ - in other words, he is well known as a long-standing local socialist. The Liverpool Community Independents is a small group of former left-of-centre Labour Party members led by former Momentum honcho Alan Gibbons and former Labour councillors. The leader of the Camden Independents is a certain Andrew Feinstein. He could have also mentioned Jeremy Corbyn’s “local community assembly” in North Islington - which is in fact the MP’s monthly constituency meeting.⁶ The list goes on.

We also suspect that *some* socialist and left groups have been invited along, though this is speculation. Counterfire, probably, SWP maybe, via its shiny new ‘We Demand Change’ talking shop, and possibly the Socialist Party in England and Wales. Why aren’t we told? It is not, after all, that we are operating under illegal conditions.

From such bad beginnings we should not expect anything much good to happen ●

Notes

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