



weekly worker



Neither king nor empress: no reason to take sides in MPs' unsavoury power struggle

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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LETTERS



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

Media answers

In my article in the *Weekly Worker* after the riots that followed the Southport stabbings, I posed the question of how the left works to combat the far right's systematic - and I argued successful - weaponisation of social media and messaging platforms ('Combat the far right online', August 22 2024). The tagline to that article read: "Carl Collins thinks we should consider throwing away our leaflets and take to our keyboards" - something the article did not in actuality suggest, unless taken deliberately out of context. In one partial response, Jack Conrad said that the CPGB and the *Weekly Worker* "profoundly disagree" with the article, without elaborating how or why (Letters, August 29 2024).

Fast-forward just over a year, to September 29 2025, and *The Guardian* has printed an interesting, though not surprising, three-page investigation titled 'Inside the everyday social media networks where far-right ideas grow', looking at this very point. I would urge comrades to read both *The Guardian* and my *Weekly Worker* article.

The recent 'Unite the Kingdom' far-right rally attracted over 100,000. This was organised largely via social media and messaging platforms. Addressing the rally were social media 'influencers', who use their online platforms to reach out to millions of people, and the owner of X (formerly Twitter), who controls algorithms to promote far-right content. Without going over the entire content of my article again, this is merely the tip of the iceberg. The highly technical and highly funded far-right dominance of social media and messaging platforms not only loosely organises groups and individuals, but goes on to influence the 'mainstream media' and, in turn, public discourse, as *The Guardian* investigation highlights.

Admittedly my article posed more questions than answers. However, I do still believe the left needs to look at those questions seriously. We are losing the online battle and, in an increasingly digital world, we are missing the opportunity to influence debate in that sphere.

I am not suggesting we throw the baby out with the bathwater and become nothing more than keyboard warriors. Nor am I suggesting there is a silver bullet. As someone who is not particularly tech-savvy, I am just looking for answers ... still.

Carl Collins
email

Trust Sir Tony?

There is little, one might have thought, that the rulers of the world could have done to make themselves more odious to decent people. And yet, as ever, they have found a way: Tony Blair, it is said, is in discussions to lead "a post-war transitional authority in Gaza".

The Gaza International Transitional Authority (Gita), we are told, would attempt to endow itself with "supreme political and legal authority" for a period of five years. The fact that such a plan implies a nearly incredible pitch of insolence and turpitude is almost needless to state. But let us see what salutary lessons might be drawn from this new example of barbarism.

Sir Tony (as he is called) is known for his decision to plunge into a naked war of aggression against Iraq in 2003 - Iraq was destroyed; religious fanaticism was unleashed; British soldiers murdered and tortured Iraqi civilians. The punishment for Blair? Nothing - no legal sanction in any

shape. Is it any surprise that a man so accustomed to impunity for his acts should have no trouble wading ever deeper into vice? The remedy, then, is clear: punish offenders; end the reign of impunity.

It follows from the preceding observation that there is nothing in our society that can be called justice: in so far as justice depends on equality before the law, it does not exist. Large swathes of the ruling classes, and their state functionaries, are exempt from the laws that are otherwise supposed to regulate our conduct. And, upon reflection, it is evident that this inequality, and correspondent injustice, is the rule in all class societies. The violence that the state inflicts on innocents, in order to promote sinister class interests, is nearly always outside the pale of legal sanctions, except in peculiar circumstances of scandal and outcry.

Democracy is a beloved slogan, and a serviceable topic for pompous speeches, but it is not regarded as a principle worthy of application in the real world. Who, after all, should be authorised to govern Gaza, after the ravage of Israel's genocide? The rulers of the world, once again, are united in saying, 'Not the Palestinians themselves'. The people of Gaza - the victims - will have no part: they will listen and obey. The business of government will be in the hands of the imperial proconsul, whether that is Sir Tony or some other collection of pliable characters. Not just the substance, but even the *forms*, of democracy are reserved for a special few: the Palestinians are not among them.

Talal Hangari
London

Orwell's red elite

In his commentary on George Orwell's 1984, Paul Flowers says: "Marxism is the anti-elitist philosophy *par excellence*: it shows that a genuinely egalitarian future - a society without a ruling elite - is eminently possible" ('The road from Eton college', September 25).

While it is true that Marxism shows that such a society is possible, it doesn't show us how to get there - and in fact takes an approach which (unconsciously) increases the possibility of the formation of an unaccountable elite. This is known as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. A dictatorship, by its very nature, is unaccountable to an elected body. If it is accountable, it is not a dictatorship, and therefore the term would be incorrect for describing working class, socialist rule, in the absence of an emergency situation.

It is a fact that the socialist revolution can and does lead to the rule of a red elite. This is not an argument against socialism: rather it is an argument for democratic socialism, which, in my view, should replace the Blanquist terminology of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', which Marx incorrectly appropriated from the former, which ends up giving too much power to the elite. The term is nowhere to be found in the *Communist manifesto* of 1848. Its use today is an echo of Blanqui's influence on communism.

The formation of a red elite is not simply the result of backwardness, as Trotskyism teaches. It can occur in the most advanced societies, like America, Britain, Germany, France or Japan. In my view, the formation of a red elite is an almost inevitable process. The very existence of a communist party implies an elite in terms of consciousness. The main question is whether it is accountable? This is why democratic socialism is so important. It helps prevent the red elite from detaching itself from the masses. In China, for instance, rather than the

Communist Party simply suppressing the pro-democracy movement, it should counterpose to it democratic socialism. Likewise, had Gorbachev mobilised a mass movement to defend democratic socialism, the Communist Party would probably still be in power.

In my view, the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat guarantees the formation of a red elite which arrogates too much power to itself. Socialism cannot do away with a ruling red elite. Only under communism can society dispense with an elite. This is why Trotsky's call for a political revolution to overthrow the 'bureaucracy' in the case of the former Soviet Union was seriously ultra-leftist. The sooner Trotskyists realise this, the better.

The best way to ensure that the red elite serves the interest of the masses is to defend democratic socialism - the form of rule of the working class.

Tony Clark

For Democratic Socialism

SuTr barrier

Saturday saw a small victory over the far right and we celebrated that on the day, but now we need to get down to some serious analysis. Three separate far-right groups came to Newcastle to sow division and hatred. Those taking to the streets with Ukip had their route blocked by a vibrant coalition of anti-fascists and anti-racists from the region and beyond.

We stopped them proceeding along their planned route through the heart of Newcastle city centre, diverting them into empty streets. We protected the government-funded asylum facility, as we quickly moved from our Quayside location and got there first, outnumbering them massively.

However, two of the established anti-racist organisations - Newcastle Unites (NU) and Stand Up to Racism North East (SUTR-NE) - failed all of us. They misled two-three thousand people into gathering at Grey's Monument, nearly a mile away from where the far right was assembled.

Many genuinely believed they were stopping the far right, when in reality they were sidelined, listening to speeches. This was deliberate. It shied away from a necessary confrontation, leaving the real work of challenging the fascists to those prepared to act. It's important to understand that confronting the fascists physically is a key part of countering them, and a fundamental part of a proud anti-fascist tradition.

For two months or more, NU and SUTR-NE stifled any chance of achieving unity around the demo against the far right, including overturning a democratic decision to assemble at the Quayside. They now push a narrative that the Monument rally stopped the fascists. The numbers were impressive, but the truth is fascists were challenged and contained because anti-fascists acted decisively and gained ground in the streets outside of NU and SUTR-NE's structures. What's more, the approach of those two groups highlights deep structural inadequacies in regional organisation by the anti-racist movement.

'Left' union leaders have outsourced their anti-racism to SuTr, while SuTr has a grift to pay the wages of Socialist Workers Party full-timers to do that and give the same union leaders - locally and nationally - a platform to sound left. SUTR regional steering committees are populated by local delegates who are then massively outnumbered by people coopted by the regional leadership (local sympathetic trade union bureaucrats, Labour councillors, 'community leaders', etc.) to give a huge majority in favour of static 'action' away from the fascists and with multiple speakers saying the

same stuff to the same people. There is no real debate and disagreement allowed by those in control of these committees.

Success on the day was only possible due to the low numbers of fascists and a poorly organised police force. It was despite our organisation, or lack of it, not because of it. Lots of lessons to learn, but we need a different, militant and democratic anti-fascist united front. SuTr and NU are a barrier to that.

Ian Elcoate
Newcastle

YP Sparts

We all know the far right is on the rise and that there is an urgent need for a socialist, working class alternative to Farage and Starmer. Your Party is a chance to build such an alternative, but from the start the Corbyn and Sultana factions have been plagued by indecision and infighting. While there have been raging debates about the structure of the new party, barely anything has been said about its political substance.

Yet the acrimonious factionalism over money and positions is not merely caused by personalities and egos, but by the absence of political answers to the problems facing the left. Both factions recite the empty mantras of 'peace', 'justice' and 'solidarity'. While a few years ago these were enough to maintain some kind of coherence among the left, this clearly won't work in this period of sharp polarisations and crisis. Fundamentally, the only way to solve the paralysis at the top and build a strong party is to have a clear programme that meets the challenges of our time.

To win workers, Your Party must get away from the liberal, middle class politics which have dominated the left since the Blair era, and which have contributed more than anything to pushing workers towards the right. To win them back, Your Party must reject identity politics and fight for a class-struggle, socialist programme.

Of course, this does not mean abandoning the fight for women, Muslims, trans people, immigrants or Palestine in favour of 'bread and butter' issues. Rather, what is needed is a programme capable of combining the economic struggle of the working class with the struggle of oppressed groups against their common enemy: the British ruling class.

But such a programme will not magically emerge. It needs to be fought for against the stale notions of 'progressive' liberalism which currently dominate Your Party. In other words, to get socialist politics, socialists must fight for them.

This is why a revolutionary caucus is needed. The Spartacist League wants to build such a caucus, but we cannot do this on our own: we want to work with other organisations and individuals to build it. If we want this new party to succeed, socialists must work together and place the interests of the movement above those of their own organisation or clique. First and foremost, we are interested in opening a debate on the policies needed to get Your Party off the ground and win mass support in the working class.

Below we propose a set of principles which we think could serve as a basis to regroup revolutionary elements in Your Party. Get in touch with us to debate these and to work with us in building a revolutionary caucus.

This is our draft platform for a planned economy run by workers, for workers.

Immigration: Nigel Farage and Tommy Robinson scapegoat

immigrants and foster racist divisions. Keir Starmer and the City encourage mass immigration to prop up a rotting economy and drive down wages. Neither of these are any good for the working class. As socialists, we oppose closing the border, but we also oppose the government's policy of mass immigration. Instead of an immigration policy dictated by the bosses, we need one determined by the needs and interests of the working class.

Unity: There can be no place for bigotry in Your Party. But to have any hope of uniting the left we must win the argument, not simply moralise and exclude people who have different views on social questions. One does not need to be a Muslim to oppose the attacks on the Muslim community. And one does not need to agree with gender theory to defend the rights of trans people to live their lives how they wish. We do not need to agree with all the ideas in each other's heads. To unite we need to agree to fight for each other's rights against the ongoing reactionary backlash.

No to Zionism! Zionism is a nationalist project based on the displacement and oppression of the Palestinian people. It is the ideology behind Israel's genocide and has no place in the labour movement. Peace in the Middle East and the unity of Arabs and Jews can only be achieved through opposition to Zionism, support for the liberation of the Palestinians and respect for the democratic rights of all peoples.

Down with US and British imperialism! British foreign policy is designed to serve the interests of the City of London - itself a part of the American empire. Wars and interventions by Britain and the US abroad have brought disaster around the globe, while bringing only misery and crisis at home. Now, the US is pressuring its allies to rearm for more wars, which will mean further squeezing working people. We say: No more arms to Ukraine and Israel! No to Nato! Down with the war drive!

No alliance with the Greens! The Green Party embodies everything the working class hates about the left today: self-righteous, middle class politics that put abstract ideals above real living conditions. The Greens are not for the working class or socialism, nor do they want to be. An alliance with them will only repel workers.

For Irish unity! Self-determination for Scotland and Cymru! The 'United Kingdom' is oppressive to Irish Catholics, Scots and Welsh. British imperialism subjugated Ireland for centuries; it must finally be thrown out of the whole island. As for the Scottish and Welsh nations, their fate should be determined by the democratic will of their people, not by the parasites in Westminster.

Yes to trade unions! No to pro-capitalist union leaders! The trade unions are the mass organisations for the defence of the working class. At least that's what they should be! For decades the trade unions have been run into the ground by leaders who stand closer to the bosses than their own members. We cannot let these people take control of Your Party. Whether to rebuild the unions or found a new left party, we need leaders who stand on clear socialist principles and are ready to take the fight to the bosses.

Down with the monarchy! For a workers' republic! Workers finally need a government and state which serves their interests, not those of a handful of capitalists and aristocrats. **Spartacist League** email

BDS

A pariah state

Pop singers, classical musicians, actors, film makers, sports people have joined the boycott campaign. World public opinion has decisively turned against the genocidal Israeli regime. **Anne McShane** gives three cheers

When the Israeli war on Gaza began in October 2023, only a minority of well-known artists dared speak out. Those who did knew they were risking their careers. But now the tide is moving in the opposite direction.

It is worth a review of how, just six months ago, things seemed very different. Kneecap, the defiant young Belfast rap band, was in big trouble after having led the way in challenging Israel and its backers. Their most famous act of rebellion was at Coachella, a Californian music festival, in April 2025, when they projected images accusing the US government of enabling, arming and funding the Israeli genocide, declaring 'Fuck Israel, Free Palestine'.

Retribution was swift, as a hysterical rightwing media condemned them as terrorists and anti-Semites, demanding that they be banned from performing. The intention was that the careers of these Irish upstarts should lie in ruins after such a brazen act. Their US agent immediately dropped them and a number of concerts in Britain and Europe were cancelled. British anti-terrorism police got busy trawling through old footage and managed to hatch up terrorism charges against Liam Óg Ó hAinle (Mo Chara). The Labour government joined in the witch-hunt, warning Glastonbury organisers to "think very carefully" about inviting the band to perform. Keir Starmer agreed that it "was not appropriate" for them to appear.

The witch-hunt did not succeed. Glastonbury management refused to buckle and Kneecap ended up playing to a huge crowd, entertaining fans by mocking Starmer's control-freakery and arming of Israel. Naturally too there were pro-Palestine chants. Kneecap's huge popularity reflects the anti-establishment and pro-Palestine nature of its young audience. This is as true in the US as elsewhere, where the band were due to perform on a sold-out tour this October - which had to be cancelled because of the terrorism charges against Mo Chara. Now those charges have disappeared - one was dropped in July during Glastonbury and the other just recently kicked out of Woolwich Crown Court for being "unlawful" because it was brought out of time.

Now opposition to Israel among musicians is increasingly popular. Brian Eno, Paul Weller, Annie Lennox and Roger Waters openly call for boycott. The 'No Music for Genocide' petition has 400 signatories include Carole King, Primal Scream, Nadine Shah, Bjork and the group Massive Attack, which, along with hundreds of less well known artists, have pulled their music from Spotify because it streams in Israel.

There have been ructions even in the cerebral and largely pro-Israel world of classical music. Over 700 classical musicians have signed a statement headed 'Classical Music for Palestine', which calls for an immediate ceasefire. More controversially, the organisers of the Flanders Festival in Ghent have cancelled a performance by the Berlin Philharmonic, as its Israeli conductor, Lahav Shani, had not sufficiently distanced himself from Israel's actions and remains the chief director of the



May 2025: Israeli entrant Yuval Raphael with pro-Palestinian protestors in background

Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. Their action has been met with accusations of anti-Semitism from the German government. Culture minister Wolfram Weimer declared: "We can never let the programme of European stages be dictated by anti-Semites."

Another Israeli conductor, Ilan Volkov, made a brave and passionate speech against the genocide just before his performance at the BCC Proms in September. He then participated in a protest in Tel Aviv's Bima Square, organised by Dalit Ziv, flautist and composer, where she assembled a group of musicians to simulate the sounds of drones over Gaza. Then on September 19 Volkov was arrested on the Israeli border, where he was protesting in support of the Samud flotilla.

Contestants

The glitzy pop spectacle of the Eurovision song contest is also shifting towards excluding Israel. In early 2024 the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural boycott of Israel (PACBI), and the Palestinian-led global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement called on all countries to refuse to take part in the contest if Israel was allowed to participate. Solidarity movements

in Iceland, Sweden, Ireland, Britain, Spain and other European countries organised petitions, demonstrations and social media campaigns.

But broadcasters refused to withdraw, claiming that the parent body of Eurovision, the European Broadcasting Union, would impose heavy fines if they did. The EBU executive has consistently defended Israel, and has, in the words of one petition, been "providing cultural cover and endorsement for the catastrophic violence that Israel has unleashed on Palestinians".

This year the Eurovision boycott campaign included an open letter from more than 70 former Eurovision contestants, including the 2024 winner, demanding that Israel and its broadcaster, Kan, are excluded. This time the pressure and the unavoidable truth of the genocide sent a number of broadcasters off to argue unsuccessfully with the EBU that it should exclude Israel. The Eurovision song contest went ahead with Israel included.

Despite BBC director-general Tim Davie telling us that the song contest has "never been about politics", it absolutely is. And politics has meant the exclusion of other states. Belarus was suspended from participating in 2021

because of its 'human rights record' and Russia in 2022 immediately after its invasion of Ukraine. The Israeli state knows how important Eurovision is as a political showcase. Its entry for 2024, initially titled 'October rain', was a piece of sickening political propaganda - too much even for the EBU, which demanded changes or elimination. Israeli president Isaac Herzog intervened to persuade national broadcaster Kan to dial the lyrics down. Kan agreed, applauding Herzog for acting to ensure that Israel could continue to "raise its voice" in the Eurovision when "those who hate us are seeking to repress and boycott the state of Israel". The replacement, Hurricane, substituted 'storm' for 'October' and got through to the competition.

Both the 2024 and 2025 contests were marked by protests, including a demonstration of 10,000 outside the auditorium in Malmo in 2024. Contestants inside raised Palestinian flags in spite of a ban on doing so, and a large section of the audience booed and heckled Israeli entries. Ireland's 2024 entrant, non-binary performer Bambie Thug, wore a costume with a message in ancient Irish Ogham calling for freedom for Palestine. Farcically, the EBU

bureaucracy detected and translated it, then insisted that it be removed. The performer complained afterwards about how the event was massively censored and biased. Unsurprisingly, the atmosphere was toxic.

In a volte-face, on September 11, Ireland's state broadcaster, the RTE, announced that it would boycott the 2026 Eurovision unless Israel is excluded, stating that to do otherwise would be "unconscionable, given the ongoing and appalling loss of lives in Gaza". Since then Slovenia, the Netherlands, Iceland and Spain have also threatened boycott. What was unthinkable for broadcasters last year has now become a moral duty. A boycott by Spain is significant, as it is one of the 'Big Five' - the countries which provide the most funding for the contest and automatically qualify to take part.

The EBU has now announced that a vote will be taken at an extraordinary online general assembly in November to decide on Israel's participation in Eurovision 2026. This follows a meeting of its executive, where it was unable to reach a decision. Its president, Delphine Ernotte-Cunci, wrote that the EBU contained an "unprecedented diversity of views" on Israel and a final decision required "a broader democratic basis".

Hollywood too

The cultural boycott has had a big impact in Hollywood, with more than 5,000 actors, directors and film workers signing an open letter pledging their refusal to work with Israeli film institutions. They include actors Oliva Coleman, Brian Cox, Joaquin Phoenix, Tilda Swinton and Susan Sarandon. Now 1,200 others, including the vile Sharon Osborne and the equally vile Debra Messing, have issued their own pro-Israel letter, headed 'Creative Community for Peace', which falsely accuses their opponents of targeting individual actors and directors.

In sport there are any number of boycott controversies, most famously the demand made of Fifa by a large number of national teams to ban Israel from the World Cup. However, Fifa president Gianni Infantino has a close friendship with Donald Trump, who has made it clear that he will do everything possible to prevent that happening. The latest news is that Fifa has postponed a decision, pending the outcome of Trump's latest Gaza plan. More success has taken place with the European body, UEFA, which is expected to exclude Israel from its fixtures next year, including the Nations League and the Europa League.

The above survey illustrates how the BDS movement has gained an unprecedented momentum and strength. It is a strength that has been hard fought for. Unlike Russia, which was the target of official sanctions from 2022, Israel has been supported despite two years of proven genocide, while the Palestinian solidarity movement has been constantly attacked, harried and demonised by the establishment. Now, however, global public opinion has swung decisively against Israel and what it is doing in Gaza and on the West Bank ●

YOUR PARTY

Neither king nor empress

There is no reason to take sides in what is an unsavoury power struggle between MPs. Meanwhile, **Jack Conrad** warns of an impending anti-left witch-hunt and calls for the left to unite around programme and principle

Alex Callinicos is “very angry”. Even incandescent. Why? Instead of his normal, mundane, everyday anger being directed at its “proper objects”, such as Keir Starmer, Nigel Farage, Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump, there is what he calls the “absurd split that has exploded at the top of Your Party”.¹

Readers of this paper will know the story oh so well, not least because of Carla Roberts and her regular updates. Naturally cautious, perhaps vainly hoping that he would be readmitted into the Labour fold, Jeremy Corbyn delayed and delayed again before finally launching what is, for the moment, known as Your Party. Nonetheless, as of now, more than 850,000 have signed up to express an interest.

Already suspended, Zarah Sultana formally resigned from the Labour Party in July 2025, declaring that she would co-found and co-lead Your Party alongside Corbyn - the giveaway presumption being that Your Party would not only have a king, but an empress too. We, therefore, arrived PDQ at a situation eerily reminiscent of the fratricidal conflict between King Stephen and the Empress Matilda. School textbooks call the 1139-53 civil war ‘The Anarchy’ (with a capital ‘T’ and a capital ‘A’). With the constant raiding, looting and general mayhem, England and Normandy were devastated. A sobering lesson for the JCP/YP.

King Jeremy has his allied barons and, with his well-financed Peace and Justice Project, a team of paid and unpaid mercenaries ready to please the patron. Len McClusky, former Unite general secretary, and especially his partner, Karie Murphy, act both as cheerleaders and the power behind the throne. Another former general secretary is Mark Serwotka. There are also the four other founder members of the Independent Alliance of MPs: Shockat Adam, Adnan Hussain, Ayoub Khan and Iqbal Mohamed - Corbyn loyalists all.

Empress Zarah is, frankly, far weaker. Unlike Corbyn she is no household name. Nor does she have any other MPs onside. Andrew Feinstein counts as a kind of confederate, so, maybe, does Salma Yaqoob. However, what she can do - and is doing - is exploit rank-and-file frustration with Corbyn’s lethargy, take initiatives and pose left. This has seen her launch her “unauthorised” membership portal, champion anti-Zionism, condemn the IHRA so-called definition of anti-Semitism, echo trans rights exclusionary mantras, take occasional pot shots against landlords and even pepper speeches with half-digested Lenin quotes.

Note, Sultana has been reported to the Information Commissioner’s Office;² Corbyn stubbornly refuses to “openly call himself an anti-Zionist”;³ Adnan Hussain, speaking about trans issues, says: “Muslims tend to be socially conservative”;⁴ and Shockat Adam, Adnan Hussain, Ayoub Khan appear to be small-time landlords.⁵ All weaponised in the dynastic struggle to see which MP will rule.

We should add here, for the sake of clarity, that communists do not reject the concept of leaders and leadership - to do so would be both absurd and self-defeating. No



Battle of Lincoln in 1141. King Stephen, wearing crown, lost to forces loyal to Empress Matilda

class in history has ever achieved victory without pushing forward capable people. Likewise, in our struggle to supersede capitalism, we need our theoretically trained, programmatically armed, energetic and highly motivated leaders. But those leaders cannot be self-appointed or self-serving Bonapartist demagogues elected by referendum. We champion republican democracy. That means being elected - and recallable - by an appropriate committee: eg, branch, city, regional and national.

Education

Sultana instinctively reaches for identity politics. She cut her teeth on whinging, whiny, easily offended executives of the NUS and Young Labour before pursuing her meteoric parliamentary career. Hence Sultana, somewhat bizarrely, demands “gender balance” (she is the only woman in the Independent Alliance), threatened her own defamation legal action (now withdrawn) and bitterly complains about a “sexist boys club”, because she has effectively been excluded from decision-making (which is almost certainly true). Nevertheless, because of her, surely calculated, left posturing, she does have the enthusiastic backing of the Socialist Workers Party - for now at least.

Comrade Callinicos pleads for reconciliation, when it comes to the king and the empress: “We must ... demand the two factions reach a compromise. History will not forgive them if they throw this opportunity away.”⁶ Others have sung the same *subordinate* tune: eg, Andrew Murray in the *Morning Star*.⁷

Yet, while there is feigned even-handedness, it is altogether clear where the sympathies of comrade Callinicos lie. Despite this or that minor criticism they lie squarely with Zarah Sultana. He gushes: “Sultana’s vision of a dynamic and democratic left party that fights oppression, not simply an election machine, has captured the imagination of tens of thousands.”

Callinicos also heaps fulsome praise on Sultana for her implicit threat to exclude “socially conservative” Muslims, such as Adnan Hussain. In the name of women’s “safe spaces” and opposing the “neoliberal idea of gender ideology”, he dared to state that trans women are “not biologically women”.⁸ Sultana almost instantly hit back saying that “there is no space for transphobia” in Your Party.⁹

A couple of decades ago comrade Callinicos would have condemned such a statement as ‘Islamophobic’, even though it came from a fellow Muslim (see below). Meanwhile, let us outline our approach to the “socially conservative”, Muslim or otherwise. It is education, education, education, not exclusion, exclusion, exclusion.

Education requires patience and above all a striving for unity in action. After all, the class struggle itself is a great teacher. Eg, the everyday ‘homophobia’ that passed with barely a comment in Britain’s coal mining communities was brilliantly challenged with the formation of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners. This was, of course, under the inspired leadership of Mark Ashton, in the midst of the 1984-85 Great Strike.¹⁰ Another cultural game changer was Women Against Pit Closures which united the women with their striking fathers, partners and sons against the common enemy: Margaret Thatcher’s Tory government, Ian McGregor and the Coal Broad, the police, the mainstream media and the cringing, cowardly Neil Kinnock.

We should also recognise that ‘transphobia’ stems not only from bigotry: there are real concerns amongst some women. It might too be a good idea to stop medicalising what are political, economic and cultural issues, which need to be approached as such. Eg, labelling next to everything a ‘phobia’ individualises next to everything. Monsterising individual transgressors is, for sure, a gift to our enemies.

We must, of course, stick to our

socialist principles and resolutely defend trans people against state, media and rightwing attacks and demand all reasonable measures to overcome demonisation, disadvantage and discrimination. We should also insist that MPs follow the instruction of our conferences and elected leadership, when it comes to parliamentary votes. Conscience clauses should be rejected as a matter of principle ... and, as a corresponding matter of principle, our MPs and other elected representatives should accept only the average skilled worker’s wage. The rest should be donated to the party.

Selective memory

What of comrade Callinicos? Is he suffering from selective memory syndrome? As a member of the second generation of SWP leaders - others included John Rees, Charlie Kimber, Lindsey German, Martin Smith, Amy Leather and Chris Bambery - he presided over the Respect popular front party alongside George Galloway, Yvonne Ridley, Nick Wrack, Alan Thorne, Salma Yaqoob, the Muslim Association of Britain and various British-Asian businessmen. Even though the SWP had a majority, when it came to conference votes, it was its “socially conservative” allies who set the programmatic limits ... the result being that Respect stood on a socially and politically conservative platform in elections.

To keep this so-called “united front between revolutionary socialists and Muslim activists” together, SWP tops ensured that their members were corralled to vote down motions advocating international socialism, republicanism, replacing the standing army with a popular militia, opposition to migration controls, abortion rights, etc. The electorate must not be put off. Such was the Blairite argument of SWP speakers - crucially Comrade No1, John Rees himself, now, of course, the *numero uno* of Counterfire.¹¹

Just prior to that, before Respect was formally established, Lindsey German, speaking at the SWP’s annual Marxism school, in July 2003, said this: “I’m in favour of defending gay rights, but I am *not* prepared to have it as a shibboleth”. Her concern was potential Muslim voters. Those who disagreed were, yes, branded ‘Islamophobes’. This was, as we said at the time, the SWP’s “clause 4 moment”.¹²

Did comrade Callinicos raise his voice? Did he express his outrage? Did he rebel? You’ve already guessed the answer: it is thrice no! Instead he singled out the CPGB and the “poisonous” *Weekly Worker* as the ‘proper object’ of his anger.¹³

When CPGB comrades handed out a leaflet warning against any dropping of gay rights for the sake of electoral expediency, the SWP leadership reacted with fury and our comrades were physically assaulted. The SWP ignored our formal letter of complaint and brushed aside our subsequent protests. As if the SWP would ever contemplate ditching its commitment to gay rights! In Respect, of course, it did just that: LGBT rights were “*deliberately omitted*” from the May 2005 general election manifesto.¹⁴

When, today, comrade Callinicos self-righteously sides with Sultana and condemns tolerating “socially conservative” individuals, he would, if he were honest, openly admit his shameful role in Respect. Clearly, though, he is not honest. No, he is a hypocrite who knows no shame.

What about Sultana’s “vision of a dynamic and *democratic* left party” that so impresses comrade Callinicos?¹⁵ Well, although Sultana talks the talk of democracy and membership control, what she means by this is an OMOV Zoomocracy.¹⁶ Largely *passive* members, sitting at home in front of their PCs, laptops and smartphones, get to vote on selected issues every once in a while. But - and this is the great virtue for the aristocracy of MPs and their hangers-on - branches, conference debates and blocs of leftwing delegates can be safely sidelined or swamped in an avalanche of clicks.

OMOV appears as the epitome of democracy. We emphatically support ‘one member, one vote’ for branch committees, conference delegates, etc. However, there were good reasons why the Blairites introduced OMOV by *atomised* members in Labour Party elections during the 1990s. It gave Tony Blair and his clique a “vice-like grip” and reduced annual conference to a “rubber stamp”.¹⁷

As we have suggested, it is doubtful that Sultana has the Blairite ascendancy as her model. More likely she takes inspiration from Spain’s Podemos (for a brief moment *à la mode* on the flotsam-and-jetsam left). As a ‘horizontalist’ organisation, its local circles exercise no effective power; however, all Podemos members get to vote online. The result is, though, thoroughly Blairite. It gave Pablo Iglesias Turrión a “vice-like grip” over an extraordinarily vertical organisation (well, from 2014 till his resignation in 2021). He became second deputy prime minister in 2020 and Podemos served as a left parliamentary prop for the ‘progressive’, pro-monarchy, pro-

Nato, pro-capitalist government of Pedro Sánchez.

Meanwhile Sultana appears to have reconciled herself to a lottocracy and sortition. This system of random selection - taking account of gender, region, age, etc - will see 13,000 members arranged in blocs of four, each of which will attend *one* of the founding conference sessions at Liverpool’s ACC over November 29-30. So if by some fluke you happen to be chosen you will be expected to travel all the way to Liverpool in order to attend conference for a couple of hours. Your role will be raise your hand on cue, clap on cue ... and then you are free to do as you want. Good perhaps for the Liverpool tourist industry, but a travesty when it comes to democratic decision making.

As comrade Callinicos rightly observes, this sort of arrangement is surely “designed to keep members passive” and those in control staying in control. Karie Murphy will set the agenda, choose the speakers and steer proceedings (she is officially conference and events planning organiser).

Paradoxically, fearing domination by King Jeremy and his court, Max Shanly drew up detailed plans for a lottocracy at November’s conference.¹⁸ Well, now he has got it and does not like it. But, comrade Shanly, you sold the pass ... as we told you, the anti-democratic results were eminently predictable. Then there is Ed Griffiths. Again in the name of democracy - but really wanting to marginalise the organised left - he too advocates sortition and a lottocracy.¹⁹ We are reliably informed that *some* in RS21’s Marxist Unity Caucus back a lottocracy too. A mistake, to put it mildly.

The same can be said of Roger Hallam, the environmental activist and former political prisoner. Nowadays he operates under the Assemble banner and is committed to a global democratic revolution and shifting power away from parliamentary elections to citizen’s assemblies selected, yes, through sortition. Understandably then, he welcomes, on the one hand, the *idea* of a lottocracy in the JCP/YP ... but, as with comrade Shanly, he recognises how the system is going to be run, manipulated and controlled by Karie Murphy. He is no fool. Comrade Hallam knows perfectly well that, given four blocs of participants over just two days, with no time set aside for preparation, debate, calling experts, etc, the whole thing is going to be a stage-managed rally.

However, speaking on a September 26 panel along with Max Shanly (Democratic Socialists) and Tina Becker (Why Marx?), comrade Hallam showed the severe limits of his politics.²⁰ He dismissed juries as “bourgeois” - in England trial by jury dates back to Anglo-Saxon times and are nowadays widely loathed by judges, rightwing politicians and the mainstream media. Especially when they acquit political, environmental and trade union activists. That is why we communists say: defend and extend jury trials.

Comrade Hallam dismissed elections as “bourgeois” too - yet the working class movement fought for “universal suffrage and annual parliaments” from its very origins: eg, the London Corresponding Society.²¹ Trade unionists, by tradition - that is, before Margret Thatcher’s anti-trade union laws and the imposition of postal ballots - decided whether or not to go on strike at mass meetings by a simple show of hands: ie, an election. The 1871 Paris Commune, soviets in

1905 and 1917 Russia, the Räte in 1918-19 Germany and similar bodies, such as the Councils of Action in Britain’s 1926 General Strike, certainly decided things by way of voting for responsible positions, delegates, amendments, resolutions and points of order.

Comrade Hallam also maintained that “people are fundamentally equal”. True, when it comes to current socio-political conditions we make demands for *equal rights*: for work or full benefits, to be housed, to be educated, to be looked after in case of illness ... and to vote. But people as people are not equal - something fully recognised by the famous communist principle, ‘From each according to their *abilities*, to each according to their *needs*’. People have different abilities and people have different needs. Some are smart and strong, others less smart and less strong. Some have young children to look after, others are childless. Some are old and infirm ... yes, we are all different, we are not equal.

Comrade Hallam has, of course, been on a journey from strict Methodism, to eco-activism, to anarcho-revolutionary ... so maybe he will eventually arrive at orthodox Marxism. We certainly hope so.

Organised left

While there have been recent proclamations about peace breaking out at the top, King Jeremy has, in fact, continued the dynastic war by registering himself as the leader with the election commission and depriving, at a stroke, Empress Zarah of support that she might have expected from the organised left.²² Members of any other “national party” are now officially barred. In other words *local parties* which are registered with the electoral commission are welcome to come in, but members of the SWP, SPEW, CPB, CPGB, etc, should keep out.

Tragically, this sets up JCP/YP for the sort of disastrous purge regime which repeatedly ripped through the Labour Party during the 1920s and 30s. Communists were banned and prescribed by rule. The same happened with Arthur’s Scargill Socialist Labour Party in the late 1990s. CPGB comrades were targeted from day one by the Fourth International Supporters Caucus, which acted as Scargill’s enforcers.

A JCP/YP version of Labour’s bans and prescriptions would be a self-inflicted wound. If implemented, it will sow fear and distrust, and deprive branches of many of their best activists and organisers. Driving out so-called ‘enemies within’ will definitely be a huge diversion from fighting the real enemy, which is without: Donald Trump, Nato, Israel’s genocidal regime, Sir Keir Starmer, Nigel Farage, Tommy Robinson, etc.

Nationally organised left groups have responded in one of two ways: surrender or resistance.

The *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain looks set to surrender. Though there are more than a few CPBers who have *openly* signed up for the JCP/YP, general secretary Robert Griffiths insists that the CPB opposes “secretive ‘entryism’ into other parties”. Leave aside Andrew Murray’s entry into the Leader of the Opposition’s Office (Loto) as a Unite-seconded Corbyn advisor, according to comrade Griffiths, ‘entryism’ leads to charges of “dishonesty and bad faith, including from potential allies in our broad movement work”.²³

Not the practice of the ‘official’ CPGB historically, of course, but a CPB attempt to prove its

respectability and trustworthiness to the trade union and labour bureaucracy. A grovelling approach which saw comrade Griffiths actually promising Labour’s general secretary, Iain McNicol, that he would expel any CPB member who had joined in order to support Corbyn while he was leader.²⁴

Comrade Griffiths also fears that the views of CPB members will be “mispresented” by the media, anti-communist parties and sects looking to set party members against “Communist Party policy and against one another”. This rings true. Comrade Griffiths dreads polemic and losing control over his membership. However, scraping the bottom of the barrel, he goes on to say that as members of the JCP/YP, “Communists would be *obliged* to promote policies which could directly contradict communist policies (eg, women’s rights, immigration, federalism, the EU, Nato, China, electoral alliances).”²⁵ Obligated! Utter nonsense! No-one has suggested that the JCP/YP operate the sort of bureaucratic centralist regime practised by the CPB, SWP, SPEW, etc. Clearly he is just looking for excuses to surrender.

Supposedly the matter will be decided “after a full and free debate” at the CPB’s Sheffield congress in mid-November ... but the betting must be on the Griffiths line winning the day (along with a not insignificant membership loss subsequently).

Thankfully the SWP is, like ourselves, committed to an altogether different approach: resistance. Reading its *Party Notes*, we find not only a broadly correct explanation of the Corbyn-Sultana civil war as being rooted in “electoralism and Labourism”: SWP members are also told to “sign up and encourage others to do so”. A convenient weblink is provided.²⁶

The comrades quote the email barring members of “another political party”. But, quite legitimately, they ask: “Who made this decision? Was there any democratic process? Do the members support it?” Instead of surrender *Party Notes* tells SWP members to join “now” and to “contest” the ban on the organised left. The SWP might be right, who knows? The “clique” which decided on the bar “may well back down”. We shall see.

Either way, on this occasion, three cheers for the SWP. Surrender offers no chance of success. Resistance, at least, offers the chance.

Our approach

We say that there should be elections in JCP/YP from the bottom up. Branches must be autonomous, not mere transmission belts, and therefore free to elect their own committees and delegates to regional and national conferences. Being popular, educated or even a landlord should not bar anyone. Remember Friedrich Engels was a full-blown capitalist! No less to the point, nor should political shade, background or factional loyalty to a pre-existing nationally organised group. Electing someone you trust, someone you agree with, someone you believe will put up a good fight - that should be considered perfectly normal. Not something to be banned and proscribed.

So the right to form, or belong to, a temporary or a permanent faction or platform should be guaranteed in the JCP/YP rules. Moreover, all committees, up to and including the national committee, ought to be elected, accountable and recallable. The same applies to officers, but especially councillors and MPs.

They must be our servants, not our masters. They should represent the party, not their atomised constituents.

Along the same lines, whoever the national committee elects as ‘party leader’ should have no more than a symbolic, nominal role, so as to formally comply with the requirements of electoral law. The unedifying ‘who will be the leader’ dispute between Corbyn and Sultana - both career politicians - testifies to an elitist mindset that ought to be discarded once and for all. No king! No empress!

Nor should we wait till November and the formal Liverpool launch and a stage-managed, hybrid rally/conference. At a local level comrades have rightly formed branches. However, things need not stop there. Form regional committees, form a national committee. Choose election candidates. Establish online and print publications. Make Your Party, our party!

Politics vital

While organisational structures are important, politics are vital.

We communists agree with, and will seek to work closely with, those who want a complete break with Labourism, broad-frontism and all varieties of reformism. Historically, not only has Labourism predictably failed to produce socialism: halfway houses such as Die Linke, Podemos, Syriza and Respect have proved next to useless too. The same has to be said of Corbynism and Corbyn’s *capitulationist* leadership of the Labour Party between 2015 and 2020.

Given escalating tariff wars, the climate crisis, the bloodbath in Ukraine, the Gaza genocide and the danger of the US-China conflict culminating in a generalised nuclear exchange, humanity faces a stark choice: barbarism or socialism. Harking back to the “mass appeal and bold policy” of Corbyn’s *For the many, not the few*, as Zarah Sultana does,²⁷ simply will not do. Indeed it screams of a total failure of the imagination. Programmatically, *For the many* did not even pass muster as reformist. It was, at best, sub-reformist: a hopeless promise of a nicer, a kinder, a fairer capitalism. Such are the delusions brought about by capitalist realism.

We openly seek to transform the JCP/YP into a Communist Party. Fundamentally that means equipping the JCP/YP with a Marxist minimum-maximum programme. The minimum programme is the maximum we can achieve under capitalist conditions and the minimum we require if the JCP is to enter or form a government: eg, abolish the monarchy and the House of Lords, establish a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, support Irish unity, replace the standing army with a popular militia, oppose all imperialist wars, alliances and occupations, proportional representation, go beyond carbon neutral, free movement of labour, work at full trade union rates of pay, abolish the anti-trade union laws, healthcare for all, genuine equality for women, end discrimination against sexual minorities. With state power (albeit in the form of a semi-state) secured, the maximum programme of transitioning to full communism and the principle of ‘From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs’ begins. Something which, of course, has to be international in scope. There can be no local or national socialism.²⁸

Towards that end we emailed RS21’s Marxist Unity Caucus seeking talks about cooperation and coordination. Unfortunately the comrades, under the name

of one Callum F, say that, while they “discussed” our suggestion, they apparently “don’t currently have the capacity to have joint meetings”.²⁹ Obvious stuff and nonsense. The Marxist ‘Unity’ Caucus clearly prefers its *centrist* unity with those “wonderful” RS21 social-imperialists in and around the pro-Nato Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. That is their choice ... but a choice which we would urge comrades to openly rebel against and overturn.

We need to unite ... and fight! ●

Notes

1. A Callinicos *Socialist Worker* September 24 2025.
2. The ICO has the power to impose fines of up to £17.5 million - icosearch.ico.org.uk/s/search.html?collection=ico-meta&profile=_default&query=fines. Not that Sultana faces anything like that, of course. However, it should be added that complainants do have the right to withdraw their complaint. Presumably this has happened in Sultana’s case.
3. J Conrad ‘Say it loud, say it proud’ *Weekly Worker* September 4 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1551/say-it-loud-say-it-proud).
4. x.com/AdnanHussainMP/status/1949926798411616689 - July 28 2025.
5. www.facebook.com/groups/178597731719679/posts/4144282665889122.
6. A Callinicos *Socialist Worker* September 24 2025.
7. Murray writes that the “apparent implosion of Your Party is a mortifying moment for the left in Britain” and quips: “Never have the hopes of so many been dashed by so few?” (‘Your Party, their crisis, our hopes dashed?’ *Morning Star* September 20 2025).
8. After quoting a social media user who said Your Party should not “parrot the same neoliberal idea of gender ideology”, Hussain added: “I agree. Women’s rights and safe spaces should not be encroached upon. Safe third spaces should be an alternative option” (*Pink News* September 9 2025).
9. *Pink News* September 9 2025.
10. For our obituary of comrade Ashton, see M Fischer ‘Good man fallen amongst Euros’ *Weekly Worker* September 25 2014 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1027/a-good-man-fallen-amongst-euros). Incidentally this is a reprint from *The Leninist*, and it should also be added that we had real hopes of winning comrade Ashton to our ranks.
11. See ‘Rees lays it on the line’ *Weekly Worker* July 9 2003 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/488/marxism-2003-rees-lays-it-on-the-line); ‘No respect for principles’ *Weekly Worker* February 19 2004 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/516/no-respect-for-principles); ‘The modern Janus’ *Weekly Worker* November 17 2005 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/601/the-modern-janus).
12. J Conrad ‘No compromise on sexism and homophobia’ *Weekly Worker* July 10 2003 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/488/no-compromise-on-sexism-and-homophobia).
13. J Conrad ‘Respect and opportunism’ *Weekly Worker* January 22 2004 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/512/respect-and-opportunism).
14. P Manson ‘Gay rights “shibboleth”’ *Weekly Worker* November 24 2005 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/602/gay-rights-shibboleth).
15. My emphasis - A Callinicos *Socialist Worker* September 24 2025.
16. *Novara Media* July 28 2025.
17. A Seldon and D Kavanagh (eds) *The Blair effect 2001-5* Cambridge 2005, p115.
18. medium.com/@maxshanly/born-for-life-or-marked-for-death-a12d87220e42.
19. x.com/EdmundGriffiths/status/1956426422509088993.
20. bit.ly/YPLaunchConference.
21. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Corresponding_Society#cite_note-58. Note, when the LCS was declared illegal by the Pitt government, Thomas Hardy, Home Tooke and other leaders were put on trial for treason. A London jury acquitted them (see AL Morton *A people’s history of England* London 1974, pp348-49).
22. Election Commission registration for Your Party is dated September 30 2025. Jeremy Coby is listed as leader, Adnan Hussain, nominating officer and Marion Roberts treasurer - see search.electoralcommission.org.uk/English/Registrations/PP18172.
23. ‘Interview with Rob Griffiths’ *Unity* September 2025, p11.
24. This is what he wrote to witch-finder general Iain McNicol: “Should you or your staff have any evidence that Communist Party members have joined the Labour Party without renouncing their CP membership, or engaged in any similar subterfuge, please inform me, so that action can be taken against them for bringing our party into disrepute” ... Griffiths signed it with “comradely regards” (21centurymanifesto.wordpress.com/2016/07/12/communist-infiltration-of-labour).
25. My emphasis - ‘Interview with Rob Griffiths’ *Unity* September 2025, p11.
26. *Party Notes* September 29 2025.
27. *Sidecar* interview, August 17 2025.
28. See CPGB *Draft programme* London 2025.
29. Original CPGB email, September 1 2025; MAC executive committee reply, September 25 2025.

YOUR PARTY

Republicanism and the split

It is not yet possible to assess whether Corbyn or Sultana are champions of the UK's social monarchy or the English social republic, says **Steve Freeman**. Choosing between them is not a matter of age or experience, but politics

While the appeal in July 2025 by Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana to launch Your Party met with a response from 800,000 people, this interest was born out of hope and fear: hope was for a left alternative to a rightwing Labour government; fear in the growing concern about the rising tide of Reform UK and fascism, with no effective political opposition. Of course, we cannot ignore the pull of Corbyn, the most widely known and respected former Labour leader.

We all know about the huge rows that divided the two wings of YP - supporters were shocked and disappointed, while their enemies were pleased. Yet it was a moment of realism: there is no easy path to building a new party. There have been and will be arguments, unifications, splits and realignments and this will not be the last. Now, after widespread dismay, there seems to be peace - Sultana's threat of legal action was withdrawn and she declared: "The stakes are too high for failure to be an option."

Your programme

What can we understand and learn from these struggles? Provisional parties are more chaotic than democratic? Is the repeated conflict between the co-leaders the result of personality frictions, power struggles? Or does it represent a manifestation of a deeper, more strategic, *programmatic* dispute? Is it a power struggle over the same programme or the beginning of a struggle between different programmes?

The central problem in establishing Your Party on solid political foundations is precisely the creation of a strong programme, based on solid theory. The term, 'party programme', emphasises the unity of the two parts: the programme is the party; the party is the programme. A republican party is the organisation of a republican programme and a Communist Party is the organisation of a communist programme, but even a provisional party must have a provisional programme. Your Party cannot exist separately from Your Programme.

A brief statement on Your Party website says:

We will only fix the crises in our society with a mass redistribution of wealth and power. That means taxing the very richest in our society. That means an NHS free of privatisation and bringing energy, water, rail and mail into public ownership. That means investing in a massive council-house building programme. That means standing up to fossil fuel giants putting their profits before our planet.

What is missing from this provisional statement are questions of democracy - state power, government, sovereignty, self-determination, constitution and law. In the United Kingdom, sovereignty has been stolen from the people and vested in the crown-in-parliament. Labour is a party built on the assumption that this so-called 'democracy' enables the people and the working class to win political power - an assumption that goes unchallenged by Labourism.

When 800,000 people are considering joining Your Party, we are discussing mass politics and a mass party. This is not about another small communist sect. The appeal gained mass support because it came from a former Labour leader who fought for and won millions of votes around the 2017 and 2019 Labour manifestos. It



Crown-in-parliament

does not mean that this programme was correct then or is now: it simply means that this programme can attract mass support.

However, democratic republicanism rejects this completely. It addresses all the questions of political democracy and popular sovereignty. This too can pass the test of mass politics. In Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin is already a mass republican party and in England about 30% of voters - especially among young people - are in favour of abolishing the monarchy. Of course, being anti-monarchist is not the same as fighting for popular democracy. Rather it shows there is a mass constituency for democratic change in the constitution and class system.

Your kingdom

On September 13 150,000 marched to 'Unite the Kingdom' under the flags of Jack and George. It has not gone unnoticed that 'your kingdom' is in a hell of a mess and far from united. Evidence includes the 'crisis of democracy', the growth of poverty and social exclusion, underfunded public services, the rise of Reform UK and the support the crown has provided for Israel's genocide in Gaza.

'Your Kingdom' is divided by nation and class. It has long suffered from a democratic deficit. The tectonic plates on which the kingdom and the union are built are beginning to move. A 'crisis of democracy' is turning its fractures into a chasm. On one side are conservatives - unionists, loyalists and social monarchists; and on the opposite side are radical democrats - anti-unionists and republicans. The 'Unite the Kingdom' slogan stands firmly on the conservative side.

Reform UK knows exactly where it stands. So does the Conservative and Unionist Party. Similarly, Labour has always been a loyalist unionist party and the Labour left is no different. It has normally ignored democratic questions or, at best, has been 'democracy-lite'. Its programme has always been to 'capture' the loyal Labour Party and then storm the corridors of Whitehall and, as ministers of the crown, bring social reforms to the people 'from above'. The bureaucratic road to 'socialism' is the very opposite of popular sovereignty and democracy from below.

Your Party and whatever its programme is are provisional. But the signs are not good. Your Party UK Ltd

is the business registered to oversee its creation (the use of 'UK' is a political, not an administrative, declaration). It seems that Your Party is simply repeating the loyalist and unionist politics of the Labour left. In trying to straddle the democratic chasm, it will fail the test of democracy.

There are two main proposals originating from within the Labour left from which to develop 'Your Programme'. The first is derived from the 2017 and 2019 Labour manifestos - both aiming to rebuild the 1945 British social monarchy. The second has its origins in Tony Benn's republican Commonwealth Bill, introduced into the House of Commons in 1992. Benn's commonwealth was an historic break with the old constitution of the crown-in-parliament from 1688.

The overwhelming majority of the ex-Labour left and communists (sometimes identified as Stalinists and Trotskyists) supported the 2017-19 social monarchy manifestos. They have ignored the major break and its implications evident in Tony Benn's republican bill, not least because democracy is alien to the politics of Labourism and seen as a diversion from bringing 'socialism' to the masses.

Social monarchism is the politics of the Labour Party traced back to Clement Attlee and Harold Wilson. It is both reactionary and utopian: it is reactionary in looking back with nostalgia to the post-war welfare state as a 'socialist model'; and utopian because it imagines that Attlee's programme could be recreated without the social conditions that existed in the febrile atmosphere of World War II.

Left social monarchism is a programme of restoring the welfare state under the unionist constitution of the crown-in-parliament. It has a left face, declaring support for socialism, a republic and self-determination for Ireland, Scotland and Wales as long-term aims. The left face is easily forgotten in the tense atmosphere of election campaigns and drawing up manifestoes (although the present 'crisis of democracy' and the growth of fascism may force them to reconsider their attitude to 'democracy').

Left social monarchists tend to believe that republicanism is achieved 'from above' by politely giving King Charles his notice. But republicanism is different: it is about democracy 'from below' in the self-organisation of the people; it is built locally in the communities, through people's

assemblies, community organisations and trade unionism.

A majority of the people want radical reform, but are not convinced about how to achieve it. The republican case is that the transfer of political power to the people removes bureaucratic barriers and makes radical reform achievable. The republican party programme is a national plan to establish popular democracy in law (ie, a written constitution).

In England there has been a birth of local grassroots organisation. In the present 'crisis of democracy' community organisations and local 'parties' have grown in many places. It is unclear whether these independent assemblies contain members of different local parties or are simply future branches of Your Party. We do know that the provisional leadership of Your Party UK is in the hands of MPs, whose job description includes swearing allegiance to the crown.

Left social monarchism and democratic social republicanism cannot exist in a single Your Party, except temporarily. Any form of monarchism is in total opposition to democratic republicanism. There can be cooperation and debate, and even temporary alliances. But there is no such thing as a royal-republican party. A republican party is one whose immediate programme is for a democratic and social republic. The left social monarchists are opposed to that - kicking the can down the road into the long grass. Of course, left social monarchists are 'left' because under challenge they claim to be republicans - but only in words, not deeds. Their 'republicanism' is confined to the confessional.

Nostalgia for the 1945 social monarchy has become reactionary. It is an ideology that must be debunked. It belongs to the past, not the future: in time it might be a statue in a museum. This struggle for democracy may lead Your Party to split into two parties, one representing 'Your Social Monarchy UK' in red, white and blue and the other 'Your Republic (England)' in a red, sea-green and violet tricolour.

Many might think such a split would be a disaster, not least because the left is already too fragmented. This is the wrong way to think of the problem of unity. We are discussing major issues of programme and principle about the United Kingdom and not hair splitting over personalities or tactical disputes. If major programme issues are posed openly and clearly, then a split can be necessary and progressive: members will face two clear, alternative programmes.

Your unity

Unity is a political question about programmes, not an organisational matter of setting up one big tent and asking everybody to pretend to agree and shut up. In a social monarchist party it should be obvious that republican democracy is subversive and divisive. A few republicans can be tolerated, as currently they are in the social monarchist Labour Party, but not if they actually activate their republicanism.

An open political split in front of the working class movement between a reactionary monarchist and a progressive republican programme would be a good thing. It would put the political choice before the people, make people think about alternative futures and how the present 1688 constitutional arrangements have failed.

Two rival 'Your Parties' would

not prevent them working together in a united front with other left parties against common enemies such as Labour and Reform. Indeed, as republicans, we could make the case that all left parties in England should form such a united front against those claiming to 'Unite the Kingdom'.

Finally, there is the issue of the unity of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. 'Your Party (UK)' would seek to impose unity through the constitution of the crown-in-parliament (or 'the union', as it is known), but 'Your Party (England)' would reject that on principle. The Anglo-British union is not a form of international working class solidarity, as social monarchists like to imagine: it is the divide-and-rule policy of the crown. The democratic 'party' of England must make clear that Ireland, Scotland and Wales are 'free nations'. We will repudiate all Acts of Union to make these nations free from the British crown. They will be free to go their own way, free to negotiate a new constitution.

At the time of writing Your Party has no members, no agreed programme and no legitimate democratic means of resolving conflicts. But encouraging a split or a coup in these circumstances would be reactionary, taking us backwards. We should welcome the fact that the co-leaders have agreed to work together for the founding conference.

This will decide which path to follow, between bureaucratic social monarchism 'from above' and democratic republicanism 'from below'. Before conference, the party must become a place where left social monarchism is identified, called out and debunked. Once the conference has made its decisions by democratic discussion and votes, we will review the situation.

Turning again to the dispute between Corbyn and Sultana, the question is whether they are fighting for the same left social-monarchist programme. If the answer is 'yes', then their arguments are over power, influence, tactics and timing, in which case there is no valid reason for the co-leaders to leave or split into two rival parties.

Alternatively, this conflict between the co-leaders may arise from different strategies and programmes as yet unrecognised or untheorised. In which case a split into two parties might become necessary - not least because the tensions and conflicts will only grow until their root cause, in programme, becomes apparent. Moreover, should Andy Burnham emerge as Starmer's successor, this would attract many left social monarchists back to the loyal Labour Party. Such was the fate of Left Unity with the rise of Corbyn Labour.

If this conflict between the co-leaders is the beginning of the battle between left social monarchists and social republicans then it will not be resolved until the former are defeated. A split over principle would be progressive, if it can be openly justified to the movement.

It is not yet possible to assess whether Corbyn or Sultana are champions of the social monarchy or the social republic. Any choice we make to back one or other co-leader has nothing to do with age, experience, ethnicity or any other distraction. We can support any leader who publicly recognises Tony Benn's commonwealth as the point of departure for the kind of politics that we need in England in 2025 ●

ORWELL

The road from Eton College

In the sixth of his series of seven articles, Paul Flowers asks why George Orwell's 'whips woven of words' fell so easily into the hands of his political opponents

Liberal and conservative champions of George Orwell have based their claim upon several factors - in particular his defence of aspects of bourgeois society, his wartime patriotism and deradicalisation, his incessant criticisms of other leftwingers, his siding with the USA in any war between it and the Soviet Union and, not least, his last two novels.

On these grounds, they then project what they feel his political trajectory would have been, had he lived beyond 1950. Of course, one cannot entirely rule out that Orwell might have ended up with the renegades from the socialist movement, whose hatred of Stalinism led them into the tender embrace of the 'Congress for Cultural Freedom'. Not a few of his contemporaries did abandon any commitment to socialism - one such casualty being CA Smith, the former chair of the Independent Labour Party, of which Orwell was a member in the late 1930s, whose fear of undemocratic collectivism drove him precipitately to the right;¹ another being Orwell's friend, Franz Borkenau.² But the evidence for the likelihood of any such evolution is indeed shaky.

We have seen that Orwell's wartime patriotism and his defence of aspects of bourgeois society were central to his concept of the struggle for socialism, and therefore they were not an indication of any abandonment of it on his part. His criticisms of fellow socialists were, as Alex Zwerdling stated, intended "to reform and strengthen, not to discredit the world to which he pledged his loyalty: he was the left's loyal opposition ... his criticism was always designed as internal."³ Orwell did indeed take pleasure in "rubbing his own cat's fur backwards", as Crick put it,⁴ but he did so *precisely because* he was a leftwinger: he considered it necessary to point to the various self-damaging and self-defeating foibles of which the left was guilty in his day (and - one must admit - remains guilty, *mutatis mutandis*, to this day).⁵ Again, it was not evidence of any renunciation of socialism on his part.

The radicalism with which Orwell entered World War II, peaking with *The lion and the unicorn*, had subsided somewhat by the end of hostilities. Nonetheless, Crick argued convincingly that despite this, "Orwell never changed his values after 1936", and what we had was the replacement of "the wild hope that he had from 1936 onwards that 'the revolution' ... was around the corner" by a "more realistic" view "in considering time-scales" of radical social change.⁶ And so Orwell criticised the Labour government for being too mild, stating in the spring of 1946 that it was "astonishing how little change" seemed "to have happened as yet in the structure of society".⁷ He thought that the Labour government's anti-communist purge was "part of the general breakdown of the democratic outlook".⁸ He refused to join the Duchess of Atholl's League of European Freedom as it had "nothing to say about British imperialism".⁹ And he called for a United Socialist States of Europe, which was a longstanding far-left demand.¹⁰

Orwell's siding with the USA if it and the Soviet Union came to blows had a definite reluctance about it, harking back to his choosing of the lesser of two evils in 1939: liberal-democratic Britain versus Nazi Germany. This was not the Atlanticism of rightwing social democracy, the strong identification with the USA and



Martin Jennings' BBC statue: at the heart of the establishment

ideological, diplomatic and political subordination to Washington: rather, it was the standpoint of much of the Labour Party left in the late 1940s - one which soon shifted into a considerably more neutral, 'independent democratic socialist' course, between Stalinism and cold war orthodoxy.

Dilemmas

All the same, Orwell helped his political enemies by making his vocation as an advocate for socialism needlessly difficult for himself.

He avoided elaborating theoretical constructs by using sweeping statements that did not necessarily coincide with reality. He overplayed the degree to which intellectuals fell for the lure of Stalinism. He dismissed the idea that middle class socialists could remain lifelong adherents to the libertarian socialism that he championed - on that basis, how could he explain his own socialist principles, and that workers could educate themselves as socialists without becoming hacks or charlatans (although he knew many such people)? He stopped short of recommending workers' control of industry as a means of forestalling the rise of a managerial elite, although this was well understood on the far left.¹¹ He continually raised unnecessary dilemmas, and thus handed the initiative to his opponents.

Moreover, he had no properly formed concept of working class independence, that the institutions of the labour movement must maintain their political independence from those of the ruling class. This, together with his tendency to support the lesser evil,¹² led him, notwithstanding his calls for radical social transformation, to back democratic British imperialism against its German totalitarian rival in 1939, and to declare that, if the cold war developed into a real conflict, he would side, if reluctantly, with the USA.¹³ It also led him into collaborating with an employee of the Information Research Department, an anti-communist wing of the foreign office that was set up by the Labour government in 1948.

"I know how, I don't know why," said Winston Smith, when confronted by the perplexing realities of Oceanian society.¹⁴ Orwell was a very good observer, capable of *describing* phenomena, often in a most evocative manner - he could point to the small details, in order to make the broad sweep simultaneously more intricate and more comprehensive. But he was far weaker in *explaining* phenomena. What lay at the root of the purloining of his literary legacy was his reliance upon critiques of Bolshevism

presented variously by anti-communists and anarchists, which view the Bolsheviks not as a militant trend within the socialist movement, but as a discrete body led by a clique of power-hungry intellectuals - an elite-in-waiting even, outwith and parasitic upon the working class, and which consider the rise of Stalinism as the inevitable result of this leadership's coming to power, rather than primarily as the unintentional consequences of the harsh objective pressures upon the Bolsheviks, once they were in power.

This approach either overlooks the democratic features of Bolshevism in 1917, and the vibrant relationship between the Bolsheviks and the Russian working class, or sees them as a disingenuous and dishonest ruse to win support. This was very much the view of his friend, Borkenau,¹⁵ and a key feature of various books that he favourably reviewed.¹⁶ The central feature of *Animal farm* - the theft of the revolution by an elite leadership - was expressed in an almost chemically pure form in an anarchist pamphlet which Orwell possessed. Declaring that "the present state of Russia" was "the inevitable result ... of the Marxist-Leninist practice of centralisation and dictatorship" of the central committee of the Communist Party, it claimed:

Bolshevik tactics, wherever they are applied, will always lead not to the emancipation of the workers from the chains which now enslave them ... They lead inevitably to the absolute of the totalitarian state. By allowing power over the instruments of production to pass out of their own hands into those of a so-called revolutionary government, the workers will achieve not liberty, but a slavery as bad or worse than that they sought to escape from.¹⁷

Altogether, it has to be admitted that, unlike the analyses of Bolshevism and its degeneration into Stalinism presented by many dissident Marxists, which were of some substance, Orwell's observations in respect of the nature of Bolshevism and its mutation into Stalinism were unimpressive - little more than a few isolated and unoriginal assertions.¹⁸

The use in *Animal farm* of different sorts of animals to represent various social strata coincides neatly with the political theories that view the rise of Stalinism as the ineluctable result of the coming to power of a discrete group of intellectuals. The paralleling on this issue of the otherwise very different theories of cold war orthodoxy and anarchism has enabled this book to be used by opponents of socialism, with

the proviso that Orwell's liberal and conservative champions are obliged either to ignore or to steer delicately around his wholehearted support for the animals' revolution.

This problem emerges in 1984, albeit in a different way. Looking beyond the absence in the narrative of the revolution that put the party into power and its subsequently becoming a ruling elite, the theoretical exposition in Goldstein's 'book' is a series of timeless clichés of ineluctable processes, the struggles amongst 'the High, the Middle and the Low', with the Middle disingenuously eliciting the help of the Low against the High in order to become the new elite, with "the same pattern" always reasserting itself.¹⁹ Again, this fatalistic assumption has enabled the book to be championed by Orwell's political opponents.

Orwell could describe totalitarianism, but he was quite unable to explain it. His nightmare vision of a super-Stalinist world was an exaggeration, but it did portray, albeit in an parodic manner, many of the truly negative features of the Soviet bloc at the end of the 1940s. Certainly, it was a good deal closer to that reality than the sugared portrayals in Stalinist publications of the time.²⁰ But, unable to explain convincingly why the liberatory promise of the October Revolution became mutated into the horrors of Stalinism, or to present a socialist programme that could avoid the establishment of a new elite, his attempt to fight for a radical, democratic socialism was hijacked by cold war ideologues, who used the portrayal in his last two novels of the inexorable rise of a revolutionary leadership into an elite in order to promote the idea that any attempt to replace capitalism by socialism will lead to the frightful world of Oceania and Big Brother.

Satires

In his essay on Russian writer Fyodor Sologub, Yevgeny Zamyatin declared:

The whip has not yet been given its full due as an instrument of human progress. I know of no more potent means than the whip for raising man from all fours, from making him stop kneeling down before anything or anyone. I am not speaking, of course, of whips woven of leather thongs: I am speaking of whips woven of words - the whips of the Gogols, Swifts, Molières, Frances, the whips of irony, sarcasm, satire.

Animal farm and 1984 were satires. Yet they failed in their purpose because, whilst they could *describe* the phenomenon they were satirising, they were unable convincingly to *explain* it - that is, to explain it in a way that differed from that of anti-socialists, or that did not rely upon theories of power-seeking - and therefore they could be - and they certainly have been - misused by Orwell's adversaries.

Orwell's "whips woven of words" fell readily into the hands of his political opponents - those who were and remain opposed to his vision of a democratic, libertarian socialism, and whose condemnations of viciously authoritarian regimes are, to put it politely, selective. Orwell did protest against the way in which his last novel was used as anti-socialist propaganda, but of the millions of people who have read *Animal farm* and 1984 within the ideological framework of the cold war, how many - or, better put, how few -

have seen his protests or consulted those of Orwell's writings which provide a far broader and clearer idea of his overall political outlook? ●

Notes

1. Smith claimed that "the rapid evolution towards central planning and state control" was "irresistible and irreversible" and that, in this process of incipient totalitarianisation, "communism is not socialism's chief ally - it is socialism's chief enemy ... Capitalism is the enemy of yesterday and today; communism is the enemy of today and tomorrow" (*Left* May 1947). Not surprisingly, Smith soon found himself in the arms of the right wing, and was a founder of the red-baiting organisation, Common Cause.
2. Borkenau addressed the CCF's founding conference in Berlin in 1950 with a speech which the conservative historian, Hugh Trevor-Roper, thought was "very violent and indeed almost hysterical" and which was received with "baying voices of approval from the huge audiences", which he felt were "the same people who seven years ago were probably baying in the same way to similar German denunciations of communism coming from Dr Goebbels in the Sports Palace" (F Stonor-Saunders *Who paid the piper? The CIA and the cultural cold war* London 1999, p79).
3. A Zwerdling *Orwell and the left* New Haven 1978, p5.
4. B Crick 'Introduction' to G Orwell 1984 Oxford 1983, p4.
5. Besides the state-worship of various Stalinist countries, not a few intellectuals have been seduced by third-worldism, post-modernism and the wilder ends of ecological, identity and gender politics - the descendants of the trends cruelly satirised by Orwell in *The road to Wigan Pier*.
6. B Crick 'Orwell and English Socialism' *Essays on politics and literature* Edinburgh 1989, p201; see also J Newsinger *Hope lies in the proles: George Orwell and the left* London 2018, pp107-08.
7. G Orwell 'London letter to *Partisan Review*', May 1946, *Collected essays, journalism and letters* (CEJL) Vol 4, Harmondsworth 1984, pp220-21.
8. G Orwell 'Letter to George Woodcock' CEJL Vol 4, p470.
9. G Orwell 'Letter to the Duchess of Atholl' CEJL, Vol 4, p49.
10. G Orwell 'Towards European Unity' CEJL Vol 4, pp423ff.
11. For example, one could read in the ILP's journal: "Nationalisation without workers' control will lead, not to socialism, but to state capitalism - a trend definitely towards fascism ... Workers' control is the safeguard, the key to real socialist direction" (*Left* February 1946).
12. And so: "In politics one can never do more than decide which of two evils is the lesser ..." (G Orwell 'Writers and Leviathan' CEJL Vol 4, p469).
13. G Orwell 'Letter to Victor Gollancz' CEJL Vol 4, p355.
14. G Orwell 1984 Harmondsworth 1969, p67.
15. Borkenau went so far as to assert that the Bolsheviks' creation of "a party above the proletariat" and a regime that was always "a dictatorship over the proletariat ... was not the unintended result of historical events, but the very aim for which the Bolshevik party had been consciously formed" (F Borkenau *The totalitarian enemy* London 1940, p208). So far as I can tell, Orwell did not endorse this assertion of totalitarian intent on the part of the Bolsheviks, as opposed to his support for this contention in respect of domestic power-seeking intellectuals. Borkenau was not the originator of this theory, which was to become a central factor in cold war orthodoxy: it had been expressed by, for example, the Czech democrat, Tomáš Masaryk, and the Russian populist, Benedict Myakotin, during the early years of Bolshevik rule (T Masaryk, 'The Slavs after the war' *Slavonic Review* June 1922; B Myakotin 'Lenin (1870-1924)' *Slavonic Review* March 1924. Borkenau presumably adopted the theory only after leaving the 'official communist' movement in 1929).
16. For example, N de Basily *Russia under Soviet rule: 20 years of Bolshevik experiment* London 1938; and Orwell's review in *New English Weekly* January 12 1939; see also G Orwell 'Marx and Russia' *The observer years* London 2003, pp72-74.
17. *The Russian myth* London 1942, p28; see also Orwell's pamphlet collection in *Collected works* Vol 20, London 1998, p282.
18. Just once, in 1946, did Orwell draw a different conclusion, one more akin to a Trotskyist analysis: "... in order to survive the Russian communists were forced to abandon ... some of the dreams with which they had started out ... From about 1925 onwards Russian policies, internal and external, grew harsher and less idealistic ..." (G Orwell 'What is socialism?' *Collected works* Vol 18, London 1998, pp61-62). Nonetheless, it still remains pretty thin stuff, when compared to other anti-Stalinist writers' explanations.
19. G Orwell 1984 pp162-66.

POLEMIC



Probabilities, not certainties

Should we refuse to take sides against our own ruling class because we lack absolute theoretical certainty? Should we downgrade the centrality of programme for diplomatic unity? **Mike Macnair** answers Jaques de Fouw

This is a reply to Jaques de Fouw's polemic in last week's paper, 'Paved with good intentions'.¹ It is a personal reply, not one from the CPGB as a whole or from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee.

The central core of comrade de Fouw's argument is that the CPGB's conception of unity on the basis of a political programme, plus the acceptance of faction rights, does not prevent splits. The examples given are the failure of the abortive Forging Communist Unity discussions between the CPGB, Talking About Socialism and the 'pro-talks' faction of the online journal *Prometheus*; and, more in depth, the split of the Mandeliste Socialistische Alternatieve Politik from the Netherlands Revolutionaire Socialistische Partij due to the RSP adopting a political position of opposition to Netherlands/Nato military support for Ukraine. Comrade de Fouw argues that *putting to the vote in the RSP* this position was sectarian and amounted to making a (debatable) theoretical position (that the war in Ukraine is an inter-imperialist conflict) part of the basis of unity.

He argues that instead the basis of unity necessarily includes theoretical positions, but on the other hand should only include *indisputable* theoretical positions, "such that any communist who is honest in their convictions has had the ability to follow the topic to such a degree that denying it would be like denying that the earth is round, denying it is a betrayal of the working class".

War

I begin unavoidably with the Ukraine question: not least because the front page of *The Times* on September 29 carried the top story that the former head of the British Security Service (aka MI5), Lady Manningham-Buller, said that she agreed with 'foreign policy expert'

Fiona Hill that "we're already at war with Russia".

In a previous article in response to an earlier stage of the debate with Netherlands comrades,² I made the point that, while *selling* arms to Ukraine would not make western states co-belligerents on the Ukrainian side, the *application of public funds* to support for Ukraine - including paying for non-military operations - *did* make governments that did so co-belligerents in the war, as a matter of the norms of international law that applied before the systematic perversion of these rules by lawyers acting in the interests of the USA. Supporters in Nato countries of 'Arm, arm, arm Ukraine' are, therefore, *supporting our own states in wartime*; and this is an obvious political fact, not an issue of theoretical argument.

Going along with this, in the UK at least supporters of the pro-Ukraine line are squirming on the political hook that they cannot unequivocally support proposals to cut arms spending or slogans like 'welfare, not warfare'. This is clear in the responses of Anticapitalist Resistance and the 'Atlanticists for Workers' Loyalty' (Alliance for Workers' Liberty) to the Trade Union Congress vote to call for cuts in arms spending.³ Supporting your own government in war implies supporting the 'sacrifices' the working class are expected to make for the cost of the war.

It is a theoretical point that this is not merely an issue for inter-imperialist wars of the 1914-18 sort (though in my opinion we are *sliding towards* a new 1914-18, but this time between nuclear-armed powers). "Not one man! Not one penny for this system!" was Wilhelm Liebknecht's slogan in relation to Germany.⁴ The policy it expressed began with Liebknecht's and August Bebel's abstention in the war credits vote for the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, *before* the development of

**Ukrainian armed forces:
armed, backed and paid for
by our ruling class**

**"We're already at war with
Russia": Lady Eliza
Manningham-Buller, former
director general of MI5**



German imperialism. I have observed elsewhere that, even for communists in semi-colonial countries, backing the semi-colonial regime's war against an imperialist power may be a road to political defeat, as in the case of Trotsky's line for the Chinese Trotskyists in the 1930s-40s, or the Argentinian Morenistas' 'victoryism' in relation to the Argentinian military regime's adventurism in the 1982 South Atlantic War.⁵

Further, and more generally, as I have argued repeatedly,

A party which is to defend the independent interests of the working class needs to defend those interests as universal interests - but also to be as disloyal to the states we inhabit as the parliamentary oppositionists who negotiated with the Scots to keep the Scottish invasion in northern England in 1640, or who invited a full-scale Dutch invasion in 1688.⁶

None of this implies absolutely automatic defeatism. It does imply that the necessary *starting point* on war questions for a politics that seeks the overthrow of capitalist class rule and the emancipation of the working class through the 'cooperative commonwealth'/socialism/communism is Karl Liebknecht's 1915 slogan that "the main enemy is at home".⁷

Splits

Contrary to what appears to be comrade de Fouw's view, it is *not* the CPGB's view that unity on the basis of programme and faction rights can prevent all splits - or even all unprincipled splits. The argument is, rather, that unity on some basis *other than* political programme - whether it is to be the personality cult of Jeremy Corbyn, or 'Cliff state capitalism', or the *tactical* agreements that have been the basis of the unity projects

of the sections of the Mandeliste Fourth International - guarantees that there *will* be unprincipled splits.

The same is true of anti-factionalism - whether anti-factionalism takes the form of overt bans on factions, on 'permanent factions' or on 'public factions'. And anti-factionalism may equally take the shape of other forms of speech control, like civility requirements, which function to defend those with *existing* power against minority views - and hence to maintain the power of the loyalist labour bureaucracy, and through it the capitalist class.⁸ Rejecting anti-factionalism is not a guarantee against unprincipled splits; holding on to anti-factionalism is a guarantee that there *will* be unprincipled splits.

In the first place, some splits are, in fact, principled. For myself, in the book *Revolutionary strategy* I wrote:

The split in the Second International was not a sectarian error on the part of the communists. It was required by the unwillingness of the coalitionist right to act democratically. Marxists have to organise in a way which is *not dependent* on unity with the right. We have to accept that the split in the Second International will not be reversed (unless Marxists altogether abandon our politics and accept the corrupt world of Blairism, etc) (p99).

This is a fundamental point of difference with the Mandelites. Since the 1980s their view has been that it is necessary to build 'parties not programmatically delimited between reform and revolution': that is, parties that *include* people committed to the politics of the state-loyalist and coalitionist right wing, but who oppose the *immediate* welfare cuts and so on. To preserve unity with these 'official lefts', the Mandelites insist on *diplomatic* formulas, and

thus on speech controls.

It was already clear in 2006, when I wrote the series of articles that was published in a collected form as *Revolutionary strategy*, that this policy was useless and tended to reinforce the global drift of politics to the right. In the years since then, the evidence has accumulated over and over again that this judgment was correct. See, just for particularly clear examples, Syriza and Podemos.

In 2022 the Mandelites, by supporting Nato's war effort in Ukraine, crossed from the camp of communism to the camp of the state-loyalist and coalitionist right wing descended from the social-chauvinists of 1914-18. Their *argument* of the primacy of the self-determination of nations repeats central arguments of socialist supporters of the Entente powers in 1914-18. They may still be able to reverse their course. But they certainly will not do so if their opponents pretend that this is a secondary 'theoretical' issue and that clear opposition to Nato's war effort in Ukraine should not be put to the vote.

Secondly, it does not lie in the gift of majorities, or of organisational forms, to prevent *all* unprincipled splits. I argued this back in 2012 in relation to the split of Manchester comrades from the CPGB in favour of the Anti-Capitalist Initiative:

It is only possible to have a collective political organisation - as opposed to a series of top-down sects and a gravel of sects of one member ('independents') - if we have open disagreement within the organisation. Open political disagreement within the organisation depends on two elements: first, that majorities (or leaderships) do not kick the minorities or individual dissenters out, either for expressing disagreement or on factitious disciplinary charges of one sort or another; and, second, and equally important, that minorities do not walk out in search of fresh fields and pastures new.

I observed in that article that the CPGB "go on and on about" the aspect of the responsibility of minorities, and had (then recently) condemned the founders of Counterfire and several others for minority walk-out splits in face of severe provocation.⁹

Walk-out minority splits *from the right wing* are not uncommon, either. Henry Hyndman and his pro-

war co-thinkers walked out of the British Socialist Party, when they lost control of the party at its April 1916 conference. In December 1920 at the Tours Congress of the Section française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO - French Socialist Party) the rightwing minority refused to accept affiliation to Comintern and claimed to be the 'continuators' of the SFIO. The 1981 split of the Social Democratic Party from British Labour was a response to an imagined triumph of the Labour left. And so on.

This sort of split by a former majority which has lost control was recently executed by the Mandelites in France in December 2022 - in essence, because the majority refused to accept that, as the largest minority, the Mandelites should retain control of the leadership and apparatus; but behind this defence of a bourgeois governmental norm, due to anti-factionalism (the overt ground of the Mandelites' split) and a desire to enter fully into the project of the Nouvelle Union Populaire Ecologique et Sociale popular front coalition (since broken up by the Parti Socialiste and the Greens over 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunting in response to the October 2023 Gaza prison-break, subsequently reassembled as the Nouveau Front Populaire, and again betrayed by the PS).¹⁰

The split of the Mandelites from the Netherlands RSP is obviously not such a 'lost control' split: the Mandelites did not have control of the group to start with. But comrade de Fouw *assumes* that it must have been the fault of the majority, led by the Communistische Platform, for putting to the vote a resolution characterising the Ukraine war as inter-imperialist. Given the history of the Mandelites, it is just as likely to be an irresponsible minority walk-out *by* the Mandelites. The proposal that the majority should not *put to the vote* a position opposed to the war, in order to avoid this split, is straightforwardly anti-democratic: the Mandelite minority is able to dictate the line to the anti-war majority. Of course, *behind* this Mandelite minority is the not-so-silent majority of the pro-war, pro-capitalist parties and media in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Nato.

Programme

Comrade de Fouw argues that it is not possible to separate differences on theory from differences on programme. "The party programme itself is a form of theoretical unity."

Hence, rather than basing membership on *acceptance* of a party programme adopted by majority vote as the basis for common action (which is the CPGB's, and my, position) the approach should be that of the 1979 pamphlet by the pro-Albanian, post-Maoist Pacific Collective (Marxist-Leninist).¹¹ The tasks he poses, then, are to focus down immediate tasks on *tactical* agreements, while seeking to create a 'real party' *in the long term* on deeper *theoretical* agreement. Theoretical unity, he argues, should only be enforced (meaning, votes taken) on positions that "have been proved in practice; or, through very thorough political statistical research ... such that any communist who is honest in their convictions has had the ability to follow the topic to such a degree that denying it would be like denying that the earth is round, denying it is a betrayal of the working class".

The first point here is that the argument that "The party programme itself is a form of theoretical unity" is seriously slippery. On the one hand, it is true that party programmes make theoretical *assumptions*. For example, if we accepted that marginal-utility general equilibrium was a true description of market economic dynamics, we could not rationally support the existence of trade unions or any other aspect of communism.

On the other hand, a programme does not consist of the body of theoretical assumptions, but of operative conclusions based on these assumptions, which take the form of proposals for constitutional change, legislation and forms of local or sectoral action. And the operative conclusions can be accepted without agreeing the detail of the underlying theoretical assumptions. Here it is only necessary to point to the sheer range of disagreement among the students of Marxist economics; but the *operative conclusions for political proposals* (as distinct from judgments about likely future crashes, and so on) are common across many such students.

A specific and important example is from 1917. Trotskyists have promoted the idea that Lenin in April 1917 came round to Trotsky's view of the "permanent revolution" on the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the poor peasantry, as opposed to Lenin's own advocacy of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". This claim is pretty clearly false, as Lars T Lih has shown (and can be independently shown from Lenin's post-October writing). It is equally (more obviously) false that Trotsky came round to Lenin's view; though what the Soviet government *did* was initially closer to the arguments of Lenin's *Two tactics* (which advocated land redistribution) than to those of Trotsky's *Results and prospects* (which argued that Social Democrats should not adopt such proposals). Nonetheless, Lenin and his co-thinkers plus Trotsky and his co-thinkers *were* able to unite in a common party with the fusion of the Mezhrayontsi with the Bolsheviks at the 6th (Bolshevik) congress (July 26-August 3 1917), and this unification was plainly practically important to the victory of the October revolution.

I might add that even quite small left parties, like the British Social Democratic Federation - British Socialist Party before 1914, included people who had sharply distinct theoretical conceptions: one has only to compare Hyndman, Ernest Belfort Bax and Theodore Rothstein. The case is equally true for the old pre-1991 CPGB and is *a fortiori* for the mass pre-1914 social democratic parties and the mass communist parties after 1920. The levels of theoretical homogeneity found in the British Socialist Workers Party's common commitment to

Tony Cliff's state capitalism, the Revolutionary Communist Party's commitment to the 'unbroken thread' of theory running through Ted Grant, or the 1970s Maoists' commitments to 'Marxism-Leninism' mark these groups off as decreasingly able to think.

Disputable

The second point is that "enforcing" "theoretical unity" only on positions that "have been proved in practice; or, through very thorough political statistical research ..." is indefensible for two reasons. The first reason is that no such positions exist or can possibly exist. Perfect certainty is unattainable. The second and the flipside of the first is that we humans (and hence our collective organisations) are entitled and morally bound to act on degrees of probability less than certainty.

First, nothing is absolutely proved. I give as an example uniformitarianism/anti-catastrophism in geology and biology, which in the later 19th and early 20th centuries were taken to be as thoroughly proved a scientific theory as any theory could be. More recently the theory has been shown to have serious limits. In reality, *nothing* can be taken as *absolutely* proved in science; everything is open to disproof, when new evidence comes along. True, too, in the study of history.

Secondly, and conversely, precisely because we cannot have certainty, we are obliged to act on less than certainty. We are obliged to act because inaction has consequences as much as action. My inaction is perhaps morally neutral in relation to events in Japan, but it is certainly not morally neutral if, for example, I choose to do no maintenance on my car and the result is that the brakes fail and someone is injured. Since certainty is unavailable, we are obliged to act on *degrees of probability*.

And these vary with circumstances. Anglo-American law traditionally insisted on proof "beyond reasonable doubt" (which is still less than absolute certainty) for a criminal conviction, on "the balance of probabilities" (that claimant's evidence is better than defendant's) in a civil claim. It continues to be debated how far we should follow the "precautionary principle" in making innovators prove their product or technique is safe - and

what *degree* of probability should be required. And so on.

The Pacific Collective (Marxist-Leninist) were in 1979 trying to get out of the trap which the 1970s New Communist Movement had landed themselves in by the struggle for unity of *theoretical agreement* - but without directly critiquing Lenin's oversimplified tag, in *What is to be done*, that "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement".¹² The attempt to get out of the problem by asserting that *some* bits of theory are 'proved' and thus to be 'enforced', while others are 'unproved', thus not to be 'enforced', manages both to combine dogmatism on what is thought to be 'proved' and to paralyse political action on issues which are not taken to have 'proved theory'. The result is, though comrade de Fouw has not followed the SAP out of the RSP ... more Mandelism ●

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Notes

1. The editors' title, not the author's.
2. 'Principle not diplomacy' *Weekly Worker* November 24 2022 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1420/principle-not-diplomacy).
3. anticapitalistresistance.org/wages-not-weapons (September 18 2025); *Solidarity* September 24, 'TUC calls for higher taxes on the wealthy': www.workersliberty.org/story/2025-09-15/tuc-calls-taxing-top-wealth.
4. www.marxists.org/archive/liebknecht-w/revolt/11-not-one-penny.html.
5. 'Ditch the strategic illusion' *Weekly Worker* November 8 2007 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/696/ditch-the-strategic-illusion).
6. 'What sort of party' *Weekly Worker* November 21 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1516/what-sort-of-party).
7. www.marxists.org/archive/liebknecht-k/works/1915/05/main-enemy-home.htm.
8. A recent discussion is in my article, 'They come with thorns' (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1537/they-come-with-thorns). This is not just my or the CPGB's view: see AB Mamo, 'A Tale of two civilities': papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5291684 (June 2025); R Gay, 'Civility is a fantasy' *New York Times* September 24 2025. It makes no difference whether 'civility' norms are proposed as bureaucratic rules or as a ground of tactical self-censorship: in either case scabbing cannot be called out as scabbing.
9. 'End the cycle of splits' *Weekly Worker* May 23 2012 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/915/end-the-cycle-of-splits).
10. See, for example, tomasoflatharta.com/2022/12/14/france-nouveau-parti-anticapitaliste-npa-new-anticapitalist-party-divides-down-the-middle.
11. www.marxists.org/history/erol/nem-8/pacific-collective/index.htm.
12. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/i.htm.

Fighting fund

You've done it!

As I reported last week, we needed just under a thousand pounds in the last five days of the month, if we were to reach that all-important £2,750 fighting fund target for September. And would you believe it? We received £985 (!) from our readers and supporters, taking the final total up to £2,776. Brilliant!

Top of the list for his generosity is comrade JC for his two donations received within a few days of each other, totalling over £200! But comrades BK, PM and LM also made three-figure contributions, while other bank transfers and standing orders came from RL (£60), MW (£30), OG (£27), JT and BH (£25 each), AB (£20), JM (£15), IS (£13), JD and MD (£10) and AR (£5).

Another eight comrades clicked on that PayPal button - thank you also, JB, DB and PS (£50 each), MS (£25), JC and ES (£10), plus DI and TR (£5).

It was only on the last day of

the month that we hit the target - and then exceeded it by £27! We really can't thank our readers and supporters enough, but, of course, we need to keep it up this month too. And so far, as I write, with only one day gone, we already have £224 in the kitty. Thanks to comrades LC (£50), PR (£24), DL, MT and SJ (£20), CP (£16), AN and BG (£15), RM (£13), plus DI and CH (£10) and MM (£11).

We rely so much on our readers and supporters to ensure that the *Weekly Worker* continues to play its essential role in the fight for a single, principled, genuinely democratic Marxist party. Please play your part and see us home in October too! ●

Robbie Rix

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

Online Communist Forum



Sunday October 5 5pm Trump's 20-point Gaza plan: political report from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

Use this link to register:
communistparty.co.uk/ocf

Organised by CPGB: communistparty.co.uk and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk For further information, email Stan Keable at Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk

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

REVIEWS

Reds with deep state connections

John Foot **The Red Brigades: the terrorists who brought Italy to its knees** Bloomsbury, 2025, pp450, £25

John Foot's lengthy book is the first English-language general account of this Italian leftwing terrorist group to be published for some decades. It includes a large number of relevant photographs extracted from a number of archives.

The book traces the development of the *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades) from their foundation in 1970 until the murder of Roberto Ruffilli in April 1988, which Foot regards as the last killing by the BR proper - choosing, probably rightly, to make no mention of subsequent sporadic violent activities by those seeking to revive the organisation (eg, the killing of Marco Biagi in Bologna in 2002), apart from in an endnote (p397). Chapter 1, 'The world that made the Red Brigades: Italy, 1968-1974', makes some attempt to sketch the background to the group's founding, placing an emphasis on the influence of the Uruguayan Tupamoros that some might see as excessive.

The Red Brigades is largely based on a wide variety of predominantly Italian-language secondary literature, although it often quotes contemporary newspaper accounts of the incidents it covers in detail. As a professional historian, Foot is well aware that some might possibly feel he could have made more use of primary sources (archival and oral) in the way he has in some of his other books. As he points out, "much of the primary material remains difficult to access" (p398) - he complains about a two-year wait to get permission to see some material relating to BR trials in the Turin State Archive, and about the fact that he was not allowed to photograph it or take notes.¹

Foot chose not to attempt any interviews with the surviving BR leaders - "they have said *what they want to say*" (p395). Of the three he mentions by name - "Curcio, Moretti, Franceschini above all" (p394) - the last has died since Foot published the book. In my view, not Foot's, who seems more hostile to Franceschini than to the other two, he was the only one who might perhaps have been willing to say something more, precisely because he did not in later years subscribe to the official version of the BR's history - the one endorsed by the Italian state, as well as Curcio and Moretti, although it was largely concocted by a lesser former BR terrorist, Valerio Morucci, soon after his arrest.

The one episode that made the BR internationally notorious is, of course, the kidnapping and murder of the Italian Christian Democrat leader and former prime minister, Aldo Moro, in 1978. Without the enduring memory of this central event, it is unlikely that anybody would have suggested to Foot (who has not previously specialised in writing about Italian terrorism or the Italian far left - preferring topics like the Italian football, cycling or radical psychiatry) that he write a book about the BR that is very clearly aimed at a general readership rather than a purely academic niche market.

Unfortunately, his coverage of the Moro affair (chapters 13 and 14) is the weakest section of the book. What we are offered is the official version, in which an extremely efficient band of terrorists captured Moro without much difficulty after rapidly killing his driver and four bodyguards, and then held him in the middle of Rome for 55 days without anybody having the remotest idea where he was until he was found dead in the boot of a car on May 9 1978.

These days, this account is more difficult to defend than it was at the time, when the American historian,



Former PM Aldo Moro

Richard Drake, took on the academic defence of the official version in *The Aldo Moro murder case* (Cambridge MA 1995)². Here we have Foot at his most polemical. There is not enough space in a review to cite all his vicious attacks on those who cast any doubt on the official version,³ so I will quote a sample passage:

... a near obsession with the minor details of the Moro kidnap and murder has developed over nearly 50 years - dominating the history of the Red Brigades and obscuring numerous stories and tragedies linked to other victims. Moro has overshadowed everything and the minutiae of the precise quantity of bullets, the exact number of *brigatisti*, the escape route, the cars, the bases, the "people's prison" - have been worked over again and again by journalists, politicians, parliamentary commissions, documentaries, novelists, historians. The endless search for some sort of outside influence on the BR - the *puppet masters* - was also linked to a powerful set of stereotypes - about Italian inefficiency, or Italian goodness (pp240-41).

This is not the only occasion on which Foot uses the phrase, "puppet masters". He is obviously referring to a book that is totally absent from his bibliography and from all his hundreds of endnotes: P Willan *Puppet masters: the political uses of terrorism in Italy* (London 1991).⁴ Foot may not agree with, or approve of, Willan's work, but not to refer to it is intellectually dishonest, as in my view is much of chapters 13 and 14.

These chapters make absolutely no mention of the Masonic P2 Lodge, or the extent to which P2 had infiltrated the Italian secret services, police and *Carabinieri* military force - which might explain why the state's efforts to find Moro in 1978 were so ham-fisted, to put it mildly. It should be added that

the only reference to P2 in the entire book is one paragraph (pp327-28), suggesting it was "involved obliquely in political violence, particularly the 'strategy of tension'" (p328).

This minimalisation of P2's role in financing and organising neo-fascist bombings - there was nothing 'oblique' about Licio Gelli's financing of the Bologna bombers - is followed by another unpleasant rant about "many conspiracy theories relating to Italian politics and history in the 1970s and 1980s". Needless to say, there is not a single reference to P2 leader Licio Gelli anywhere in the book. Perhaps we should be grateful that we are spared any claim that the Bologna bombing of August 1980 was organised by Palestinians - the standard claim of Gelli's Italian apologists in the far-right Fratelli d'Italia.

The absence of Gelli's name anywhere in Foot's text is symptomatic of a wider pattern of denial. There is an equally deafening silence about the role of Steve Pieczenik, the sinister American advisor to Interior Minister Francesco Cossiga during the Moro affair. Even if Foot has not read the book by Emmanuel Amara, *Abbiamo ucciso Aldo Moro* ('We killed Aldo Moro'),⁵ in which Pieczenik himself admits that he and Cossiga decided to let Moro be killed, Pieczenik's frequently appears in other books about the Moro affair.

In other words, it is not just a question of vague 'conspiracy theories' about American involvement, but repeated references to a specific individual, who has always refused to testify in Italian courts or parliamentary commissions dealing with the Moro affair. Of course, the significant silences about Gelli and Pieczenik are matched by the absence of any mention of Corrado Simioni, even to refute Franceschini's theory about Simioni's role as an external influence on the BR during Moretti's leadership, particularly during the Moro affair.⁶

The trouble with Foot's generic

attack on 'conspiracy theories' is the only such work that he bothers to refer to in any detail is the Fasanella and Rocca book about the alleged role of the conductor and composer, Igor Markevitch, as a mysterious intermediary during the last days of Moro's life⁷ - a work full of nonsense about Rosicrucians, the Knights of Malta and, in a rather coded way, 'the world Jewish conspiracy'.

Foot gives a detailed account of the BR kidnapping of the corrupt Neapolitan politician, Ciriaco De Mita, in 1981 (pp335-44), in which the Christian Democratic Party ended up paying a huge ransom, and Ciriaco emerged alive, even if utterly politically discredited. The contrast with the DC's behaviour during Moro's captivity should be obvious. As Giovanni Moro, Aldo's son, said to *La Repubblica* on September 5 2003, "It is a fact that in that case - and only in that case - the Italian state decided neither to negotiate with the terrorists nor seriously attempt to free the prisoner".⁸ Foot's comment about the Ciriaco case ("the context - involving the BR, the DC, the secret services and the Camorra - was astonishing") is in my view rather absurd, but regarding it as "astonishing" is a necessary corollary of taking the official version of the Moro affair at face value.

Whilst Foot offers what is in general a well-written, detailed and frequently very graphic account of the BR's principal actions, where I (and many others) would differ from him is over his contention that the BR's success - in their own terms - as a terrorist group was due to the rigid internal rules they adopted in 1974, discussed in chapter 6, and the intensity of their group loyalty - at least until Patrizio Peci became a *pentito* (supergrass) in 1980 (see chapter 17).

My own view is that their survival after 1974 was due to the fact that their original leadership was replaced by first Mario Moretti and then Giovanni Senzani - both of whom were in some way connected to Italian or foreign

secret services. The case against Moretti was best made by Sergio Flamigni in *La sfinge delle Brigate Rosse* (Milan 2004), which Foot does refer to once, briefly and very dismissively (pxi). The case against Giovanni Senzani was best made in a much more recent book, of which Foot may perhaps have been unaware.⁹

The original members of the BR were sincere, if totally misguided, revolutionaries, and the vast majority of subsequent BR rank-and-file members were of the same ilk - infiltration at the top was not replicated on a large scale at the bottom. Moreover, there is no reason to suppose that Barbara Balzerani, the last leader of the BR (or, to be more exact, of one of its fragments), was in any way manipulated by outside forces - the bloodthirsty path she pursued was hers alone.

Foot chose to dedicate his book to Salvatore Porceddu and Salvatore Lanza - two very young low-ranking policemen killed by the BR in Turin in December 1978. Although this murder was one of the BR's most brutal and pointless actions, it is hard not to be cynical about Foot's motives for this dedication.

Despite the book's many literary merits, Foot's aim in writing it may not have been purely scholarly, or even largely commercial. When attacking "conspiracy theories", he says that

... one logical outcome of these interpretations is that ... thousands of magistrates, judges, lawyers, police officers, *carabinieri* either had the wool pulled over their eyes or were themselves part of a plot that reached the very top of the state - and even to international organisations, including those in the USA. This is a monstrous suggestion. If it is true, the entire Italian state should be dismantled (pxii).

Beyond remarking that I never thought Paul Foot's son would go quite so far in defending the Italian state and "international organisations, including those in the USA" (presumably the CIA, Nato and Operation Gladio), I leave it to readers to assess whether it is a "monstrous suggestion" that the Red Brigades, like their contemporaries in the neo-fascist terrorist groups, ended up as pawns in Washington's game during the cold war ●

Tobias Abse

Notes

1. He appears to see no contradiction between these difficulties and the very rose-tinted view of the Italian state apparatus he expounds elsewhere in the text.
2. Surprisingly, Foot does not quote Drake. However, he is eager to cite the official version's Italian academic defender - the civil servant, Vladimiro Satta, whose principal work is *Odissea nel Caso Moro* (Rome 2003).
3. I discussed the views of doubters - including Moro's widow, Eleonora, and his son, Giovanni - in my article, 'The Moro affair: interpretations and consequences', in S Gundle and L Rinaldi (eds) *Assassinations and murder in modern Italy: transformations in society and culture* Basingstoke 2007, pp89-100.
4. It was re-issued by a minor American publisher in 2002. One suspects that any one of the dubious characters named in it took advantage of English libel laws to block any re-issue in the UK.
5. Rome 2008 (translated from the French original, *Nous avons tué Aldo Moro*, Paris 2006).
6. Foot refers to the book in which Franceschini puts this forward, but he does not mention Simioni - in other words, Foot is well aware of the whole 'Superclan' story, according to which Simioni manipulated the BR via a much more clandestine organisation of his own.
7. Chapter 14, endnote 1, p422.
8. The state did free the prisoners, Vittorio Vallarino Gancia and General James Lee Dozier, in 1975 and 1981 respectively, having used armed force against the BR.
9. M Altamura *Il professore dei Misteri. E con lo Stato e con le BR: Giovanni Senzani e la storia segreta del doppio livello* Milan 2019.

McCarthyite secrets and lies

Julia Bracher (director), *The Rosenbergs: atomic spies*, PBS America

In 1949, for anyone who remembers, the United States found out that the Soviet Union had the bomb. PBS America has just shown a documentary lasting one hour and 10 minutes on the collective paranoia that gripped the US for years thereafter. The film is a 'curate's egg' (good in parts) - the old video and newspaper clips, etc, are very interesting. But some of the narration is so anodyne as to be risible - at least to those of us who have read more deeply.

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg are names many people are familiar with, and the outcome of their trial is also known widely. But details of their trial and the period of time between trial and execution are not widely known and this film tries to fill in the gaps.

Both Julius and Ethel were children of immigrants from the Soviet Union. Julius had a far more supportive family than Ethel, whose mother was not a kind person - she put Ethel in charge of her younger brother, David, for the whole of their childhood. Ethel wanted to be a singer, but, like most immigrants at the time, the poverty of their family meant she had to work, so she became a stenographer.

All of this became important in the years that followed, although the film tends to take information from a biography of Ethel which concentrated too much on her being a rather emotional female. At the end it says that she did not encourage Julius to confess because she "loved him too much". But she was also a dedicated communist, and understood all too well what she was doing.

Julius and Ethel were both members of the CPUSA, and persuaded David Greenglass (Ethel's brother) to join also. In the beginning, they believed that 'socialism' of the Soviet variety would save the world.

David was sent to work on the Manhattan Project (where the atomic bomb was made), and was a mechanic in the explosives laboratory. Julius remained in New York and worked as an engineer. David would give Julius information to pass onto his Soviet handler. Importantly, though, when interviewed in later years, his handler said that the information Julius gave him was useless for atomic bomb purposes.

Julius continued giving information after World War II, and for that reason both Julius and Ethel apparently left the CPUSA. Unfortunately for them, however, this did not help them when they were finally arrested.

When the Soviets exploded their A bomb, hysteria gripped the US. Atomic shelters were built all over the country, and endless public information appeared on the radio and television and in newspapers. 'Duck and cover' was the prevailing mantra. In my childhood I sat under school desks, or in the hallway of the school (right in front of the glass classroom door!) once a month by state decree, in case the Soviets decided to bomb Philadelphia. We were certainly 'ducking', but not necessarily 'covering'!

Joseph McCarthy was in his element because "Communism is an evil and malignant way of life." The first 'spy' to be arrested was Klaus Fuchs, and the information he gave led to revelations about David Greenglass's role. At this point, Greenglass's wife suffered major burns from an accident and was taken to hospital. When Greenglass was threatened with seeing his wife arrested from her hospital bed, he confessed and also revealed the role of Julius, who was arrested.

Ethel told journalists that she was



Ethel and Julius Rosenberg

a housewife at home with two young boys and in her statement she said: "Neither Julius nor I have ever been communists, nor do we know any." That was a monumental error on her part and the journalists took advantage of the untruth (at this time the Korean War began, and it really seemed as though World War III was on its way).

Julius refused to reveal any names and so the FBI arrested Ethel "pour encourager les autres": ie, to get Julius to confess. They could not afford bail - £100,000 being an astronomical sum at that time.

The two Rosenberg boys were sent to Ethel's mother, but she abandoned them in a Jewish children's home, and ordered Ethel to confess and tell the FBI what they wanted to know. This was the first and second abandonment by Ethel's family. There was a third, and worse, to come.

The lawyers who represented the Rosenbergs were politically savvy, but had no experience of criminal trials. The judge, however, the (Un) Honorable Irving Kaufman, who bragged about giving the Rosenbergs the death penalty, was a close personal friend of J Edgar Hoover, by that time head of the FBI.

They were accused of revealing key information about the atomic bomb - Julius himself believed, and said, that the atomic bomb should be shared by every country. One part of the testimony was a sketch of the cross section of the Nagasaki atomic bomb, which David Greenglass said he gave to Julius. He also said that Ethel typed up the notes from a meeting that they held, which was a lie. But this made Ethel a 'conspirator' and sealed her fate. The FBI coached him specifically on her guilt, but how much of Greenglass's testimony was a lie? Since the FBI blackmailed him from beginning to end, it can be assumed that a good part of it was.

Judge Kaufman believed (no

evidence given) that Ethel was the instigator of the spying. When the jury came back with a "guilty" verdict, he went to Hoover to discuss what should be done. J Edgar thought Ethel should not be executed because (a) she was a woman and (b) she had two young boys and it would not look good in the press. Kaufman, however, believed that she was the most important person in this spy ring (no evidence suggested this) and therefore had to be executed, as well as Julius.

The FBI isolated Ethel in Sing Sing Correctional Facility (a male prison) with four female wardens, whose 'job' it was to break her, so she would convince Julius he had to confess. But she never tried and he never did.

After a lengthy worldwide movement to save the Rosenbergs, spearheaded in part by the CPUSA, the Supreme Court rejected allegations of a biased judge and their fate was in the hands of president Dwight D Eisenhower. Since Eisenhower also believed that Ethel must have been the main instigator, they were executed on June 19 1953. Julius's very elderly mother appeared in demonstrations and was prostrate with grief. When Ethel's mother was interviewed, she told journalists that her daughter had been "nothing but an agent of Stalin".

When the Soviet and FBI files were opened in 1995, it was clear that Julius had passed on some information - but whether it was crucial information relating to US atomic weapons was still not clear. The film skirts over this contradiction, since it is entitled *Atomic spies*. Is that what they were? Julius's handler said not, and for Ethel the files clearly show that even the FBI knew she was innocent.

And the boys? They were finally adopted by friends of the Rosenbergs, and eventually became lecturers/professors. They started the Rosenberg Foundation, which gives money for education and necessities to children

of political prisoners from countries all over the world. One Rosenberg granddaughter has made films about the period and another runs the foundation.

The film does not use any quotes or information from or about the family or about their commitment to the cause. It is not a political documentary. It gives a lot of general information, and makes very good use of video clips from the time, but those watching it have to see beyond some of the verbiage.

Having lived with the trial all of my life, and having read books and the letters the Rosenbergs wrote, their commitment was made clear when, on the day before the execution, Julius and Ethel wrote to their sons:

Your lives must teach you, too, that good cannot really flourish in the midst of evil; that all the things that go to make up a truly satisfying and worthwhile life must sometimes be purchased very dearly. Be comforted then that we were serene and understood with the deepest kind of understanding that civilisation had not as yet progressed to the point where life did not have to be lost for the sake of life; and that we were comforted in the sure knowledge that others would carry on after us ●

Gaby Rubin

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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**Nigel Farage
and Reform UK
go whiny
cry-baby**

Fear and loathing in Liverpool

Can Sir Keir and his gormless front bench turn things around? **Paul Demarty** reports on Labour's conference, Andy Burnham, bashing migrants and the risky strategy of talking up Farage and Reform UK. It could all horribly backfire

Party conferences are always, to some extent, hostages to fortune.

Things can go terribly wrong in the room - we all remember poor old Theresa May in 2017 - her speech interrupted first by a merry prankster handing her a P45, and then by repeated coughing fits, while the display behind her slowly disintegrated. Nothing so humiliating befell Sir Keir Starmer and his gormless front bench this past weekend in Liverpool. The surrounding news cycle, however, was notably unkind. His *consigliere*, Morgan McSweeney, has been dragged into a political funding scandal, hot on the heels of the resignation of Paul Ovensen for mean text messages about Diane Abbott and the downfall of Angela Rayner over tax-dodging.

As for Starmer himself, on the eve of the conference, Ipsos released a poll which found him to be the least popular prime minister ever (or at least since they started doing approval ratings in the 1970s). Opinion polls must be treated with a little scepticism, but anecdotal evidence seems to confirm the picture (consider only the anti-Starmer chants echoing around football grounds every weekend). Desperate Labour eyes turn to Andy Burnham, mayor of Greater Manchester, as a possible replacement: he is, after all, reasonably popular up there, and Manchester seems to be in pretty good nick. He denies any interest, in the sort of half-smiling way people do, when really they come not to praise Caesar, but to bury him.

The big policy announcements essentially all had to do with immigration - unsurprisingly, since at present the main beneficiary of Labour's malaise is Nigel Farage and his Reform UK outfit. Revived plans for digital ID cards - a hobby-horse of the Labour right going back to Tony Blair - were pitched entirely as a measure against illegal immigration. Shabana Mahmood, elevated to the home office because she is considered a hardliner, proposed various measures to make it more difficult for migrants to retain indefinite leave to remain (IDR), with a battle shaping up between Labour and Reform over this category. (Farage had already trailed simply abolishing it.)

The rhetoric from the top table, meanwhile, targeted Reform relentlessly, repeatedly accusing the party and its surrogates of racism. In his closing speech, Starmer claimed Farage was a "snake-oil merchant" who "doesn't like Britain" - no lies detected - and asserted, to general approval:

If you say or imply that people cannot be English or British because of the colour of their skin, that mixed-heritage families owe you an explanation, that people who have lived here for generations, raised their children here, built lives here ... if you say they should now be deported, then, mark my words, we will fight you

with everything we have, because you are an enemy of national renewal.

Such was the rhetoric that Farage claimed Starmer "directly threatened the safety" of him and his colleagues - the standing orders among the far right since the death of Charlie Kirk being to imitate the sort of intolerable, whiny cry-baby that might have been teleported directly from a student union general meeting in 2015. We look forward to the Reform UK safe spaces policy with great interest.

Calculation

The political rationale here would seem to be related to what the lobby journalists believe is McSweeney's strategy: to set up a straight fight between Starmer and Farage at the next general election. Given such a choice, he supposes, defectors to the Greens, Liberal Democrats and - if it ever gets off the ground - Your Party will come crawling back (and even now, with Reform topping opinion polls, head-to-head questions pitching Starmer against Farage tend to come out in the Labour leader's favour). Promoting chauvinist anti-immigration policies may shore up Labour's vote in some places, but also ensures that everyone is talking about immigration, which will tend to raise the profile of Reform. Meanwhile, Starmer and co can emphasise the ghoulishness of Reform-ism in their public rhetoric.

That said, it is a tricky manoeuvre, as is evidenced by both Starmer's and Mahmood's conference turns. Both denounced the Reform IDR plan as racist; but, if it is racist, it is surely because it is attacking IDR, and so are they. It is the difference between someone who uses a racial slur against a minority and someone who beats them to death in a hate crime. The two cases differ in important respects, to say the least, but they are both cases of racism. Voters with a strong moral objection to immigration fearmongering are directly alienated by the very methods used to lure them back at a later date. It is risky, as Kamala Harris and Hillary Clinton could probably tell you.

The policies, meanwhile, are vulnerable to telling attacks. If IDR is the problem, Reform might well ask, why tinker with it and not get rid of it? ID cards, meanwhile, are bluntly risible as a solution to the problem of migrants illegally taking jobs. These workers are already off the books; how is digitising the books supposed to help? There is definitionally no sanitised, bureaucratic means of suppressing these workers - any effective approach will look rather like the terroristic activities of America's ICE agents, only far worse.

Beyond the immigration talk, anyway, there was little else memorable on display. A motion designating Israel's conduct in Gaza genocidal passed - a symbolic victory, given the way Labour ministers ignore conference decisions, but nonetheless a good thing. Chancellor



They were the days

Rachel Reeves promised a library for every primary school in Britain (and conceded that she could no longer avoid tax rises, which will no doubt be the more well-remembered part of her speech). Some paltry amelioration of the two-child benefit cap was trailed ahead of the budget. An extremely limited return of student grants was mooted, wholly unequal to the looming crisis of higher education.

King of north

Even by the standards of Labour conference, then, this was a peculiarly empty event: little of substance, plenty of pompous speechifying by people who have the general look of having been drastically over-promoted, living in fear of Farage, an ale-sodden demagogue and former spiv.

Can Starmer survive? He is fortunate in that Burnham, the man who right now appears to be his chief rival, is awkwardly ineligible at present for the job, not being an MP (there is some talk of retirements being hurried along, so he can win a seat in the Commons soon). For now, he can focus on building his national profile. He is talking left, at least by post-Corbyn Labour standards, demanding the nationalisation of water and other utilities. He told the *New Statesman* that "we've got to get beyond this

thing of being in hock to the bond markets" - a clear barb against the treasury-brained timidity of Reeves.

His alternative, at this point, thus seems to be a soft-left populism with a distinctly regional accent. I, for one, remember mocking Burnham in 2015 for his talk of "getting out of the Westminster bubble", but fair's fair: he really did it; and sparring with the Tories down south from his Mancunian bully pulpit helped rebuild his reputation in national politics. He is not likely to drop the 'provinces versus the capital' schtick now.

The deputy leadership election is being viewed as a proxy battle between him and Starmer, with Lucy Powell standing in for Burnham (and leading the polls by some distance as I write). If Powell wins, and if Labour suffer too bad a drubbing in the next local elections, and if Burnham procures himself a parliamentary seat, a coup is hardly unlikely. None of these are especially big 'ifs'. Burnham has since made some attempts to quieten down speculation by backing Starmer, but we have a long way to go in this parliament. Time is on his side.

Whether he would have greater popularity in the event is another matter. Having started talking vaguely left, he would surely enjoy the relentless enmity of the papers of the

yellow press and their digital-native successors. (Remember the treatment of Ed Miliband, basically portrayed as if he was Mao disguised as a think-tank analyst.) The difference between a minor embarrassment and a disastrous scandal is largely a matter of will on the part of the media.

Even on the substantive points, one can see hostages to fortune. Defiance towards bond vigilantes is always nice to hear, but it is not really that long since Liz Truss was defenestrated by such people, with the connivance of their allies at the Bank of England. These institutions *really* are powerful, and it will take more than a recitation of the St Crispin's day speech to frighten them. It may well be the case that Reeves is more timid than necessary, and it is certainly true that she has disgracefully taken aim at children and the elderly to make the numbers add up to her satisfaction. But the constraints are real: she is not merely afraid of her own shadow.

The political economy of Britain is extensively financialised. The exchequer ticks over largely on income tax takings from a relatively small layer of upper professionals, whose most important role in the world economy is lubricating global tax evasion. We have little industry, and what there is has been plugged into supply chains dominated by others. We are not even close to self-sufficient in food production. Even patently necessary state actions, like the renationalisation of utilities, are unacceptable to the international markets, since they amount to expropriations and therefore threaten other investments; and, because we are entirely dependent on our specific role in global finance, these investors find it easy to threaten governments into backing down in all but the direst of emergencies.

If Farageism is anything but snake-oil, then it amounts to merely doubling down on this situation. The remaining crown jewels of the post-war boom - crucially the NHS - will be sold off to American insurers and similar parasites. Corporate taxes will bottom out further. This much is obvious, even now that Reform is a little more cautious about putting out its full turbo-Thatcherite programme, in the name of fake populism. If Burnham does not have an answer, however, he is equally peddling snake oil, and 'sensible' politics will remain a matter merely of making the best of managed decline in vassalage to the United States.

On the Marxist left we *do* have an answer, which is disloyalty to the nation-state and *international* action. Britain probably cannot feed itself if cut off from the global market, but *Europe* could. However, most of the far left prefers to behave as if it *was* possible to have socialism - or failing that, 'anti-austerity' or suchlike - in Britain alone. As such, we too are selling snake-oil. At the end of this road, sooner or later, lies the political victory of a Farage-like figure ●

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