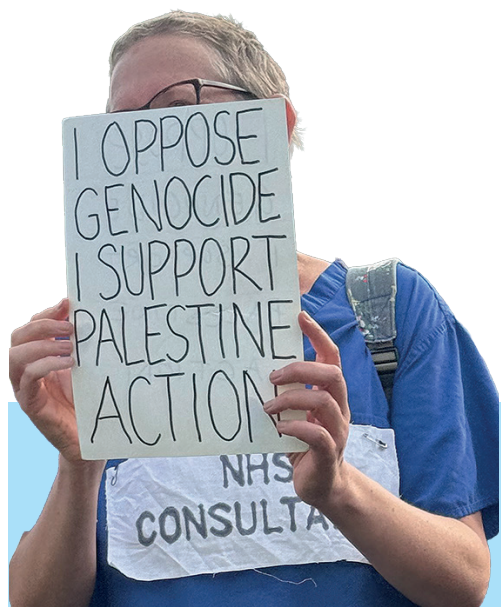


weekly **worker**



**Release all Palestine Action supporters;
end the ban on Palestine Action; uphold
the right to protest against genocide**

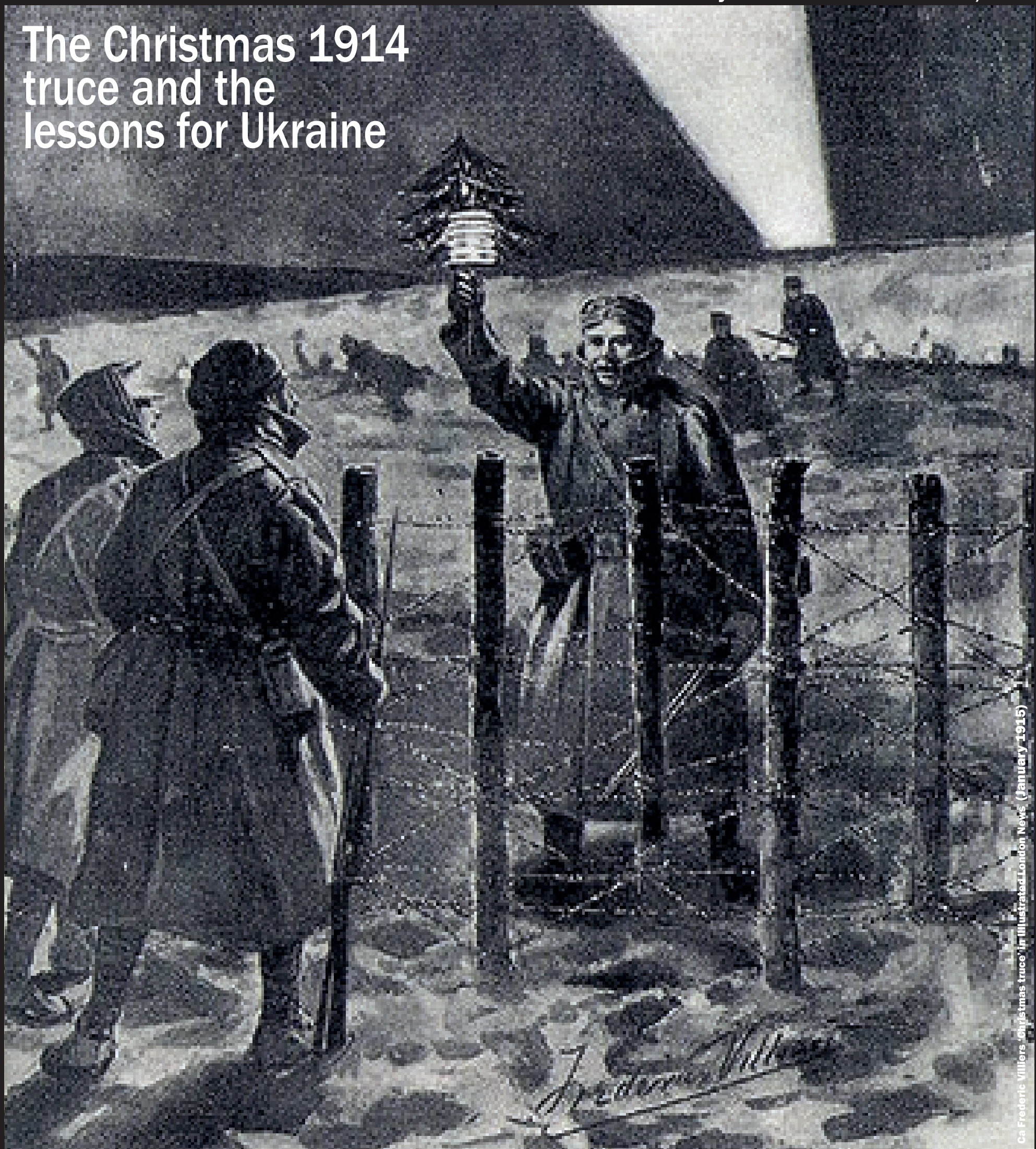
- Letters and debate
- Eurovision boycott
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- SWP 'Delta' crisis

No 1566 December 18 2025

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

The Christmas 1914 truce and the lessons for Ukraine



Ca Frederic Villiers 'Christmas truce' in Illustrated London News (January 1915)

LETTERS



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

Irish prisoners

In the December 14 Online Communist Forum Jack Conrad correctly raised solidarity and concerns for the pro-Palestine prisoners. He highlighted their detention without trial and the subsequent ongoing hunger strikes, which, for some, have now lasted more than 40 days. Legal representatives have said: "There is the real and increasingly likely potential that young British citizens will die in prison, having never even been convicted of an offence."

I think it is important to emphasise that the systematic denial of freedom to activists is not only a historic phenomenon deployed by states and governments. A largely ignored case in point is that just across the Irish Sea, Republican prisoners have been held on remand for years, denied due process and subjected to conditions that clearly constitute political imprisonment. Others continue to live under the most extreme, punitive and politically restrictive conditions outside prison - designed to isolate, silence and criminalise activists.

It is right to stand in solidarity with the pro-Palestine prisoners. But I hope this letter also reminds readers of the largely ignored or silenced situation being endured by Irish comrades - and doubtless many others globally.

Carl Collins
email

YP OMOV

I am writing to respond to Patrick Ramsey's letter last week that claimed that 'one member, one vote' (OMOV) would have positive effects for the organisation of Your Party - particularly as it may encourage more discussion and the inclusion of members who are not able to regularly attend meetings. Unfortunately, as someone who has interacted with online-based digital

democracies before, I can say with some reasoning, that is quite probably not going to be the result.

Online political simulators (known as 'polsims' usually) tend to have significant difficulties when the ideal strategy for winning votes (elections, referendums, etc) often ends up being 'mass DM campaigning', where an individual (or group) message as many members who they expect to vote for them as possible. The people being canvassed are usually quite inactive, not participating within the polsim much at the time of the vote, and generally not being particularly aware of the debate around the vote.

This is known as the 'zombie voter' issue, where the vast majority of voters are essentially being whipped by specific groups or specific individuals. Debates gradually end up being performative, because the only people actively participating within the polsim already have their views and the majority of the voters are not going to actually observe the debates. Cliques of a few people able to contact voters end up being able to control the polsim, even when they are not the majority of active members. The problems with this are quite obviously that the active population declines, because why would someone participate if they cannot challenge the existing 'majority' of voters that don't actually participate? It also means that campaigning is less and less about public debate and increasingly about backroom dealings of groupchats and cliques.

This applies just as much to a 'digital democracy' political party as it does to internet polsims. It applies *more* actually, because the ways of solving these problems that polsims have implemented are not applicable to a political party. There is not really going to be any way of counteracting the inevitable culture of campaigning that is going to be built around email lists, WhatsApp chats, discord servers and possibly social media followers. I, of course, cannot condemn those groups

within Your Party that apply these campaigning strategies, and I recommend the socialist groups within Your Party to utilise these tactics for the purpose of victory, because whichever groups utilise these tactics are *going* to control Your Party.

The idea of packing a meeting to win a vote will seem much preferable after some time of this, I suspect: at least 'meeting packers' have to observe a debate and may have a chance to speak their own views. Perhaps, after going to a meeting to 'pack' it for one side, they realise the other side is actually correct. For the OMOV voter, however, they never really observe the debate, except perhaps a bit from the opinion of whichever group has them within their email list or group chat. It's a great win for the representation of those who tend to have difficulty attending meetings regularly: they get to vote how some group tells them, while still not actually participating within any kind of debate, where they can observe a real explanation of the issues.

Really, we should be focussing on how to ensure a meeting is accessible - eg, ensuring all meetings are hybrid, and encouraging people to participate - rather than establishing a system which enables those with the infrastructure (email lists, group chats, group members, social media followers) to have much more of a say than active members.

Each amendment during the YP founding conference usually got about 10,000 votes total (some less than that, although usually not that much less). There were about 2,000 people within the conference hall and maybe 2,000 people were watching the YouTube stream. Quite possibly the majority of voters didn't even observe the very limited debates that did occur (I have already noted some of the tactics and strategies occurring during the founding conference).

To improve debate and discussion within Your Party, to improve genuine representation, we should establish a system of delegates voting after genuine debates within branches and at conference. OMOV voting won't produce anything more representative, except for 'representing' those that are able to utilise the tactics I have described.

Dovah

Oxfordshire

SUP meets

The Socialist Unity Platform met on Saturday December 13 to discuss if and how it should continue, seeing as the group very much came together to jointly fight for a set of democratic demands to the four founding documents 'discussed' at the launch conference of Your Party (I use the term 'discussed' very lightly).

It was perhaps no surprise that all of the 20 representatives from local YP branches and national organisations present argued that the SUP *should* continue, although, unlike in previous meetings, Counterfire and the Socialist Workers Party were not present. The Socialist Party in England and Wales has never participated.

We discussed the fact that many of the SUP's minor demands had actually been implemented by HQ *before* conference, showing that the 'Sheffield Demands' have had a real impact: these include the fact that there is no longer a 'confidentiality' rule in the constitution; that it is up to branches to decide how they want to organise and if they want

to establish 'local assemblies'; and that all those living in Britain can now become members (not just those with residency rights). On the other hand, the expulsions of members of the SWP on the eve of conference and the stitch-ups and bureaucratic control of conference itself means that the left has its work cut out to organise within YP. A campaign to overturn expulsions and fight for real dual membership is an obvious area where the left could and should work together.

Collective leadership was, of course, the major win for the left and we have to work hard to make sure that the central executive committee (CEC) is as leftwing and politically principled as possible. It makes obvious sense for the left to coordinate on this issue, too. The steering committee of Sheffield YP has prepared a set of 'pledges' based on an extended version of the 'Sheffield Demands' that we hope might form the basis of an active approach towards leftwingers who are standing.

Ideally of course, the left should agree on a common leftwing slate on a solid, principled programme. However, this will not be easy. Not just because of the long-held sectarianism on the left (and its twin - anti-sectarian sectarianism *against* the organised left). There was also what I think was an ill-advised attempt by the Democratic Socialists (DSYP) to come to some sort of agreement with the rightwing Democratic Bloc of Mish Rahman, while ignoring much of the 'organised left'. You see, any member of the SWP, SPEW, Counterfire or any other leftwing organisation which stands for the CEC will "probably be expelled by Karie Murphy", so we shouldn't touch them.

I find that attitude deeply problematic and, as a member of the DSYP, have consistently argued against it. For a start, it is not clever politics - between them, groups like Counterfire, SWP, SPEW and the rest of the organised left have thousands of votes in the CEC elections. It makes obvious sense to include these groups in your negotiations - without sanctifying whatever else they might be up to.

It is also a cowardly attitude in the face of yet another witch-hunt and it stinks of the same attitude that some in and around Momentum took - including, of course, former vice-chair Mish Rahman, who now poses as a 'democrat'. He uncritically implemented the witch-hunting constitution of Jon Lansman and helped to turn what could have been a useful tool for the left into an empty, undemocratic career vessel for little Labour left bureaucrats like himself. He is now trying to do the same in Your Party. We should stay well clear of this outfit, in my view.

However, because Zarah Sultana is friendly with them - no doubt in order to push along her own career prospects - and had been hovering over the negotiations like some kind of benevolent queen, some of the leading lights in the DSYP were dead set on including the Democratic Bloc, when it comes to the CEC elections, and were powering on with 'negotiations' despite a serious level of unease in the wider organisation. Rahman and co have even managed to successfully implement a 'veto' in the discussions, meaning they can stop anything going forward they don't like.

The Democratic Bloc has now walked out. It is unclear if they will continue by themselves, if they can

convince Sultana to support them and/or if some of the other groups involved will follow them. The veto continues in any case!

However, apart from Ken Loach's Platform for a Democratic Party, only insignificant groups are involved in the 'negotiations' - but, of course, they also hold a veto. Rahman had even convinced the other groups that the candidates on this joint slate should be chosen via US-style 'open primaries'. The Democratic Bloc has initially argued for a short two-hour voting window after Zoom hustings, when literally *anybody* could cast a vote for their favourite candidates. The reason is obvious: The long-term careerists in the Democratic Bloc would have done much better at that type of event than any youngster, no matter how passionate, standing for the DSYP. Mish Rahman, Andrew Hedges and James Giles would, I'm afraid to say, would have wiped the floor with the other candidates. Rahman was by far the best speaker at Zarah Sultana's pre-conference rally. He doesn't mean a word of what he says, of course - his actions on the Labour Party NEC and in Momentum have more than proved that.

The discussion has now moved on to holding 'closed primaries', with only 'members' of those organisations allowed to vote - which replicates the above problems of a 'beauty contest', while opening yet another can of worms: none of these groups have any 'real' members to speak of and will no doubt be arguing over how many of their 'supporters' and 'sign ups' might be allowed to cast a vote.

Another complication is that the CEC election will be held regionally. While we don't know the electoral system to be used yet, and if there might be enforced quotas, one clash is already looking very likely: Both Rahman and the Socialist Party's Dave Nellist live in the West Midlands. It would have been an utter travesty if the DSYP had ended up having to call for a vote in favour of Rahman, because he won a 'primary'. Or, almost worse, if they now stand a DSYP no-name against Nellist, splitting the left vote.

There will likely be other clashes - especially if DSYP insists on continuing to ignore the "transphobic" Counterfire, which is supporting a number of good candidates, including Salma Yaqoob, Michael Lavalette and Andrew Feinstein. In Liverpool, we know Audrey White is keen on standing, and there will be other supportable candidates. It would be madness to continue organising 'primaries' as if none of that was happening - for a start, it would cost a lot of time and effort, for very little results. The hole that the DSYP comrades are digging themselves into is getting deeper and deeper.

Hopefully, the Socialist Unity Platform can play a useful role in cutting through this nonsense and instead aid negotiations with the different left groups.

Tina Becker

Sheffield YP

YP nationalism

Your Party didn't implode at the Liverpool conference, but the way things are going it might not survive much beyond the YP Scotland conference in Dundee on the weekend of February 7-8 2026.

This date has just been announced after the typical delays by YP HQ that appear like ineptitude, but are actually bureaucratic control methods. Just this ridiculous

Fighting fund

Next issue: January 8

You are reading the last *Weekly Worker* edition of 2025 - there will, of course, be no issue on either Thursday December 25 or Thursday January 1!

But we intend to continue in 2026 the essential task that this publication is committed to - campaigning for a single, principled, democratic-centralist party, uniting all revolutionary Marxists in Britain and committed to a global socialist revolution.

And, of course, in order to do that, we rely on the support - both political and financial - of our readers. When it comes to finance, we need to raise the full £2,750 fighting fund target each and every month. Well, as regular readers will know, we were no less than £500 short in November, so now we need to make up for that big-time in the final month of the year!

Well, this last week has been OK, with £579 coming our way. Thanks go to comrades MM and AG for their brilliant £100

donations, as well as PB (£80), MM (£75), TR (£40), OG (£39 in two instalments!), TW (£25), CC, JL and AM (£10 each). All those donations came via standing order or bank transfer, while another eight comrades clicked on that PayPal button. Thanks also to PM (£50), VS (£7), plus AR, SO, AH, RD, GP and RD (£5 each), and AH (£3). Finally, comrade Hassan handed his usual fiver to one of our team, meaning that our running total now stands at £1,591.

So now we have, as I write, exactly two weeks left to not only raise the £1,200 we still need for December, but also to make up for November's shortfall. Please play your part in making sure we do both. We need your help! ●

Robbie Rix

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

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example speaks volumes - after three missed deadlines went by for HQ to send out the conference info to members in Scotland, the organising committee had to threaten on December 15 that they would send out a press release and social media posts at 2pm, whether the mailout happened or not. Miraculously the mailout to members was sent at 1.50pm!

Understandably this is exactly the type of behaviour that is riling comrades, but in Scotland it also leads further towards the call for complete autonomy for the party north of the border. So YP HQ are shooting themselves in both feet (and sawing a leg off into the bargain) because such frustration is leading to the possibility of UDI being voted for at conference as the means to overcome all such problems - even the solution to getting a better name!

The wrangling will continue over what the conference agenda will be and there's even been talk of how to resist if HQ threatens not to finance the conference. Given what we saw at Liverpool, nothing can be discounted from HQ shenanigans.

But what has surprised me is the strength of argument towards UDI from within the ranks of the Democratic Socialists of Your Party Scotland. It really is being proposed as a quick fix in so many ways - such as the means to escape the HQ grip and concentrate instead on 'external struggles' around community building and election campaigning.

Such election campaigning is also being touted in DSYP Scotland as more than likely supporting independence, "given the strong class alignment on the issue". I'm trying my best to kick back against all this disastrous nationalism and have found some opposition to UDI. It's vital that such arguments are taken on, because otherwise implosion of the whole project could prove inevitable.

Tam Dean Burn
Glasgow

YP drift

So Jamie Driscoll will now be joining the Green Party. A canny operator, charming individual, smart quite probably, but self-admittedly not a socialist: he's a liberal, wanting to 'do good', and very PC.

Team Corbyn clearly saw in him a potential leading light. This says much about Your Party and its leadership cabal - with Ayoub Khan MP being a bit shaky on private schools having to pay VAT, and others have been little better. Nice people, maybe, but class fighters? YP seems keen to distance itself from socialist working class politics more generally. Corbyn has to be made to say 'socialism' through gritted teeth and a minority actively dislike working class people. It has the feel of the Lib Dems in exile.

The criticism of independent YP MPs is framed as hostility on the basis of ethnicity or hostility to social conservatism. Criticising the MPs on the basis of a complete lack of class politics doesn't seem to register. Adding to the general rightward drift, left champions/enablers, such as Novara Media, Counterfire and the SWP all have to answer about why they are privileging anti-socialist actors.

We must insist therefore on democratic accountability, a culture of sharp, open exchange and working class political independence - all essential if Your Party is not to go the way of previous attempts at unity on

the left. Everything remains to be played for - for now.

Paul Cooper
email

Comrade Delta

I have just read on David Renton's substack a quite stunning report on proposed seismic changes to the Socialist Workers Party's central committee via its latest *Pre-Conference Bulletin* (No3). Renton is an ex-member of the SWP, who left over the infamous 'Comrade Delta' affair in 2013, and is now a leading activist in Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century.

The SWP proposes that long-standing, senior members Alex Callinicos, Weyman Bennett, Mark Thomas and Charlie Kimber, having 'resigned' from the CC, be replaced by younger activists. This was not mentioned in bulletins 1 and 2 and is something of a bolt from the blue. The reason cited in PCB3 was their direct involvement in the 2013 'Comrade Delta' affair and its aftermath. It should be noted in passing that a retained CC member, Julie Sherry, wrote defences of the party in *The Guardian* 'Opinion' in 2013, so she obviously escaped the 'guillotine'.

This is very much a palace coup, with the younger 'new bloods' like Sophia Beach, Lewis Nielsen and Tomas Tengely-Evans turfing out the old guard. It seems the final direct link with SWP founders Tony Cliff and Duncan Hallas has been broken. Although I do note that a member of the influential Cox family is on the proposed CC. I say 'proposed' knowing that this CC slate will be voted through (they always are in the SWP's curious version of internal 'democracy').

I am guessing that the outgoing comrades didn't have the heart for a fight. Factional struggle sessions may be fun in your 30s and 40s - less so in your 60s and 70s (combined with rumoured health issues with some of those older comrades - we obviously wish them well with that, regardless of politics). I would guess that the old guard will not be 'un-personed' and their publications plus speaking at SWP events will not be curtailed.

So what prompted this? The recent expulsions from Your Party has shaken the SWP to the core and was a bolt from the blue for them. They were pinning all their hopes on their recent 180° pivot towards electoralism (after ignoring elections since the Respect debacle) and getting heavily involved in YP. The faction around Karie Murphy (who some wag online has nicknamed "the Murphia") obviously had other ideas and expelled SWP national organiser Lewis Nielsen while he was on his way up to Liverpool by train. Nielsen has always used the 'Stand Up To Racism activist' cover title while on YP duties, but dropped that pretence after the expulsions and referred to himself under his true SWP title.

The still shocking 'Comrade Delta' affair was repeatedly used heavily by the Murphy faction as justification, and even the influential Novara Media brought it up in an interview with Nielsen. He defensively replied: "That's not the story ... the 800,000 initial sign-ups to YP is the story." Owen Jones in a *Guardian* piece also mentioned the scandal. The SWP are obviously close to Zarah Sultana, but have resisted too openly attacking Jeremy Corbyn and reserved their fire for Karie Murphy and Jeremy's wife, Laura Alvarez.

The inability to 'shake' Delta

has obviously concentrated young minds. There may be a plan by the young guard to reunite with RS21 and even Counterfire and this was the price: indeed RS21 leading activist David Renton has titled his substack article 'Is it time to forgive the SWP?'

What is certain is that the usually boring SWP conference in January 2026 will not be this time. Interesting times on the left.

Paul O'Keeffe
email

Rival strikes

The last months of 2025 in Italy have been marked by both industrial militancy and trade union disunity. There were two general strikes - one on November 28 and another on December 12. Both were protests against the fourth budget of Giorgia Meloni's government, which has now been in office for over three years.

The demands raised by the trade union leaders on each occasion were broadly similar: eg, the need to increase wages, which have fallen by 8.8% in real terms over the last four years; a more progressive taxation system; and a reduction rather than increase in the retirement age. Both sets of union leaders also attacked the increased austerity needed to reduce Italy's budget deficit below the 3% limit imposed by the EU's so-called 'growth and stability pact' - a pact that was considerably tightened up after the brief Keynesian breathing space that had resulted from the major economic crisis caused by the Covid pandemic of 2020-21.

Moreover, in both instances the union leaders made it clear that the Italian government was seeking to escape from the EU's infraction procedure - not just to balance the books in a rigorously neoliberal manner, but also (and primarily) in order to access the EU's new fund that grants loans to member countries for military expenditure. In other words, Italy is now experiencing deliberate cuts in health, education and welfare in order to participate in the EU's re-armament drive - what Ursula von der Leyen's programmatic document originally called 'Rearm Europe', before she realised this was too blatant an expression of bellicose intent, and invented various euphemisms.

It should be stressed that the union leaders involved in the strike have shown a courage that the centre-left political leaders - especially those of the Partito Democratico - completely lack, in making no bones about the shift to a permanent arms economy. Of course, Elly Schlein and most prominent figures in the PD-backed trade union complains about cuts in expenditure on Italy's health service and so forth, but, given their pro-Ukraine and pro-Nato position, they either refuse to make any link with rearmament or often resort to counterposing the creation of a hypothetical European army to each EU state building up its own armed forces.

Having explained what was positive about both general strikes, I cannot avoid pointing out that it was utterly ridiculous to have two *rival* strikes - the first called by the Unione Sindacale di Base (USB) and other small unions of a broadly anarcho-sindicalist complexion, and the second called by the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL), Italy's largest trade union confederation - the one that used to be close to the Communist Party and still

represents the mainstream trade union left.

I might add that I have some reservations about the USB's tactics, which hardly encourage sympathy from wider layers. They seem to think that road blocks are a wonderful thing in themselves, rather than a way of persuading waverers to join a strike rather than scab. In Livorno, their posters informed supporters where the 6am roadblock would take place, and added that further ones would be organised by mobile phone. This created massive traffic jams.

In Italy, transport workers are legally obliged to run services during certain limited periods of the day. I went into Livorno on a legally guaranteed bus service that left the village where I live at 8am. By 8.20, we approached the edge of Livorno rather belatedly because of a USB-created traffic jam and, instead of continuing to the terminus, or even the city centre, where the vast majority of passengers would get off anyway, the USB driver, who was continually talking to his comrades on his mobile phone, suddenly announced that the strike had started and told us all to get off the bus. Whilst I can still walk a fair distance to get to the city centre to buy newspapers, and could see the funny side of it, I am not sure that other passengers felt the same.

Incidentally, as an illustration of the absurdity of two rival strikes, I will point out that the same bus service ran all day on December 12 during the CGIL strike - I soon realised that this was because the drivers were all in the USB, but I suspect that many less political people assumed they were just scabbing.

Toby Abse

Italy

Salisbury con

We have recently had the report into the death of Dawn Sturgess, who died on July 8 2018 from chemical poisoning - probably related to

the earlier 'Salisbury incident' of March 4 that year. Yet another excuse for a slew of Russophobic comments and narratives and yet more sanctions imposed. (You might have thought that, nearly four years after February 2022, the UK state would have already used all possible sanctions - if, of course, it was serious.)

Let us examine just some of the 'facts', which make no real sense in the context of the official explanation of what happened in Salisbury.

The Novichok nerve agent is meant to be so deadly that a small spot on the skin can kill within seconds and a perfume bottle of the stuff could potentially kill thousands. Yet it is claimed it was sprayed liberally all over Skripal's door handles in the morning. Both Sergei Skripal and his daughter then managed to cover themselves in it through their normal morning routines and spread it all over the house. At midday, they left the house, had lunch at a restaurant in town, and only in the afternoon did they become ill. I don't doubt that both Skripals and the attending police officer were made seriously ill, but note that not only did they not die, but neither did hundreds or thousands of others.

So, was this *really* Novichok? Was it a seriously defective batch of Novichok, which had deteriorated so badly that it was essentially ineffective? Would a state intent on using Novichok to assassinate a top target *really* not have checked the chemical first?

Coincidentally (or not), the one place on Earth known for certain to have real Novichok is the top-secret chemical and biological warfare establishment at Porton Down, just eight miles from Salisbury. Who better to manufacture and calibrate a compound which could make people genuinely unwell (ideally, not fatally)?

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Online Communist Forum



Sunday January 4 5pm
The 1914 Christmas truce and Ukraine:
political report from the CPGB's
Provisional Central Committee and
discussion

Use this link to register:
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AUSTRALIA

Heroes amidst the horror

Shock and trauma in the Jewish community is real and will be lasting. However, Zionists are cynically attempting to use the Bondi massacre to discredit the mass pro-Palestine movement. **Marcus Strom** reports from Sydney

While the surviving victims of the December 14 anti-Semitic massacre at Sydney's Bondi beach were still in hospital undergoing treatment, Australia's Zionists were already out of the blocks, seeking to pin the blame for the horrific event on the Palestine solidarity movement.

Spokesperson after spokesperson stood up to blame the movement against genocide for the acts of terrorism and abhorrent slaughter we saw on the first night of Hanukkah. The president of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies, David Ossip, said: "For two years people have paraded our streets and universities calling for the intifada to be globalised - a catchphrase that means 'Kill Jews wherever you find them'. Last night, the intifada was globalised and came to Bondi." Ossip has clearly graduated from the Zionist school of the big lie. Anyone with half an education knows 'intifada' means 'uprising' or 'rebellion' - in this case, against Israeli colonial oppression and occupation.

Australia's 'special envoy to combat anti-Semitism', Jillian Segal, issued just her third statement since being appointed by the Labor government 18 months ago. Segal - a Zionist with impeccable credentials and ties to the far-right lobby group, Advance Australia - has said that the massacre was the inevitable result of "the hatred" on display at the Palestine solidarity demonstrations: "We ... watched a march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge waving terrorist flags and glorifying extremist leaders. Now death has reached Bondi Beach."

This is an explicit attempt to directly link people peacefully protesting against genocide to an anti-Semitic bloodbath committed by two people at Bondi. The Palestinian solidarity march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge on August 3 was one of the largest protests in Australian history. It is reprehensible to seek to smear the more than 200,000 people who took to the streets - horrified at both the ongoing slaughter in Gaza and attempts by the Australian and NSW Labor governments to ban the 'March for Humanity'. Thousands of those protesting were Jewish, this author included - and now deeply shaken by the Bondi massacre.

Not linked

It is beyond revolting to use a massacre to further seek to cover up a genocide in Palestine, yet this is where the Zionist movement has landed. Benjamin Netanyahu has directly linked the Australian recognition of Palestinian statehood to it, saying the decision, taken in September in coordination with Britain and Canada, "pours fuel on the anti-Semitic fire ... emboldens those who menace Australian Jews and encourages the Jew hatred now stalking your streets".

Zionists are now seeking to further weaponise anti-Semitism to accelerate the assault on civil liberties and the Palestinian protest movement in defence of a murderous Israeli regime. They are morally and factually incapable of defending the actions of Israel and so seek to smear the entire solidarity movement with acts that have nothing to do with us. Equating the two murderous anti-Semites to a mass movement is no better than equating the murderous and genocidal acts of Israel with all Jews.

The response of prime minister Anthony Albanese is coming under direct fire from the Zionists, who now see him as an easy target. The



Caused by Israeli genocide, not mass movement against genocide

government has moved quickly to restrict gun ownership, but the rightwing press has called gun law reform a 'distraction'.

Former Liberal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg has called on Albanese to follow moves in Britain to criminalise chants on Palestine demonstrations referring to the intifada. The conservative Liberal Party, which has been wallowing in the polls since the May election, sees an opportunity to use this tragedy to claw back support by seeking to label Albanese as 'soft on anti-Semitism' - code for not supporting Israel vigorously enough.

This is rubbish, of course. Albanese has been in lockstep with most imperialist powers on the question of Israel, subordinating Australian foreign policy to the dictates of global empire. Australia has never acknowledged a genocide, while Albanese has continued to allow the two-way arms trade with Israel. No sanctions have been contemplated and Australian firms have continued to supply parts to the F-35 programme which arms the Israeli airforce. Defence minister Pat Conroy has bragged that Australia continues to import Israeli weaponry, saying: "We make no apology for getting the best possible equipment for the Australian Defence Force."

Meanwhile, Segal is using the moment to push her 'Plan to Combat anti-Semitism' - largely seen as an attempt to muzzle any criticism of Israel. Her recommendations include giving herself power to monitor the media and propose cutting off funding from universities and arts organisations that are allegedly "facilitating anti-Semitism".

On the rise

Let's be clear: of course, anti-Semitic incidents have been on the rise in Australia. That must be combatted by the workers' movement and, yes, people with backward, racist ideas

about Jews must be challenged and educated. I was at a union conference last week where some delegates questioned whether anti-Semitism was really on the increase. A representative of the (anti-Zionist) Jewish Council of Australia and myself said that of course it is.

Given that Israel and Zionism both contend that they speak for all Jews, some people not only take them at their word, but project their view of Israel onto all Jews - a reactionary and bigoted error. This is made more likely, given the absence of any coherent, mass socialist and democratic alternative to the global system of imperialism, for which Zionism is a useful tool.

Iranian diversion

Even with a rise in incidents, the NSW police has confirmed that some acts initially reported as anti-Semitic were not so. And, in a strange move, the Australian government expelled the Iranian ambassador, linking the Islamic Republic to some of the criminal acts aimed at Jewish businesses and places of worship. But it is not claiming such a link for Bondi. The father-and-son pair alleged to have committed the massacre have been linked to Salafi Sunni extremists, and are said to be inspired by the Islamic State movement, which is hostile to Iran.

Two things: first, the Palestine solidarity movement has been trenchant from the start that anti-Semitism will not be tolerated. Yes, chants of "Fuck the Jews" were heard at the first demonstration on October 9 2023, but the Palestine Action Group quickly clamped down and said that any such anti-Semitic sentiment was incompatible with being on its demonstrations.

Second, it is clear that Zionists and Israel want to equate all Jewish identity with support for Israel. This is a driving force in anti-Semitic

sentiment. A brutal fact is that Zionism relies on anti-Semitism as a motivating factor. A leading figure of Jews Against the Occupation in Sydney, Michelle Berkon, was forcibly removed by police from a mourning event at Bondi this week because she was wearing a Palestinian keffiyeh. She rightly made the point that Israeli flags were being flown and that all Jews should be able to mourn the deaths of so many people. Zionists clearly consider her to be the 'wrong type of Jew'.

Anti-Semitism, of course, is a real and revolting aspect of modernism with roots going back to feudal Christian Europe. Jews have long been a scapegoat for the reactionary right - from Russian pogroms in the 19th century to the holocaust of the 20th. But we now live in a bizarre world, where mainstream Zionist groups defended anti-Semitic loons like Elon Musk when he delivered his Nazi-like salute during the Trump campaign last year. Zionism certainly did not create anti-Semitism, but is a response to it. It is a real fact of capitalist society, and the left and workers' movement must not resile from combatting it.

Courage

As acts of respect and mourning, planned Palestine protests this week have been postponed. I'm not sure this is the right move, as it implies that pro-Palestine protests are indeed anti-Jewish, which they are not. They could have been transformed into mourning events. Meanwhile, the NSW Labor Friends of Palestine WhatsApp group has put a pause on discussion - an act that shows a fear of what might be said.

Moments of tremendous courage amidst the horror ought to be celebrated. Five people attempted to stop the shooters. Three of them paid with their lives. Reuven Morrison, who hurled a brick at the older assailant, was shot and unfortunately

died. A couple had tried to disarm the shooters as they left their car, which had an Islamic State flag on it. They too were shot - the first victims.

Ahmed al-Ahmed, a Syrian migrant and shopkeeper who arrived in Australia in 2006, tackled one of the shooters, disarming him - an act seen in footage around the world. He was later shot and is now recovering in hospital. A hero. Another man, on a refugee visa, who has not been named, risked his life by kicking a gun away from the wounded shooter, who had been shot by police. Both he and al-Ahmed are Muslims - an inconvenient fact for some.

Squandered

The massive Sydney demonstration of August now seems a long time ago - the moment to reorganise the Palestinian movement as a national democratic united organisation² was squandered. Now social media will no doubt act as an accelerant to conspiracy theories on all sides. Iran as the motivator? A Mossad-organised 'false flag'? Such idiotic ideas are already being spread by demented keyboard warriors.

The Palestine Action Group in Sydney has issued an excellent statement, which in part says:

We are shocked and absolutely horrified by the terrorist attack at Bondi beach, which targeted the Jewish community on the first day of Hanukkah ... No-one - anywhere in Sydney or anywhere in the world - should have to live in fear of terrorism or racist hate.

We reiterate our complete condemnation of anti-Semitism and all other forms of racism. For years, we have stood and marched in our hundreds of thousands, side by side with members of the Jewish community, to fight for a world free of racist violence and oppression. From Sydney to Gaza, anti-Semitism has never had any place in our movement, nor in the world we want to live in.

On campuses and in general society, attempts to silence the pro-Palestine movement will no doubt increase and must be resisted. The NSW government has recalled parliament in order to pass laws giving police powers to ban demonstrations during times of terrorist incidents. A regressive move.

We can oppose individual acts of terror and oppose the state terrorism of Israel at the same time. The attack on Bondi seems all the more challenging to those in Australia, as it destroyed a social event at an iconic location. The shock and trauma of this will be real and lasting in the Jewish community and the city of Sydney, where such events are rare.

Yet the daily terror inflicted by Israel on the Palestinian people are just as horrific - but hidden behind a screen of banal industrial normality. Since the 'ceasefire' started on October 10, nearly 400 Palestinians have been killed by Israel. But simple attempts at 'whataboutism' are pointless. It is incumbent upon the socialist and democratic left to organise, so that our movement becomes a real physical force, able to overcome a state of affairs where despair still rules and hope is diminished ●

Marcus Strom is editor of **Labor Tribune** - labortribune.net.au

Notes

1. www.ascca.gov.au/news/article/special-envoys-plan-combat-antisemitism.
2. See labortribune.net.au/build-a-mass-democratic-solidarity-movement-for-palestine.

PROTEST

Release the hunger strikers

Palestine Action has been proscribed as a terrorist organisation. Now it is illegal to even chant ‘From the river to the sea’ or call for a ‘global intifada’. Government ministers, says **Yassamine Mather**, are determined to criminalise the entire solidarity movement

Six of the original eight remand prisoners are still on a coordinated hunger strike, some are already in a life-threatening condition. They are protesting against being held without trial and against the government’s proscription of Palestine Action, famous, not least for its ‘red paint’ protest actions. In total there are now 33 pro-Palestine protesters on remand.

All this has triggered a national debate on the misuse of ‘terrorism’ laws, the right to protest and the UK’s arms trade with Israel. And, of course, the health of the hunger strikers is deteriorating rapidly, with doctors warning of an imminent risk of death.

The original eight are:

■ Kamran Ahmed (HMP Pentonville, approximately six weeks): he has lost over 10kg, has dangerously high ketone levels and mouth ulcerations.

■ Amu Gib (HMP Bronzefield, approximately five weeks): lost over 10kg, has severe exhaustion and muscle twitches.

■ Qesser Zuhrah (HMP Bronzefield, approximately five weeks): has lost considerable weight, has difficulty walking and her pulse is never below 100bpm. She collapsed in her cell and the authorities refused to admit an ambulance into the prison. Zarah Sultana has been outside the prison since Wednesday.

■ Jon Cink (HMP Bronzefield, approximately five weeks): he barely sleeps, has lost 10kg, has deteriorating vision and life-threatening ketone levels. He decided to begin taking food on December 17.

■ Heba Muraisi (HMP New Hall, approximately five weeks): he is struggling to stay alive after catching a cold.

■ Teuta ‘T’ Hoxha (approximately four weeks).

■ Lewie Chiaramello (approximately two weeks).

■ Muhammad Umer Khalid (after a week without food, he ended his hunger strike on December 17).

Five hunger strikers have been hospitalised and Dr James Smith, an NHS emergency doctor in contact with the families, warns that after six to eight weeks on hunger strike, there is “a very, very high risk of death”. Apart from the symptoms listed above, other symptoms include dizziness, chest tightness, memory loss and, obviously, an inability to walk normally.¹

Let us not forget that these prisoners have been locked up for nearly a year and have never been convicted of any crime. Their trial dates are still many months away. Their demands include:

■ Immediate bail.

■ The right to a fair trial.

■ The de-proscription of Palestine Action (outlawed as a terrorist group in July 2025).

■ The closure of all Elbit Systems sites in the UK (more on this below).

■ An end to prison censorship (withholding of letters, phone calls, etc).

Proscription

On July 5 2025, the UK government proscribed Palestine Action under the Terrorism Act 2000, even though it has never advocated violence against anyone. But this proscription makes membership or support for the group a criminal offence punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

The proscription is under historic judicial review in the high court.



Thousands of arrests, thousands of court cases

Lawyers argue it unlawfully violates the rights to freedom of expression and assembly (ECHR Articles 10 and 11) and over 2,000 people have reportedly been arrested simply for expressing support for Palestine Action since the ban.

The insistence of the government and the Crown Prosecution Service that the proscription is both ‘lawful’ and ‘necessary’ is apparently based on “disturbing information” about the group’s ‘criminal’ campaign. But even organisations like Amnesty International have condemned the “misuse of terrorism powers” and “excessively long periods of pre-trial detention”. Lawyers for the prisoners have warned justice secretary David Lammy that there is a “real and increasingly likely potential that young British citizens will die in prison, having never even been convicted of an offence”.²

The hunger strikers were all arrested for protests that targeted Israel’s suppliers of arms and weaponry. These include the ‘Filton 24’, four of whom took part in a protest action in August 2024 against an Elbit Systems facility in Filton, Bristol, where activists allegedly sprayed red paint and caused other damage. Other were arrested for the June 2025 protest at the RAF Brize Norton base in Oxfordshire, where they allegedly caused severe damage to military aircraft destined for Israel.

The reason why Elbit systems was targeted and is mentioned in the prisoners demands is very clear: it is Israel’s largest privately owned arms manufacturer and a central component of the country’s military-industrial complex. Its ties to the Israeli state are extensive and the two cooperate on a number of levels.

The company is a key supplier to the Israel Defence Forces, covering land, air, naval, cyber and intelligence

technologies. Its products are designed and upgraded in close cooperation with the IDF and often tested by real combat use. The company is eager to promote this operational experience as a selling point in global markets.

Elbit also plays a major role in Israel’s security infrastructure, including surveillance systems and barrier technologies used around Gaza and across the West Bank. The bulk of its research and development takes place inside Israel itself. Its work on drones, electronic warfare, C4I systems and armoured platforms underpins Israel’s military action, which has seen the slaughter of tens of thousands.

Elbit’s expansion

The Zionist regime’s close political and military relationships with states such as the UK, the US and Australia facilitates Elbit’s expansion abroad. The company typically enters foreign markets through buying or partnering with domestic firms, as in the UK case of Instro Precision, in what are known as offset arrangements. International subsidiaries promise jobs, technology transfer and local investment, making arms deals more acceptable to governments and parliament.

These close links to Israel at a time of genocide are precisely why Elbit’s UK facilities have become targets of sustained protest, particularly by a number of Palestine campaigns and the movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS). Introducing and exporting weapons from the UK helps rebrand or sanitise this technology, separating it from the realities of Israeli military practices. For Palestine Action, disruption of Elbit’s UK operations is also one way of putting pressure on the British state to bring a halt to military cooperation with Israel.

The situation in Israel and Palestine has, of course, drawn significant domestic and international attention. Over the last few months anti-war activists who support the prisoners have held weekly demonstrations and protests in London and other major cities. In late November, the campaign group, Defend Our Juries, organised demonstrations in 10 locations, including Bristol, Manchester and Birmingham. Over the last few months, those arrested for supporting Palestine Action include an 83-year-old in Liverpool and a very elderly priest, Reverend Sue Parfitt, who was arrested in Parliament Square on July 5 2025. In fact 97 people in their 70s were arrested at the Parliament Square protest on August 9, as well as 15 octogenarians at the same demonstration. All this in the name of ‘national security’.

Your Party MPs Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana, as well as Green Party deputy leader Mothin Ali, have visited the hunger strikers. According to *The Guardian*, more than 50 MPs and peers have written to justice secretary David Lammy urging him to meet with MPs representing the hunger strikers and their loved ones, or their lawyers, “and act to prevent a catastrophe”.³

Last week, speaker Lindsay Hoyle told Labour MP John McDonnell, who has written to Lammy about the hunger strikers, that it was “totally unacceptable” for ministers to fail to respond to correspondence. Yet Lammy refuses to address the issue, and most of the British media remain silent on the subject.

When it comes to international solidarity, Palestinian prisoners who were recently released by Israel have sent messages of support, calling the hunger strikers “brothers and

comrades”. Activist Jakhi McCray in Brooklyn is undertaking a solidarity fast, while recently freed Lebanese militant Georges Abdallah has expressed support. Supporters of Palestine Action have organised protests outside UK diplomatic offices in various countries, holding demonstrations at British embassies and consulates to draw international attention to the hunger strike. And now 147 leading medical professionals have signed a letter describing the hunger strikes as causing an “imminent risk to their health and life” and a “medical emergency”.

Historic parallels

The current Palestine Action hunger strike has drawn parallels to the 1981 H-Block hunger strike by Irish Republican prisoners, which represents “the largest coordinated prison hunger strike in UK history”.⁴ The 1981 action saw Irish republican prisoners demanding recognition from Britain as political prisoners.

Today, two current hunger strikers are, as I write, on day 45 - one day less than Martin Hurson lasted before becoming the sixth of 10 IRA hunger strikers to die in 1982. Both hunger strikes resulted in government silence and inaction - Thatcher’s government allowed 10 men to die, before quietly conceding to many of their demands. But, of course, the denial of political status to delegitimise a movement is not new. In the 1970s, the British government’s policy was explicitly described as a long-term strategy of “criminalisation” to alter public perception of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Today, human rights organisations like Liberty warn that the “extremely broad” UK definition of ‘terrorism’ risks being used disproportionately against protestors, creating uncertainty about what constitutes an offence. In view of what is now happening, that is a gross understatement.

According to *The Guardian*, “Palestine Action became the first direct-action protest group to be banned under the Terrorism Act”, placing it in the same category as Islamic State, al-Qaeda and the far-right group, National Action.⁵

Camille Marquis Bissonnette notes that “counterterror legislation has shown, since September 2001, to be a slippery tool when it comes to human rights protection”. The latest act provides “full discretion to states in their definition and application” of what constitutes ‘terrorism’.

This proscription clearly illustrates the use of ‘counter-terrorism’ legislation to stifle specific viewpoints on Palestine - especially given the significant divide between public opinion and the government’s stance. The use of the Terrorism Act establishes a model for targeting various forms of political dissent under the guise of ‘security’ during times of crisis ●

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TRIAL

Opposing genocide is no crime

Britain supports Israeli genocide in Gaza in deeds, if not in words. Disagreeing with that complicity risks arrest under counter-terrorism laws and a draconian prison sentence, writes **Tony Greenstein**

On January 5 I will go on trial at Kingston crown court, charged with an offence under section 12 of the Terrorism Act 2000. The maximum penalty, if found guilty, is 14 years in gaol.

You might be forgiven for thinking that my alleged offence was preparing a bomb, which I intended to deposit outside the Israeli embassy, an Elbit arms factory or war criminal Keir Starmer's house. In fact I was arrested on December 20 2023 by counter-terrorism police in a dawn raid under the Terrorism Act 2000. My 'crime' was posting a tweet, one month previously, saying that I supported the Palestinian resistance against the Israel Defence Forces.

The anti-terrorism police today is reminiscent of George Orwell's 1984, when the "Thought Police" (Thinkpol) spent their time hunting down and punishing "thought crime". Britain's equivalent of Thinkpol seized all my electronic devices - computers, mobile phone, external hard drives, etc. When I applied to the courts to recover these items, DC Beckford justified their retention by saying that they provided a "highly relevant insight" into my mind.

The aim of the Thought Police in 1984 was to enforce mental conformity, ensuring that citizens police their own minds. In his 'expert witness statement' in the 'Case for the deproscription of Hamas', Jonathan Cook - a journalist who has worked for *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Times* and *The International Herald Tribune*, amongst other papers, and was a recipient of the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism in 2011, wrote:

Over the past several months, I have been watching with growing professional alarm - and personal trepidation - what I can only describe as a campaign of political intimidation and persecution of a number of journalists in the UK. The journalists who have been targeted share one thing in common: they report and comment on Israel's actions in Gaza from a critical perspective that judges those actions to be genocidal ... They also criticise the British government as being complicit in that genocide.

The investigation by the police of these journalists has been justified under an expansive interpretation of both section 12 of the 2000 Terrorism Act and sections 1 and 2 of the 2006 Terrorism Act. These laws tightly restrict commentary about Hamas and other Palestinian organisations the UK government has proscribed. That proscription applies not only to Hamas's military wing, which is committed to armed resistance against Israeli colonisation, but Hamas's political wing, which is the elected government of Gaza.

I now find myself in a situation where, for the first time in my 36-year professional career, I am no longer sure what by law I can write or say in my capacity as a journalist on an issue of major international importance. I now live with the fear that, by writing critically about events in Gaza, I risk a dawn raid by counter-terrorism police on my home in front of my children, the confiscation of the electronic devices I rely on for my work, and my possible arrest, leading potentially to terrorism charges being laid against me.¹

The aim of the Thought Police in 1984 and that of counter-terror police operations in Britain today is to eliminate any independent thought, dissent or questioning of British foreign policy in Gaza and its complicity in the genocide. The fact that Hamas was freely elected as the government of Gaza in 2006 is irrelevant. By opposing Israel militarily, they have become 'terrorists'.

Initially I was bailed under suspicion of having committed an offence under section 12(1a) of the Terrorism Act, which makes it an offence to express "an opinion or belief that is supportive of a proscribed organisation" (ie, Hamas).²

A year later I was charged under section 12, which makes it an offence to "invite support for a proscribed organisation". It is alleged that, by posting a blog entitled 'Full support for the Gaza ghetto uprising', I was inviting support for Hamas as an organisation.³ This is untrue. I have posted many articles opposing the politics and practices of Hamas. Examples include an article condemning torture by Hamas⁴ or its attacks on NGOs in Gaza.⁵

However, I support resistance to the Zionist occupation, whoever is leading or participating in it. The proscription of Hamas as a "terrorist" organisation, when it has never operated outside Palestine, demonstrates that, contrary to its official position, in practice the British government supports Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Hypocrisy

The justification for the proscription is that "Hamas commits and participates in terrorism. Hamas has used indiscriminate rocket or mortar attacks, and raids against Israeli targets. During the May 2021 conflict, over 4,000 rockets were fired indiscriminately into Israel. Civilians, including two Israeli children, were killed as a result."⁶

Presumably the use of snipers by Israel to deliberately kill children is not terrorism. Over 20,000 children have been killed by Israel since October 7, but what is that compared to two Israeli children? Here the racist hypocrisy of the British government is exposed for what it is.

Hamas rockets are unguided and therefore the killing of Israeli children is not deliberate, whereas Israel has deliberately targeted children, as overseas doctors operating in Gaza during the current genocide have testified.⁷ Why are Palestinian children targeted? Because children are seen as the future of the Palestinian people, avengers of the deaths of their parents and loved ones.

Rabbi Eliyahu Mali of the Bnei Moshe pre-military yeshiva in Jaffa advocated the murder of Palestinian children and spoke about how, in the case of Gaza, not "a soul" should be left alive there:

Today's terrorists are the children of the prior [military] operation that left them alive. The women are essentially the ones who are producing the terrorists ... It's not only the 14 or 16-year-old boy, the 20 or 30-year-old man who takes up a weapon against you, but also the future generation. There's really no difference.⁸

The Israeli police recommended that he should *not* be prosecuted for incitement. If an Arab had said the same about Jews, then they would be facing a long stretch in gaol.



Right to protest being steadily eroded

This is the same argument that Himmler made about exterminating Jewish children. At Posnan on October 6 1943 he told SS generals: "For I did not consider myself justified in exterminating the men - in other words, killing them or having them killed - and then allowing their children to grow up to wreak vengeance on our children and grandchildren."

In a poll conducted by Pennsylvania University, 47% of respondents said that the Israeli army should kill all the inhabitants of any city they conquer. This rose to over 60% when asked whether they believe there is a "current incarnation of Amalek" - the tribe that god said the ancient Hebrews had to wipe out. This is the state that Starmer and our rulers believe has the "right to self-defence".⁹

In July 2024 the International Court of Justice ruled that Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories was illegal.¹⁰ By saying that armed resistance to that occupation is 'terrorist', the British government is therefore supporting the occupation, despite claiming to support a two-state solution.

What Tony Blair and Jack Straw did in passing the Terrorism Act 2000 was to make it a crime to support a national liberation or anti-colonial movement that is seeking freedom from colonial domination or occupation, when the British government supports the occupying power. If the Terrorism Act had been in force during the era of apartheid in South Africa then the African National Congress would undoubtedly have been classified as a 'terrorist' group.¹¹

When I gave my support to the October 7 attack, I was not giving my support to Hamas as an organisation, despite the attempts of the Crown to pretend that this is what it amounted to. The example I gave to the police in an interview was that of the Polish Home Army (AK). In 1944 its officers told Jewish servicemen in Britain that

when they went into battle they would be shot in the back. A slogan widely reported was that "Every Pole has two bullets - the first for a Jew and the second for a German". (The problems that Jewish servicemen faced in the Polish forces stationed in this country were debated in the Commons on April 7 1944).¹²

I explained that, if I had been alive then, I would, of course, not have supported the AK as an organisation, but when they led the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944 then I would have supported them against the Nazi occupiers.

Free speech

What is happening is a naked attempt to use the anti-terrorism laws in order to curtail free speech on Palestine. As John Dugard - an emeritus professor of law at the Universities of Leiden and Witwatersrand, and an ad-hoc judge of the International Court of Justice - wrote.

Terrorism is an emotive word that has no place in the assessment of the conduct of either a government or a resistance movement. One man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist. Few would today label members of the French resistance in World War II as 'terrorist' and most would have no hesitation in describing the Nazi forces as 'terrorist'. Yet today most western states refrain from describing the acts of government forces as acts of terror, but have no hesitation in so describing the acts of resistance movements and other non-state actors.¹³

It is noticeable that one piece of legislation that has remained a dead letter is the International Criminal Court Act 2001 - section 52 of which renders assistance to the commission of genocide abroad an offence meriting a sentence of 30 years imprisonment.¹⁴

There is no doubt that in allowing the supply of arms to Israel and providing military help via the overflight of RAF planes, this government is guilty of having actively supported genocide.

Fortunately though, the permission of a member of the government, the attorney general, is required in order that a prosecution can be initiated. It is just as well that the position of the current attorney general, Richard Hermer KC, is dependent upon the goodwill of Keir Starmer, who appointed him.

And, speaking of the corruption of the government's law officers, in my case it was necessary that the attorney general approved my prosecution as being "in the public interest". Because Hermer is on record as saying "I have dear family members currently serving in the IDF", he chose to delegate the task of approving my prosecution to the solicitor general at the time, Sarah Sackman, who gave the go-ahead.¹⁵

And who is Sarah Sackman if not a dedicated Zionist? She was vice-chair of the avidly pro-Zionist Jewish Labour Movement from 2015 to 2024¹⁶ and it was the JLM that was a leading force in waging the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign against Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour left. It is not surprising that, on her promotion to minister of state at the Ministry of Justice, the JLM wrote: "We're so pleased for Sarah, our former vice-chair, and know she'll be fantastic in this new position."¹⁷ I imagine they are also very pleased that one of her first tasks as solicitor general was to approve the prosecution of myself, a leading Jewish anti-Zionist.

I am calling for the largest protest demonstration outside Kingston Crown Court on Monday January 5, to demonstrate the strength of feeling at the deployment of the Terrorist Act against those who support the Palestinians ●

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EUROVISION

BBC must join boycott

Already five counties are refusing to participate. But despite continued Israeli crimes, not Britain. Anne McShane calls for a redoubling of efforts to force a change

Eurovision is in crisis. Continued Israeli participation, amidst its continued crimes on the West Bank and above all Gaza, has provoked a huge popular outcry demanding a boycott.

So far five national broadcasters have announced they will boycott because of the European Broadcasting Union's refusal to kick Israel out. Slovenia, the Netherlands, Ireland, Iceland and one of the 'big five' funders, Spain, will not appear in Vienna in May 2026. The singer-rapper, Nemo, who won for Switzerland in 2024, handed back their trophy this month in protest against Israel.

These are important symbolic victories for the Palestinian solidarity movement, which has been campaigning for Israel's exclusion for many years. After all, Eurovision is not just a trashy pop-song contest: it is that and much more. The EBU initiated the contest in 1956 to "unite post-war Europe through music". It is now not limited to Europe, with participants from parts of Asia, North Africa, and most recently, Australia. Yet it is most definitely a Eurocentric lash-up, with lots of glitz and camp performances. And, with an average audience of more than 170 million, it is the biggest singing competition in the world.

Publicity

Being accepted into the Eurovision circle brings international publicity, primarily for tourism, and global legitimacy. Israel, which entered in 1973, has made the most of every opportunity. It has won the competition four times and hosted it on three occasions, the most recent in Tel Aviv in 2019. The competition motto that year, rather sickeningly, was 'Dare to dream'. A spectacular affair, it received glowing reviews for glamour, daring and progressive symbolism - with effective use of pink-washing.

KAN, the Israeli national broadcaster, reported 182 million viewers. They were treated to a portrayal of the host country as both biblical and modern, and in possession of a 'fascinating and tolerant culture'. The real history of the West Bank, Gaza and Israel itself were, of course, kept hidden. The EBU stated that it had taken "all necessary steps to safeguard the non-political character of the event". And, despite being fully cognisant of the atrocities being carried out against Palestinians and the ongoing apartheid, 41 national broadcasters and their governments enthusiastically played along with the jamboree.

At that very moment, in May 2019, Israel was launching air strikes on Gaza. The 'great march of return' protests were in their second year. From March 2018 until December 2019, tens of thousands of unarmed Palestinians marched weekly to the borders of Gaza, demanding an end to the siege and the right to return. The Israeli army opened fire on them in murderous sprees, killing 214, including 46 children, and brutally injuring 36,100, including nearly 8,800 children. One in five of them were hit by live rounds. In the aftermath there was continued suffering, with a substantial number of amputations experienced by young men, and chronic problems with inadequate healthcare in the blockaded strip. Studies revealed, unsurprisingly,



Israel's 2024 entry, Eden Golan: heckled and booed by Malmö audience

a very high level of post-traumatic stress among young Gazan men.¹

Israel's use of deadly force was condemned in June 2018 in a United Nations general assembly resolution, but Benjamin Netanyahu praised his troops for protecting the border, and the violence continued. 2019 also witnessed an increase in settler violence towards Palestinians on the West Bank, with at least 341 attacks, two Palestinians murdered and 115 injured. Palestinian land and property were vandalised. Israeli forces demolished 623 buildings, of which 98 were EU-funded humanitarian aid structures, doubling the destruction of such EU-funded structures compared to the year before. Overall, there was a 35% increase in demolitions and a 95% increase in displacements that year, compared to 2018.

So Israel had actually accelerated its persecution of Palestinians in Eurovision year, while being fawned over by the west. The EBU was intransigent in dealing with even the token protests against Israel - for example, Icelandic entry members raised the Palestinian flag during voting and its broadcaster was punished with a fine of €5,000.

While the EBU insists it is not political when it comes to Israel, this was very much not the case with Belarus and Russia. BTRC, the Belarus broadcaster, was banned for three years in 2021. The EBU claimed it had breached journalistic freedom during the electoral challenge to president Aleksandr Lukashenko, and the songs proposed for entry breached rules because of the "obvious subtext".

Yet Israel has breached just about every code of journalistic freedom since October 2023, killing 220 media workers. That is, of course, in addition to the many other atrocities

it has committed, the killing of the *Al Jazeera* team with targeted drones. Israel's last two Eurovision entries - 'Hurricane' in 2024 and 'New day will rise' in 2025 - were unashamed propaganda for its war on Gaza. Truly, while Lukashenko is no democrat, he does not hold a candle to Netanyahu.

Russia was the next to go. Just a day after its invasion of Ukraine, it was out. Ukrainian broadcaster UA-PBC appealed to the EBU to expel its enemy and was joined by national broadcasters from Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Denmark, with the editor in chief of the Danish broadcaster stating: "We find it incompatible with Eurovision's values that Russia is participating." On March 1 2022 the EBU announced that not only was Russia banned from the competition, but also from all its governing bodies.

Ukraine was crowned winner that year - hardly a shock. The English language journal, *Kyiv Post*, reported Ukrainian political scientist Oleh Saakyan as saying: "Eurovision is not only about music: it is also about meanings and images." According to him, winning Eurovision has "brought many positive aspects for Ukraine at the political level".² It buoyed the country in its struggle against Russia and made clear which side Europe was on.

Next year

As for Israel, it knows the importance of European backing and has fought tenaciously against any possible exclusion. Earlier this year, there was an open letter from over 70 former contestants demanding Israel be expelled. More importantly perhaps, journalists in a number of national broadcasters began to express their doubts.

In the last couple of years the atmosphere around the event has become unmistakably politicised. There was a demonstration of 10,000 outside the auditorium in Malmö in 2024 demanding a boycott. Contestants inside this and the 2025 event raised Palestinian flags in spite of the ban, and a large section of the audience booed and heckled Israeli entries. Both events were massively censored by broadcasters.

At an EBU assembly in July 2025 a number of countries called for Israel to be excluded. When this was refused, Ireland, Spain, Netherlands and Slovenia announced publicly that they would not take part. The EBU promised a vote on the issue at its assembly on December 4-5, but then backed out after Donald Trump announced a ceasefire, stating that circumstances had substantially changed for the better. Instead the assembly was limited to voting on a new set of rules preventing Israel cheating.

To explain: the EBU uses a combination of country jury panels and televoting to select the winner. In 2025 the divergence between the jury vote and the public vote for Israel was unprecedented. Most jury votes were low - between 1 and 7 out of a top score of 12. However, the public support for Israel was huge by comparison: televoting in 13 countries gave Israel the maximum number of votes - something which has never happened before for any country. Israel's Yuval Raphael went from nowhere to top the public vote and finish second overall. Given the mass movement against Israeli genocide and in support of Palestinian self-determination, it was obvious that something was not right.

Reports were presented to the EBU which showed that an Israeli

government agency had paid for advertising and state social media accounts to push for votes for its entries in 2024 and 2025. This included TV and YouTube ads "encouraging viewers to vote for Israel's song, with content tailored in various languages to appeal to diverse European audiences. The ads emphasised that viewers could vote up to 20 times, aiming to maximise public support."³ An Israeli company, Morrocanoil, as one of the Eurovision's main commercial sponsors, successfully manipulated the event itself, with audience boos during Israel's performance muted in live broadcasts, replaced by artificial cheers.

Not worked

Obviously the EBU had to act. But, rather than removing Israel, it hoped that the new rules it introduced would satisfy its critics. Clearly this has not worked.

In Ireland campaigners are very happy with the results of our efforts. But this is not the time to be sanguine. As I have shown above, Israel is determined to win official support at all cost, and will use whatever form of manipulation and threats it can lay its hands on to silence its critics.

We now need the movement to redouble its efforts demanding the removal of Israel from Eurovision. Without that the BBC must be forced to join the boycott. A British boycott would be a huge moral blow to Israel. And it is within our reach •

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UKRAINE

Notes on the war

While Ukraine is on the backfoot diplomatically and militarily, the lines of trenches and strongpoints remain essentially static. Perfect conditions for fraternisation and an unofficial Christmas ceasefire, argues **Jack Conrad**

Donald Trump is determined to force Volodymyr Zelensky and Ukraine into agreeing his 28-point peace plan. What were once red lines are to be junked. No regaining every inch of lost territory. No departure of every single Russian soldier. No Nato membership.

Indeed Ukraine is being told to limit its army to 600,000, relocate its European fighter jets to Poland, concede what territory Russia holds in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, withdraw from its 20% of Donbas and accept some sort of free economic zone. On top of all that, Zelensky is expected to allow presidential and Rada elections (overdue, because of the war), which he and his party could easily lose. We are told that Trump expects Ukrainian acquiescence by Christmas.¹ If not, dire consequences will follow.

With few cards to play, Zelensky has been doing his best to agree, but disagree. He says he supports elections and would put a Ukrainian withdrawal from Donbas to a national referendum. How the question is worded would doubtless play a role. To ask 'Do you support dismembering the country?' is to invite rejection. But recommending a 'demilitarised buffer zone' might just do the trick. Whatever the wording, one could, though, easily imagine the Ukrainian-Ukrainian population rejecting what will be branded, not least by the far right, as national betrayal. Who knows what would happen then? Regime collapse, an Azov coup, a show trial of Zelensky and his corrupt cronies?

But none of that is really the point here. Zelensky is trying to put Ukraine in a position where it is seen, in American eyes, to be doing the right thing. He wants Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation to be the problem, when it comes to securing peace, not Ukraine.

What Trump is attempting with Ukraine is best understood by putting it into the context of the recently published *National Security Strategy* (November 2025).² This is the latest and fullest statement of what "putting America first in everything" means, when it comes to foreign policy. The Trump administration has unceremoniously dumped the post-World War II so-called law-based international order. Liberals are outraged. Shorn of the Trumpite braggadocio, what is being re-established is the 'might is right' transactional politics of 19th century imperialism. American hegemony will take a new/old form: territorial ambition, naked force, protectionism, resource control, colonies.

NSS promises to assert a "Trump corollary" to the Munroe doctrine: America will be "pre-eminent" in the western hemisphere. That means Latin America, Canada and Greenland too (though the latter is not mentioned). Prior approaches to China are rejected as deluded. American trade with China must be "rebalanced" and allies such as Europe, Japan, Mexico, Canada and South Korea are expected to cooperate in achieving that aim (ie, reversing the "inexorable" rise of China).

NSS repudiates the interventionist policy of strong-arming other countries into adopting "democratic or other social change that differs widely from their traditions and histories". According to *The Economist*, that is welcome news for "Russia, China and the monarchies of the Middle East".³ Yet, when it comes to Europe, NSS bluntly declares that "our goal should be to help Europe correct its current



Battlefield skies are thick with them

trajectory". It stresses America's "sentimental attachment" to Europe, especially "Britain and Ireland", but ominously warns that "European states cannot reform themselves if they are trapped in political crisis".

"American diplomacy" will therefore "continue to stand up" for what NSS calls "genuine democracy, freedom of expression, and unapologetic celebrations of European nations' individual character and history". In other words, America will "promote" the growing influence of "patriotic European parties": unmistakably Reform UK, AfD, National Rally, Brotherhood of Italy, Vox, etc.

When applied to Ukraine, NSS draws conclusions that mainstream conservatives, liberals and social-imperialists call "appeasement";⁴ the "spirit of 1938"⁵ or "end the war by giving Putin everything he wants".⁶ Such types cannot think about today's Russia outside the Third Reich box. Anyway, NSS envisages an "expeditious cessation" of the war in Ukraine to prevent further escalation. Evidently, Trump is wagering on cleaving Russia away from the embrace of China by offering an expanded sphere of influence and a revived G8, even establishing a G5 ... the US, China, Japan, India and, flatteringly, Russia. (Why flatteringly? Because despite its 150 million population and nuclear weapons, economically it ranks roughly on a par with Italy and Canada.)

Cold war

Meanwhile, this winter is set to be a real trial for Ukraine, not least its civilian population. Once again Russia is "weaponising" the cold.⁷ Thousands of drones and missiles have been targeted

on Ukraine's power stations, electricity grid sub-stations and storage facilities. While a good number, around 80%, are intercepted, enough get through to cause considerable damage.

In a country where winter temperatures regularly stay below zero - and in the east and north-east they can go down to as much as -20°C - demand on what is already a strained power grid will be substantial. Even during the summer months shops and restaurants regularly have to resort to diesel generators. This winter has already seen prolonged power cuts, affecting hundreds of thousands of people, many lasting more than 36 hours. For the infirm, elderly and sick, killer conditions.⁸

Russia has upgraded its main Shahed-type attack drone, doubling the size of its warhead and increasing its range and speed (this is the suicide drone originally developed in and supplied by Iran). Production in Russia is now at a level over "five times higher than a year ago and set to more than double". In June 2024, around 330 drones of this type were launched against targets in Ukraine. A year later, the figure was "over 5,400".⁹

Russia has also significantly expanded production of ballistic and cruise missiles. A Ukrainian military intelligence estimate suggests that Russia may have increased its output of ballistic missiles by "66% in the past year".¹⁰ This poses a very serious challenge for Ukraine's air defences. The availability of anti-missile missiles is limited. Moreover, an American Patriot missile system is vastly more expensive than a Russian-produced ballistic missile (then there is the little matter of whether or not Trump will allow continued resupply)¹¹.

Perhaps the calculation in the Kremlin is that civilian morale will be slowly ground down to the point of collapse and thereby force a surrender. Unlikely, in my opinion. After all, Ukrainian nationalism has deep roots, which will not be destroyed no matter how many drones and missiles Russia launches. Nonetheless, power cuts are not only a form of psychological warfare. Emergency repairs for the energy sector are hugely costly, and constant outages disrupt domestic heating, water supplies and industrial (eg, arms) production too.

Power war

Not that the weakness of Ukraine's energy sector should be exaggerated. During Soviet times it was deliberately grown oversized to help cope with bureaucratic socialism's inefficiencies, low productivity and chronic shortages. Before the Russian invasion around 50% of its energy requirements were met by four nuclear power plants. It still stands at some 50% - or 7.7GW - one of the highest percentages in the world.¹² However, since the beginning of the war electricity generation in Ukraine has dropped by about a third - a figure in no small measure accounted for by the loss of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant to the Russian army (Zaporizhzhia, Europe's largest NPP, is now in 'cold shutdown').

Fear of triggering a nuclear disaster has meant, so far, that the three remaining operating nuclear power plants have largely been left untouched - though not their substations and electricity switch yards, which feed power into the grid. There has, moreover, been a drive towards decentralisation and diversification: solar panels, wind

turbines, small gas modular turbines, old coal plants recommissioned, etc. That meant that, during the June-September 2025 period, Ukraine became a "net electricity exporter".¹³ But it was massive electricity imports from the EU that saved Ukraine from a winter shutdown in 2024-25. Using the ENSO-E system, 4.4GW were transmitted from Europe - a 5.5-fold increase from the previous year.¹⁴ Zelensky says it will be the same this winter.¹⁵

Of course, Ukraine is conducting its own drone and missile war against Russia. Instead of the energy infrastructure, it is oil and gas refineries. With western targeting support, more than 50% of them have reportedly been hit more than once.¹⁶ Ukraine has also targeted fuel depots, pumping stations and other logistical hubs. Prices have risen, exports scaled back and refining capacity reduced (reportedly by some 20%)¹⁷.

Trench war

Russian forces continue to advance on, or in, Vovchansk, Siversk, Pokrovsk and Hulyaipole, albeit at a snail's pace. However, in Kupiansk, Russian troops are surrounded. The 100-200 who remain have to be supplied by drones.¹⁸ Despite that, Vladimir Putin could triumphantly announce early this month that Pokrovsk had finally been taken - that after a 20-month campaign (with, he did not admit, huge losses in men and materiel). Ukraine, note, insists that its forces still control the north of the city.

Once it was claimed that capturing Pokrovsk, because of its E-50 highway and rail line, would mark a strategic defeat for Ukraine. Logistical supply lines feeding the rest of the Donetsk front would be lost and allow Russia to rapidly advance on Dnipro. Always a dubious proposition.

Now, though, Ukraine has its 'fortress belt', running 31 miles through western Donetsk. The 'hawkish' Institute for the Study of War, reports that Ukraine has "spent the last 11 years pouring time, money and effort into reinforcing the fortress belt and establishing significant industrial and defensive infrastructure". There are strongpoints, bunkers, trenches, minefields, dragon's teeth, anti-tank ditches and razor wire.

Ukraine's fortress belt is not the only problem Russia faces. There is topography too: "The terrain is fairly defensible, particularly the Chasiv Yar height which has been underpinning the Ukrainian line," says Nick Reynolds of the Royal United Services Institute.¹⁹

It is a similar story along the whole 600-mile long line of conflict. Both sides have chosen defensible positions, established strong points, dug ditches, poured concrete and planted mines. No wonder Russian advances have proved so costly. Attacks by large formations amount to slaughter. For a few yards of sod, thousands die. Instead, Russian generals have turned to infiltration by small groups of two or three men. They exploit natural defensive gaps, use the cover provided by fog and rain, hide in woods, even crawl through disused gas and oil pipelines. Having established a sufficiently strong force, they strike from the rear.

The defensive lines of the Ukraine war are remarkably similar to those of World War I. Having been forced onto the defensive in 1915, the Germans responded by fortifying their front: trenches, barbed wire, machine guns,

concrete bunkers. To have any hope of breaching such awesome defences required the delivery, via rail and lorry, of huge quantities of artillery shells, prolonged bombardments and then hugely costly infantry assaults (artillery conquered and infantry held any territorial gains).

Trotsky, at the time, it should be noted, devoted several articles to trench warfare, including ‘The trenches’ (September 1915) and ‘Fortresses or trenches?’ (October 1915). He dismissed the walls, moats and battlements of old fortresses as totally anachronistic - artillery quickly reduced them to rubble. Hence, Trotsky declared, “trenches” had triumphed, and to such an extent that both militarists and pacifists worshipped them.²⁰ Deluded pacifists imagined that state borders protected by trenches could finally abolish war.

Fortress war

However, on the western front fortress warfare continued, albeit in a different form. German chief of staff Erich von Falkenhayn promulgated a military doctrine that allowed for no retreat. As with a fortress under siege, the “standard response” was that any breach of the defences had to be met with swift counterattacks, no matter what the cost.²¹

Given that German forces had behind them a thousand square miles of captured French territory, such a doctrine was militarily unnecessary, but ensured that the final outcome ultimately depended on who could produce the most armaments and who could sustain the greatest losses in human life.

Certainly, as a “temporary sanctuary”, trenches served as “decisive boundaries, the smallest crossing of which by either side is paid for with numerous victims”. But conditions in the trenches were terrible. Trotsky called them “disgusting dumps”. Alike German, Austrian, Italian, French and British troops found themselves crouching in mud, water and filth. They thought not about the grand plans of monarchs, ministers and generals. Nor did they think about killing the enemy. No, their overriding concern was getting a crust to eat - that, and survival. Trotsky quotes testimony from men at the front about how they would enter into a silent agreement not to fire upon each other.²²

Given the vantage of hindsight, it is now crystal-clear that the decision by Russia’s high command to withdraw from Kherson, Izyum, Lyman and the environs of Kharkiv in the autumn of 2022 was no rout, as claimed by a jubilant Zelensky - but, yes, a repositioning, a reset, to secure their forces behind the strongest, most advantageous defensive positions.

True, a hyperbolic storm of protest blasted out from Chechnya’s warlord, Ramzan Kadyrov, and Yevgeny Prigozhin of Wagner. Defence minister Sergei Shoigu and top military commanders were branded cowards, traitors and incompetents, who deserved to be stripped of medals and sent barefoot into battle. Given that Russia had banned any criticism of the conduct of the Ukraine war by making it illegal to “discredit the armed forces”, such language was highly significant. The Wagner coup happened a few months later, in June 2023, and shook the whole of Russia. Vladimir Putin was humiliated, but survived, and - surprise, surprise - successfully won a fifth presidential term in March 2024.

That aside, strategically, it is now obvious that the Russian high command took a German turn in 2022-23. Instead of pursuing the quixotic aim of “de-Nazifying” Ukraine (a euphemism for decapitating the Kyiv regime), Putin was forced to settle on keeping what Russia has got in Ukraine and pursuing a war of attrition. The

final outcome will therefore depend on who can produce, or secure, the most artillery shells, drones, missiles and sustain the greatest losses ... and on which side cracks first.

Drone war

Of course, Ukraine is no rerun of the western front. There are drones, drones, drones. Battlefield skies are thick with them.

Some are tiny and come equipped with nano night-vision cameras or thermal detectors for reconnaissance purposes; others carry large-calibre machine guns or serve as launch platforms for rockets. Some are modified hobbyist drones and are directed by soldiers wearing VR goggles. Some lie on the ground, waiting for passing men and vehicles before exploding. Some are one-way suicide drones. Some carry significant payloads to supply frontline troops with much needed water, food and munitions. Some are preprogrammed, others controlled by radio signal or impossible to jam fibre-optic cable. And drones hunt drones. There are drones which target drone pilots too.²³

Drones have created a 15-mile-wide ‘kill zone’ along the front line. Trenches therefore go unmanned. The wounded are left to die in no-man’s land, so risky is it to rescue them. Moving supplies to fighting troops by lorry has become almost impossible. Even using armoured vehicles is to invite a deadly drone strike. Fixed artillery positions have had to be abandoned too. Easy targets.

Rotating troops has become hellishly difficult. According to a report in *Politico*, “Most soldiers currently die during rotation.” They are forced to spend weeks at the front and when they are due for rotation they have to duck and dive for three or four miles due to the drone threat before being picked up by a waiting car. “That creates a problem with morale.”²⁴ And morale matters. It is far more important than all those Leopard II tanks, F-16s and Storm Shadows put together. As Napoleon Bonaparte famously remarked, “In war, three-quarters turns on personal character and relations; the balance of manpower and materials counts only for the remaining quarter.”²⁵

Wounded soldiers face their own particular nightmare. Sometimes they have to wait for days before getting any kind of proper treatment. Getting them to a medically equipped armoured personnel carrier means hobbling, crawling or being carried the same three or four miles. No wonder so many die. Not that they are safe anywhere near the front line. Drones hover above tracks and roads. Ukraine has, as a result, even turned to robotic surgery and virtual treatment by doctors. And, of course, drones deliver medical equipment, drugs and PPE to the front line.

Ironically, Ukraine’s surging production of drones relies heavily (80%) on Chinese components (navigation systems, chips, magnets and composites). Eg, Ukraine’s Motor-G plant, Europe’s largest producer of drone motors, turns out about 100,000 units per month. “But it still buys its high-grade magnets and copper wire from China.”²⁶ Not surprisingly, because it is such good business, the same pattern applies to Russia’s drones. Roughly 80% of Russia’s drone electronics, motors, fibre optic cables, etc, come from companies of “Chinese origin”, often via Russian fronts (operating under the cover of producing refrigeration units).²⁷

Kill war

Bunkers, trench warfare and static front lines allow for - and encourage - fraternisation. Ordinary soldiers, especially those in non-elite units, dread the prospect on being ordered over the top. The chances of death

are exceedingly high. Meanwhile, they endlessly wait and wait and do their best to reduce the discomfort, suffering, boredom and dangers. There is an obvious interest in not being sacrificed in useless military operations. Rank-and-file soldiers and their NCOs frequently take a common stand against the non-combatant officer class safely located in distant command posts. Men in the trenches bond, form a close-knit community. Staff officers are, with very few exceptions, held in utter contempt: out of touch, arrogant, corrupt and determined to save their children from the meat grinder.

Away from the most active fronts, with their cannon fodder, suicide missions and terrible injuries, there is ‘live and let live’.²⁸ If you do not shoot us when we are bucketing out our waterlogged bunker, we will not shoot you when you are bucketing out your waterlogged bunker. The same even goes for drone operators. Some develop a definite fellow feeling for potential victims. While they readily slaughter mass waves, they are often reluctant to end the life of lone grunts or the obviously injured. There is compassion, sympathy, for fellow ‘pawns’.²⁹ A tacit, always illicit, truce is observed - the antithesis of the official ‘kill, kill, kill’ doctrine. Veterans always instruct newcomers in the arts of ‘not kill’ as well as ‘kill’.

There grows a recognition of mutual plight. The poor buggers on the other side endure the same cold, the same mud, the same infestations of rats, mice and lice as we do. They get to know their neighbours in the nearby bunkers and trenches not only through the drones buzzing constantly overhead, the shells whizzing in and the night raids. They hear the agonised screams, the curses, the familiar songs and the messages shouted in a closely related language (many Ukrainians are bilingual). They will even smell what the other side is cooking. Fellow feeling, empathy, easily develops - as was the case with the rightly celebrated Christmas 1914 in World War I.

This, argues Tony Ashworth, saw “neither the first nor the last instances of ‘live and let live’”.³⁰ Perhaps things began with coinciding mealtimes, perhaps it was night sentries not firing upon each other. Whatever the exact case, on Christmas Day 1914 German troops began setting up Christmas trees above their parapets, lighting candles and singing carols. The Tommies joined in.

A few brave souls ventured out of their trenches. They were met not with a hail of bullets. Instead, others joined them. Smiles, handshakes and hugs followed. Soon thousands were exchanging little gifts. On the British side packets of *good* cigarettes, on the German side *good* chocolate. Football matches are reported to have been played: with an improbable 3:2 average score in “favour of the Germans”!³¹ And such events were far from isolated. They happened here and there, dotted across at least half of the British-controlled western front. Some 100,000 were involved. Naturally, the internationalist left - not least Lenin and the Bolsheviks - welcomed all such acts of fraternisation.

There can be no argument that one of the key preconditions for this and other spontaneous examples of fraternisation lies in the mass anti-war propaganda and agitation conducted by the parties of the Socialist (Second) International.

Nevertheless, it is also worth pointing out that, while most British *frontline* troops came from a working class (ie, Labourite) background, that was not the case with German forces. Most came from rural areas and therefore peasant stock. They were not natural social democrats. However, the trenches themselves, the commonality imposed by life on the front line, the technology of industrial

warfare - proletarianised them.

The dangers of fraternisation were already all too apparent to the officer class. On December 5 1914, general Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, commander of one of the two corps which made up the British Expeditionary Force, issued these orders:

It is during this period that the greatest danger to the morale of troops exists. Experience of this and of every other war proves undoubtedly that troops in trenches in close proximity to the enemy slide very easily, if permitted to do so, into a ‘live and let live’ theory of life. Understandings - amounting almost to an unofficial armistice - grow up between our troops and the enemy, with a view to making life easier, until the sole object of war becomes obscured and officers and men sink into a military lethargy, from which it is difficult to arouse them when the moment for great sacrifices again arises. The attitude of our troops can be readily understood and to a certain extent commands sympathy. So long as they know that no general advance is intended, they fail to see any object in understanding small enterprises of no permanent utility, certain to result in some loss of life, and likely to provoke reprisals. Such an attitude is, however, most dangerous, for it discourages initiative in commanders and destroys the offensive spirit in all ranks. The corps commander therefore directs divisional commanders to impress on subordinate commanders the absolute necessity of encouraging offensive spirit, while on the defensive, by every means in their power. Friendly intercourse with the enemy, unofficial armistices (eg, ‘We won’t fire if you don’t’, etc), however tempting and amusing they may be, are absolutely prohibited.³²

But such orders were, of course, powerless to stop fraternisation. In subsequent years sentries were posted with instructions to shoot anyone tempted to repeat the 1914 Christmas truce.

A similar story could be told about French and German, Italian and Austrian, and Russian and German troops. High commands on both sides issued instructions forbidding the slightest manifestation of fraternisation. Those who disobeyed were to be treated as traitors. Nonetheless, life on the front line creates a tendency towards fraternisation, even if it is at the level of ‘live and let live’.

Today’s war

The same is true with the Ukraine war. Anything smacking of fraternisation horrifies Volodymyr Zelensky and Vladimir Putin alike. Not surprisingly, therefore, the authorities on both sides impose harsh media censorship and restrict access to the front line. Ukraine has three colour zones: red is completely out of bounds and yellow is accessible to accredited journalists only if they are accompanied by press officers from the defence ministry; green zones are open to every journalist who has received special military accreditation, “which can be a long-winded process”.³³

The claim is that such measures are imposed to counter disinformation. Total and absolute nonsense. No, it is obvious that both sides fear honest, objective, truthful reporting: the appalling conditions in the bunkers, the squandering of human life in pointless military operations, the *hostile* feelings of rank-and-file soldiers towards their politicians and generals ... and their *fellow* feeling for the grunts on the other side.

Not something the social-

imperialists want to hear. Instead of promoting fraternisation, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, Anticapitalist Resistance, the RS21 right wing and their like deny the self-evident truth that the Ukraine war began with the CIA-directed 2014 Maidan Square coup. After that, Ukrainian-Russians were denied elementary rights and were treated as enemies within. Intolerance, bigotry and murder squads ruled. Breakaway republics, doubtless backed by Moscow, were inevitable. Around 14,000, mainly Russian-Ukrainians, died in what amounted to a civil war in the Donbas.

Despite that, the social-imperialists urge on Ukraine’s *oligarkhiya* regime to complete victory, oppose any talk of ceasefires, and brand Donald Trump’s peace plan as a rerun of 1938 appeasement. For these traitors to socialism - and, whatever their centrist apologists say, that is exactly what they are - it is ‘Kill, kill, kill’ ●

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POLEMIC

Against action programmes

We need to build a mass party and we need to fight for democracy in the state and in the workers' movement too. **Mike Macnair** rejects the standard 'left Trotskyist' arguments

As comrade Yasmine Mather stated in her December 4 report of the Socialist Unity Platform fringe event at the Your Party conference,¹ at the session on 'What kind of programme for Your Party' I found myself speaking on a panel with four proponents of variations on 'left Trotskyism': Vincent David of the International Communist League (Spartacists, originally a 1960s left split from the US Socialist Workers Party); HaPe Breitman of the International Bolshevik Tendency (one of the splinters from the Spartacists); Richard Brenner from 'Marxist Strategy' (a splinter from Workers Power, itself a 1970s split from the British International Socialists, now the British SWP); and Ted Reese, an independent speaking for the YP 'DemSocs', but who has acknowledged training in Marxism from the Revolutionary Communist Group (aka *Fight racism, fight imperialism* - another 1970s split from the British IS).²

I characterise these groups as offering variants on 'left Trotskyism', in contrast to the 'right Trotskyism' of the Mandelbrot Fourth International, the British SWP, and so on. The 'right Trotskyists' maintain a sentimental attachment to Trotsky, but interpret 'permanent revolution' as implying tail-ending nationalist movements, 'the united front' as involving suspension or diplomatic downplaying of criticism (as Georgi Dimitrov argued at the 7th Congress of Comintern), and 'transitional method' as amounting merely to promoting currently popular ideas. By this means they have substantially rejected the original Trotskyists' differences with 'official communism' and produced variants on the latter. As a result, in their political practice they promote the construction of broad fronts, intended to be left social democratic (or, in the 'third world', left-nationalist). As world imperialism has, since the late 1970s, turned away from substantial concessions to social democracy and left nationalism, these projects tend merely to fail and end in demoralisation.

The 'left Trotskyists', on the other hand, are still attempting to construct a revolutionary politics on the basis of (versions of) Trotskyism. The method is that of the 1938 *Transitional programme*, which states:

It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat...

The Fourth International does not discard the programme of the old 'minimal' demands to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day work within the framework of the correct actual - that is, revolutionary - perspective. Insofar as the old, partial, 'minimal' demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism - and this occurs at each step - the Fourth



Four to one: Mike Macnair (second from left)

International advances a system of transitional demands, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very bases of the bourgeois regime. The old 'minimal programme' is superseded by the transitional programme, the task of which lies in systematic mobilisation of the masses for the proletarian revolution.³

A 'transitional programme' built on this method is not a party programme - a system of proposals that defines a political party, like the 1838 Six Points of the People's Charter, the 1848 *Demands of the Communist Party in Germany*, the 1875 Gotha or 1891 Erfurt programmes of the German SAP-SPD, the 1880 *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier* of France, and so on. It cannot be such a programme because it internally defines itself as a "bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution" - that is, it asserts that there is another, real, programme lying behind it.

My four co-panellists at the YP fringe on November 29 were all in agreement that what had to be put forward for YP is an 'action programme'. Most of the contributors from the floor agreed. The question that is posed by this formula is what counts as 'action'. Put another way, what counts for the 1938 *Transitional programme* as "systematic mobilisation of the masses"?

Richard Brenner was most explicit on the point. An action programme was a programme for direct action by the masses, as counterposed to electoral campaigning. It needed to link this direct action to socialist measures: meaning, mainly, expropriations. Again, this attracted extensive agreement.

The British ruling class, he said, is the oldest, craftiest and most cynical ruling class in the world. Hence, it is a fantasy to suppose that a workers' government could come to power through elections. Imagine that a left party won 600 MPs: the generals and admirals who announced in advance that they would not obey Corbyn would not obey it. Hence, a workers' government can only come to power through working class councils of action (soviets). These will grow out of building mass direct action.

In responding to the discussion,

I made the point that this was a politics of nostalgia for the 1960s to early 1970s. In that period, we had very extensive nationalised industries, public housing, and so on. We had a powerful shop-stewards movement that in a good many larger workplaces could impose substantial elements of workers' control (albeit not full workers' control). Since the mid-1970s, however, the capitalist class's continued control of political legitimacy and the state - and its international character - had allowed all these gains (won, in the case of the shop-stewards' movement, by direct action) to be rolled back.

I can add for this article that, surprising as it may seem, I agree with comrade Brenner that the British state - the organised bodies of armed men (that is, the armed forces, the police, the prison service, the Security Service, the Secret Intelligence Service, the judiciary and Crown Prosecution Service and the senior civil service) will not permit a left government to come to power - as long as they themselves remain intact. They will intervene long before there are actually 600 left MPs: the 'anti-Semitism' campaign running since 2016 was and is an operation of the Anglo-American security services to secure the loyalty of any British government to the Atlantic Alliance, and it achieved its immediate central aim in this country by putting in the seurocrat, former director of public prosecutions Sir Keir Starmer, as Labour leader.

The problem is to break up the coherence and loyalty of the state. This is not all our work. The British state is in increasing difficulties, but not yet in crisis. It will fall into crisis, probably not that far in the future. Our task, however, is to pose the idea of an alternative to the capitalist-constitutional order, which has the potential to win to the side of the working class rank-and-file members of the state apparatus.⁴

Anti-parliamentary

I don't know about comrade Reese, but the other comrades - the two coming from the Spartacist tradition and Richard Brenner - certainly think that they are Trotskyists. But their counterposition of 'direct action' to 'electoralism' is actually a politics denounced by Leon Trotsky as "anti-parliamentary cretinism":

Parliamentary cretinism is a revolting sickness, but anti-parliamentary cretinism is not much better. We see this most clearly in the fate of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists. The revolution poses political questions directly and at the present stage gives them a parliamentary form. The attention of the working class cannot but be concentrated on the Cortes, and the anarcho-syndicalists will secretly vote for the socialists or perhaps the republicans. To fight against parliamentary illusions without fighting simultaneously against the anti-parliamentary metaphysics of the anarchists, is less possible in Spain than anywhere else.⁵

In Chile in 1972-73, the anti-parliamentarist (and, in fact, guerrillaist; but more generally direct actionist) Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria wound up giving critical support to the Unidad Popular people's front government - which proved helpless in face of the US-sponsored military coup because of its constitutionalist illusions. The Spanish anarcho-syndicalist CNT union confederation and the Chilean MIR are not the only examples of the political helplessness of parties affected by anti-parliamentary cretinism, when actual pre-revolutionary crisis develops.

There are numerous examples. A large-scale one, though not noted by Trotsky, is that the anti-partyism of the German *Revolutionäre Obleute* ('revolutionary shop stewards') in 1918-19 allowed the rightwing Majority SPD to take largely uncontested control of the *Räte* workers' and soldiers' councils in 1919, through SPD representation via trade union officials, and through the existence of soldiers' councils in fact dominated by officers (because the revolution in the capital and elsewhere had not reached the point of breaking down discipline in the armies at the fronts). A small-scale but relatively recent one is the extraordinary zigzag course of the British SWP's co-thinkers in Egypt, the Revolutionary Socialists, in the political crisis in Egypt in 2011-13, from tailing the Muslim Brotherhood, to tailing its 'secular' opponents, to the final realisation that these were re-imposing the tyranny of the military regime, which had never actually fallen in 2011.

The problem underlying these repeated failures is that revolutionary

crisis poses the question of central coordinating authority, to substitute for the failure and/or sabotage of capitalist economic coordination. Local institutions, like the Russian soviets, German or Austrian *Räte* of 1918-19, or Chilean *cordones industriales* of 1971-73, cannot solve this national-level coordination problem.⁶ To solve the problem requires the working class, and in particular the broad layer of activists, thinking politics at the level of general laws, and of independent foreign policy, before a strike wave or crisis breaks down capitalist coordination.

The emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself. True. But the act of the working class itself is not *only* strikes, shop stewards committees and so on. It is *also, and just as necessarily*, the creation of permanent workers' organisations - trade unions, cooperatives, collectivist political parties.

Revolutionary crisis

We are, of course, not today in conditions of revolutionary crisis, but - as the Spartacist comrades correctly judge⁷ - in ones of an accelerating global movement of reaction, in which imperialist capital is seeking to take back all the concessions made to the working class - and to lesser national capitals - since 1917.

I should note here that *Leninist*-CPGB comrades have been arguing since 1991 that we had entered a period of reaction of a special kind - one in which communists were not so much subject to repression as to intellectual marginalisation. Even today, the Trump administration's repression is directed primarily towards depressing the Democratic Party vote, not towards the suppression of the far left.

My point above is that comrades who are pursuing 'anti-electoralist' or 'direct actionist' concepts of 'action programmes' are seeking to create political organisations that, if they got large enough to be influential, would be *useless and dangerous* in conditions of revolutionary crisis.

But what would be conditions of revolutionary crisis? This does have a bearing on what revolutionaries should be doing in a period of reaction.

Lenin offered three versions of the same conception of revolutionary crisis, starting in June 1913:

Oppression alone, no matter how great, does not always give rise to a revolutionary situation in a country. In most cases it is not enough for revolution that the lower classes should not want to live in the old way. It is also necessary that the upper classes should be unable to rule and govern in the old way.⁸

This formulation was not *necessary* to the analysis that followed. It is very likely that it was directed against Rosa Luxemburg and others' arguments in 1910-12 in favour of 'escalating' the mass movement to demand universal suffrage in Prussia towards political strikes, etc.

He diagnosed the beginning of revolutionary crisis in Russia from the fact that 250,000 people went on strike on May Day, while, on the other hand, the regime was suffering an internal political crisis due to its self-perception that "the autocracy and landowners were unable to ensure 'peaceful development', were unable to provide the basic conditions for 'law' and 'order', without which a capitalist country cannot, in the

20th century, live side by side with Germany and the new China". The diagnosis was wrong (war in 1914 staved off revolution for another three years). But it was not unreasonable: the deep crisis of the tsarist state was visible to all; May Day has since been practically politically neutered, but in 1913 striking on May Day was an unambiguous act of political identification with revolutionary social democracy. As was true, also, of striking on International Women's Day in February 1917, the trigger of the 1917 revolution.

Ex-leftists

In 1915 Lenin elaborated the point a bit further in polemic with ex-leftist supporter of the German war effort Heinrich Cunow.⁹ Cunow had argued that the 1912 anti-war resolution of the Basle congress of the Second International rested on "illusory" hopes for a revolution against the war; now that revolution had not materialised, it was necessary to take sides. Lenin argued that there could be no *guarantees* that a revolution would take place. He went on:

To the Marxist it is indisputable that a revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation; furthermore, it is not every revolutionary situation that leads to revolution. What, generally speaking, are the symptoms of a revolutionary situation? We shall certainly not be mistaken if we indicate the following three major symptoms: (1) when it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the 'upper classes', a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for 'the lower classes not to want' to live in the old way; it is also necessary that 'the upper classes should be unable' to live in the old way; (2) when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual; (3) when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who uncomplainingly allow themselves to be robbed in 'peace time', but, in turbulent times, are drawn both by all the circumstances of the crisis and by the 'upper classes' themselves into independent historical action.

Without these objective changes, which are independent of the will, not only of individual groups and parties but even of individual classes, a revolution, as a general rule, is impossible. The totality of all these objective changes is called a revolutionary situation. Such a situation existed in 1905 in Russia, and in all revolutionary periods in the west; it also existed in Germany in the sixties of the last century, and in Russia in 1859-61 and 1879-80, although no revolution occurred in these instances.

Why was that? It was because it is not every revolutionary situation that gives rise to a revolution; revolution arises only out of a situation in which the above-mentioned objective changes are accompanied by a subjective change: namely, the ability of the revolutionary class to take revolutionary mass action strong enough to break (or dislocate) the old government, which never, not even in a period of crisis, 'falls', if it is not toppled over.¹⁰

Finally, the argument reappears in

Leftwing communism (1920), as part of an argument against precisely the sort of politics that the 'left Trotskyists' promote:

The fundamental law of revolution, which has been confirmed by all revolutions and especially by all three Russian revolutions in the 20th century, is as follows: for a revolution to take place it is not enough for the exploited and oppressed masses to realise the impossibility of living in the old way, and demand changes; for a revolution to take place it is essential that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. It is only when the 'lower classes' do not want to live in the old way and the 'upper classes' cannot carry on in the old way that the revolution can triumph.

This truth can be expressed in other words: revolution is impossible without a nationwide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters). It follows that, for a revolution to take place, it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class-conscious, thinking and politically active workers) should fully realise that revolution is necessary, and that they should be prepared to die for it; second, that the ruling classes should be going through a governmental crisis, which draws even the most backward masses into politics (symptomatic of any genuine revolution is a rapid, tenfold and even hundredfold increase in the size of the working and oppressed masses - hitherto apathetic - who are capable of waging the political struggle), weakens the government, and makes it possible for the revolutionaries to rapidly overthrow it.¹¹

It seems to me that repeated revolutions, revolutionary crises, near-revolutionary crises, mass movements that do not issue in revolutionary crises, regime crises without (social-) revolutionary implications, and, indeed, counterrevolutions like 1989-91, confirm the fundamentals of Lenin's approach. Revolutionary crisis requires *both* crisis of the old order *and* the clear unwillingness of those below to put up any longer.

Further, in fact, this unwillingness of those below to put up any longer requires not merely intensity of oppression, but also widespread perception that *another way of doing things is possible*. I referred above to Lenin's 1913 reference to masses of workers striking on May Day, and to the February 1917 International Women's Day strike/demonstration that triggered the revolution. In both cases - and more generally in the global revolutionary wave of 1916-20 - the idea that another way of doing things is possible was given by the existence of the Second International, its constituent parties and their associated unions, coops, clubs and other organisations - and their promotion of socialism and radical democracy as an alternative to the existing order.

In the revolutionary wave of 1944-49 the idea that another way of doing things is possible was given mainly by the USSR and the involvement of the communist parties in the wartime resistance movements. In the weaker global surge of around 1967-79, the imagined alternative remained in part the 'Soviet bloc', but focussed more on third-world revolutions, in particular Cuba and Vietnam.

Where are we now (or, what are the present dynamics) from the standpoint of this understanding of revolutionary crisis? We have to begin with the stage of decay or crisis of the regime, how far it is "impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule". In this

field a big problem of Marxist analysis is the loss of the distinction between chronic problems and "crisis" due to the casual use of "crisis" to mean chronic problems ('housing crisis', and so on; but equally the early 20th century 'Revisionists' and Georges Sorel's 'crisis of Marxism').

US decline

First, the Trotskyists in 1938 falsely diagnosed the death agony of the British empire as the death agony of capitalism. The world capitalist class did not have 'no way out' (unlike the Russian autocracy, landowners and Orthodox church in the early 20th century): the USA could take over. The present *global* situation is not yet the death agony of the American world hegemony: the US is in decline but still in control. It may be that this will entail the end of capitalism, if it turns out to be impossible to destroy the military power of the USA without either a generalised nuclear exchange leading to human extinction, or - the alternative to be hoped for - the proletarian-socialist revolution overthrowing the US constitution. The relative decline of the USA is not yet a *crisis*: it is more analogous to the beginnings of British 'declinism' with the military failings of the Crimean war.

Within this framework, the UK (considered as a firm) has been trading at a loss and paying dividends out of capital since the mid-1980s. This has involved making the UK a tax haven and an attractive place to 'park' hot money (the 'London laundromat'), as well as extensive sales of UK capital assets to overseas capitals (mainly US).¹² The country is approaching the end point at which open bankruptcy is inevitable; and this situation underlies both David Cameron's plebiscitary frauds in 2011, 2014 and 2016, and the remarkable instability of UK governments since 2016: only false pretences are *available*, not any actual working policy.

We are not yet in open crisis of the UK regime, but it is possible or even moderately likely in the near future.

On the other hand, there are symptoms among the masses of *aspiration* to a break with the existing system of rule. These can be seen in the Greek Syriza in 2009-16, in Corbynism in 2015-18, in the initial surge for the Spanish Podemos from 2014, and so on - and recently in the 800,000 expressions of interest in what became the considerably smaller Your Party. These show mass-scale aspirations that there *should be* an alternative. But these hopes are rapidly disappointed, as the supposed alternatives turn out not to involve any real break with the existing regime.

Alternative

What is absent is any mass sense that an alternative way of doing things is *really possible*. If we ask *why* this is the case, the answer is that the left remains in the shadow of the Soviet regime and remains committed to 'official communist' politics: socialism in one country/national roads to socialism, the bureaucratically controlled party monolith, and the people's front.

Until 1989-91 this was a plausible alternative, though always weak in mass purchase in the UK and USA, and tending to decline in plausibility. In 1989-91 the Soviet leadership voluntarily collapsed the Soviet and east European regimes, and did so because - as they openly admitted - their planning regime had failed to deliver results superior to those of the American capitalist empire. The institutional forms of the Soviet regime meant that no-one *could* effectively resist this collapse (and also that these forms inherently produced demoralisation, so that

what the masses saw as an alternative was the illusion that they would get western European living standards).

In the 'west' the equivalent is managerialism - both in the bureaucratic structures of the trade unions and workers' parties, including the SWP, and so on; and in the alliance with 'human resources' managerialism that is expressed in commitments to speech controls, 'safe spaces' and so on. By these commitments to managerialism, the left asserts that *there is no alternative*: that the managerialist regime of the state and capitalist management is the only way things can be done.

Getting back the mass sense that another way of doing things is possible will not happen through simple direct action. We cannot be always on strike, always on the streets, and so on. We have to fight for political democracy - both as the central core of a programme for 'high politics' and as the central core of a programme for reorganising and rebuilding the workers' movement.

The comrades who argue for deprioritising issues of democracy in favour of 'action programmes' are exactly wrong, and practically serve as small outposts of the ideological fortifications of the capitalist state order ●

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Notes

1. 'Ideas, unity, action' *Weekly Worker* December 4 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1564/ideas-unity-action).
2. *Socialism or extinction: climate, automation and war in the final capitalist breakdown* (Kindle edition 2019), acknowledgments page. The RCG has retained certain fundamentals (anti-parliamentarianism, direct actionism) from early Cliffism, though around 1980 it moved towards Maoist 'anti-imperialism' and belief that the 'western' proletariat is entirely a labour aristocracy, albeit without full Maoist theory.
3. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/tp-text.htm>: the section, 'The minimum program and the transitional program'.
4. And even some higher ranked ones, like the Helsinki police chief, Gustavo Rovio, who sheltered Lenin after the 1917 July Days; or tsarist general Mikhail Bonch-Bruyevich, who jumped to the Red side in October 1917.
5. 'The Spanish revolution and the dangers threatening it' (May 1931): www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/spain/spain01.htm. Section: 'The parliamentary cretinism of the reformists and the anti-parliamentary cretinism of the anarchists' (the whole section is relevant).
6. Examples in Otto Bauer's *History of the Austrian revolution* (HJ Stenning's translation, London 1925), chapter 10. For the Russian Revolution there are examples in L Douds *Inside Lenin's government* Bloomsbury 2018. Lars T Lih's long-standing arguments that 'war communism' amounted to no more than a retrospective theorisation of a collection of *ad hoc* emergency measures can provide more. See, for example, 'Bolshevik razverstka and war communism' *Slavic Review* Vol 45 (1986), pp673-88).
7. 'The world at a turning point', December 14 2025: iclf.org/spartacist/en/2025-world.
8. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/jun/15.htm.
9. On Cunow's politics (so far as relevant to this polemic), see M Macnair, 'Die Glocke or the inversion of theory: from anti-imperialism to pro-Germanism' *Critique* Vol 42 (2014), pp353-75.
10. 'The Collapse of the Second International', section II: www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/csi/ii.htm.
11. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch09.htm.
12. Among various discussions see N Shaxson *Treasure islands* London 2012; A Hanton *Vassal state: how America runs Britain* Swift Press 2024 and my review of it in 'Vanishing capitalists?' *Weekly Worker* April 10 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1533/vanishing-capitalists); plus M Macnair, 'Class composition in a snapshot' (part 2) *Weekly Worker* August 28 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1550/class-composition-in-a-snapshot).

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What we fight for

- Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

weekly Worker

Can SWP put shameful past behind it?

Too little, too late

Four central committee members closely associated with the ‘Comrade Delta’ scandal have been removed. Just them? Why now? asks **Paul Demarty**, and will it finally put this self-inflicted disaster to rest?

Bankruptcy, Ernest Hemingway famously wrote, happens “two ways”: “Gradually, then suddenly”.

Less than two months ago, the Socialist Workers Party’s first *Pre-Conference Bulletin* was sent to members, it included, as usual, a recommended slate for the new central committee. Nobody would have batted an eyelid at the recommendations: it was more or less the outgoing committee recommending itself as usual, and certainly the inclusion of Alex Callinicos, Weyman Bennett, Charlie Kimber and Mark Thomas was no surprise - the four having been on the body since time immemorial.

A very different picture presented itself in *PCB No3*, which landed on December 10. A new slate was proposed, with those four comrades replaced by Andy Brammer, Samira Ali, Judy Cox and Alan Kenny (Brammer and Ali were already on the *PCB No1* slate). For once, the outgoing CC was candid about its reasoning:

We have had to confront the legacy of the 2013 crisis, when the SWP failed two women who raised complaints of sexual misconduct.

The outgoing CC has acknowledged political and procedural failures and issued a full apology to the two women, which all members of that body agreed. This builds on earlier efforts by the party leadership to correct our mistakes by transforming our procedures to ensure a robust and zero-tolerance approach to abuse and harassment. The proposed changes to the leadership ... would continue this process.¹

On the face of it, this is a quite extraordinary turn of events, merely because it comes *now*. Callinicos, Kimber, Bennett and Thomas have clung, limpet-like, to the uppermost ranks of the SWP for a dozen years since the 2013 events. No new accusations have come to light. If these four (who, it is certainly true, bear grave moral responsibility for the SWP’s crisis) were not minded to do the honourable thing a decade ago, when the catastrophic consequences of their actions were already apparent - why do so today?

Before we answer that, we should go into more detail on the particulars of the case. In the run-up to the SWP’s 2011 conference, accusations began to circulate that long-time SWP top Martin Smith had engaged in abusive and coercive sexual relations with a much younger female comrade. These were very vaguely alluded to at the conference and then dismissed. Nothing more - so it seemed - would be heard about the matter.



The scandal will not go away

But, two years later, when the same comrade formally accused Smith of rape, the matter was referred to the SWP’s disputes committee - which, at the time, was largely composed of other senior SWP bods, many of whom were personally close to Smith. The verdict came down that there was no case to answer, and news rapidly circulated among the SWP’s general membership - a substantial portion of whom were rightly outraged. A rebellion began to take shape, despite the desperate use of expulsions by the leadership.

Conference 2013

When conference rolled around in January 2013, all eyes were on the vote on the disputes committee’s report, normally a minor formality. After a long debate on the Smith case, the report was narrowly accepted. A transcript of the debate was leaked to various left media outlets, including this one, and from there made it into the bourgeois media; Smith was anonymised as ‘Comrade Delta’ in the first version to be published, giving the scandal its best-known name. The SWP rebels began to operate in the open, in defiance of the organisation’s absurd bureaucratic dictates. The leadership responded with fire and fury, repeatedly attempting, by means of threats and stitch-ups, to “draw a line under the matter”.

Over the course of the year, two separate opposition factions resigned, taking with them a substantial minority of the active membership. Something like 95% of students were lost - no minor matter, when it is campus recruitment that largely refreshes the membership. Further allegations against Smith emerged, at which point he was put out to pasture. Probably worst of all, the SWP’s reputation in the wider movement - always a little shaky - was utterly destroyed. It faced

repeated witch-hunts on campuses and in trade unions, a phenomenon that continued for years.

Drawing a line

If we ask ‘why now?’, then part of the reason is that even today a line has *still* not been drawn under the matter. People have long memories. The SWP’s reception in Liverpool at the Your Party conference was notably frosty, according to CPGB members in attendance. The ‘Comrade Delta’ fiasco had been litigated out in the open, and so people know the names. Amy Leather, who spoke at the YP conference, was widely believed to have been the *de facto* leader of the most hardline pro-Smith faction in 2013. Bennett was also part of this grouping. (One opposition grouping took the name, ‘In Defence of Our Party’, and its members later drolly nicknamed the hardliners the ‘In Defence of Our Martin’ faction.)

Callinicos and Kimber were core leaders, and must bear primary responsibility for the obstinate refusal of any compromise or acknowledgement of errors, when it really counted. Callinicos at one point darkly warned oppositionists that “there will be lynch mobs over this”. He was right, but the “lynch mobs” that came were the earnestly disgusted trade union and student militants, encouraged by cynical bureaucrats, who did their best to purge the rump SWP from their demesnes.

The lack of accountability for these individuals has always made a mockery of the SWP’s later attempts to offer apologies for the gross errors. When the SWP CC released a contrite statement last year, it somehow did not include any names *at all* - not Smith’s and not any of the committee’s members. Its lessons learned were all bureaucratic and procedural, as if the SWP was a scandal-hit municipal social care office.²

There is perhaps a further reason why action is required at this moment. Dave Renton - one of the SWP rebels then, and now a member of Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century, which regrouped one of the major rebel factions - is to publish a history of the crisis, *Comrade Delta*, in July 2026. He promises it is thoroughly researched and based on extensive interviews, and should be a must-read for all us coprologists of leftwing drama. It is probable that new specific allegations in detail against the SWP leadership of the day will be included. It is also quite possible that SWP leaders are well aware of the specific allegations for legal reasons, since the publishers will want to head off any defamation actions.

Now, it is unlikely that Renton’s book will be really *transformative*

in anyone’s view of Callinicos and co. The general shape of their record in this scandal is quite clear, and quite dreadful enough already. Yet specific and concrete examples will tend to revive bad feeling against them, as is only natural. From this point of view, it would be prudent to ensure their tenure at the top of the SWP has already been over for six months by the time July rolls around.

The third potential motivation is more straightforward. There has been a considerable turnover of SWP membership since 2013. New members will, at some point or another, have become aware of this scandal. Those who remain members will, at least, have not found in it dispositive reasons to *leave*, but that is not to say they are happy to have this cloud hanging over them. It is embarrassing, and rightly so. The younger generation of SWP leaders may be quite genuinely frustrated by their organisation’s failure to settle accounts with the errors of 2013, and, if so, their patience with the CC holdouts may simply now be exhausted.

Whatever the case, the question immediately arises: will this work? We are first of all required to state what it would *mean* for something to ‘work’ in this sense. There are three types of answer. One is essentially moral: the SWP, and these leaders in particular, violated socialist morality in their handling of the Smith affair, and so the question is whether the very belated removal of these comrades from leadership amounts to sufficient penance. The second answer is political: does this act make it meaningfully less likely that similar mistakes will be made in future? The last is instrumental: will this in practice be *enough*, at last, to remove a major obstacle to the SWP’s participation in the broader movement? The ‘Comrade Delta’ affair curses them: “Instead of the cross, the albatross about my neck was hung.”

Forgiveness

Renton has, as it happens, weighed in on this, with a *Substack* post entitled ‘Is it time to forgive the SWP?’ It turns out he has another book, due out in May 2026, *Revolutionary forgiveness* (promoting two books in one blog post - you have to respect the hustle). He offers a basic heuristic for deciding whether it is time to forgive, which seems broadly reasonable:

- the perpetrator admitting they were wrong
- spelling out exactly how they were mistaken,
- promising not do anything similar again, and
- doing all they can to lower themselves and lift up the victim

(“reparation”), so that they have reversed the original dynamics of power and powerlessness, inside which they committed the original wrong.

Renton allows that, according to this rubric, “actually quite a lot of progress” has been made. The major exception is on the second point. He is right to object:

The SWP still refuses to say anywhere what mistakes the organisation made in 2013. Where did the faults start? What caused them? ... The [2024] apology says, “We were wrong in how we responded to the two cases”. How were you wrong? “The process we had in place at that time was entirely inadequate”. How was it inadequate? The SWP is willing to admit to the vaguest and most weightless of things - error - but can’t say what people did, or who was affected by their actions, or why they were so destructive ... Now tell the truth - give us your best version of the story. Tell us honestly what you did wrong.³

This is slightly unfair. The 2024 statement at least describes the failings in its old disputes procedures, and commends its new ones in some detail. Alas, as I argued at the time⁴ and mentioned above, this is an entirely *bureaucratic* explanation and solution. The inability of the *state* bureaucracy to protect the vulnerable from predators is on display in the unending ‘grooming gangs’ scandal (once one gets beneath the surface layer of racist spin). It is not clear why the SWP bureaucracy could do a better job, however tied it is to ‘best practices’, especially since such ‘best practices’ are at least as much about avoiding liability as they are about preventing abuse.

And, in the end, it is the *bureaucratic regime* that all but ensures scandals of this type. To really settle accounts with this shameful episode would mean abandoning the very model of pseudo-Leninist organisation to which the SWP adheres, which, in turn - its leaders correctly surmise - would entail a revolution in its overall politics. Nothing of the sort will be forthcoming - and so we predict that the ‘Comrade Delta’ hangover is a long way from clearing up yet ●

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Notes

1. drive.google.com/file/d/14WxXdMPxATkdK-1IKmpT41RBoYbaWGSv/view.
2. socialistworker.co.uk/procedural/party-statement/statement-2013.
3. davidrenton590934.substack.com/p/is-it-time-to-forgive-the-swp.
4. ‘Regrets, they’ve had a few’ *Weekly Worker* May 23 2024: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1492/regrets-theyve-had-a-few.