

weekly worker



Despite going down to Argentina, there is still England vs France. Should we apply Lenin's revolutionary defeatism to football?

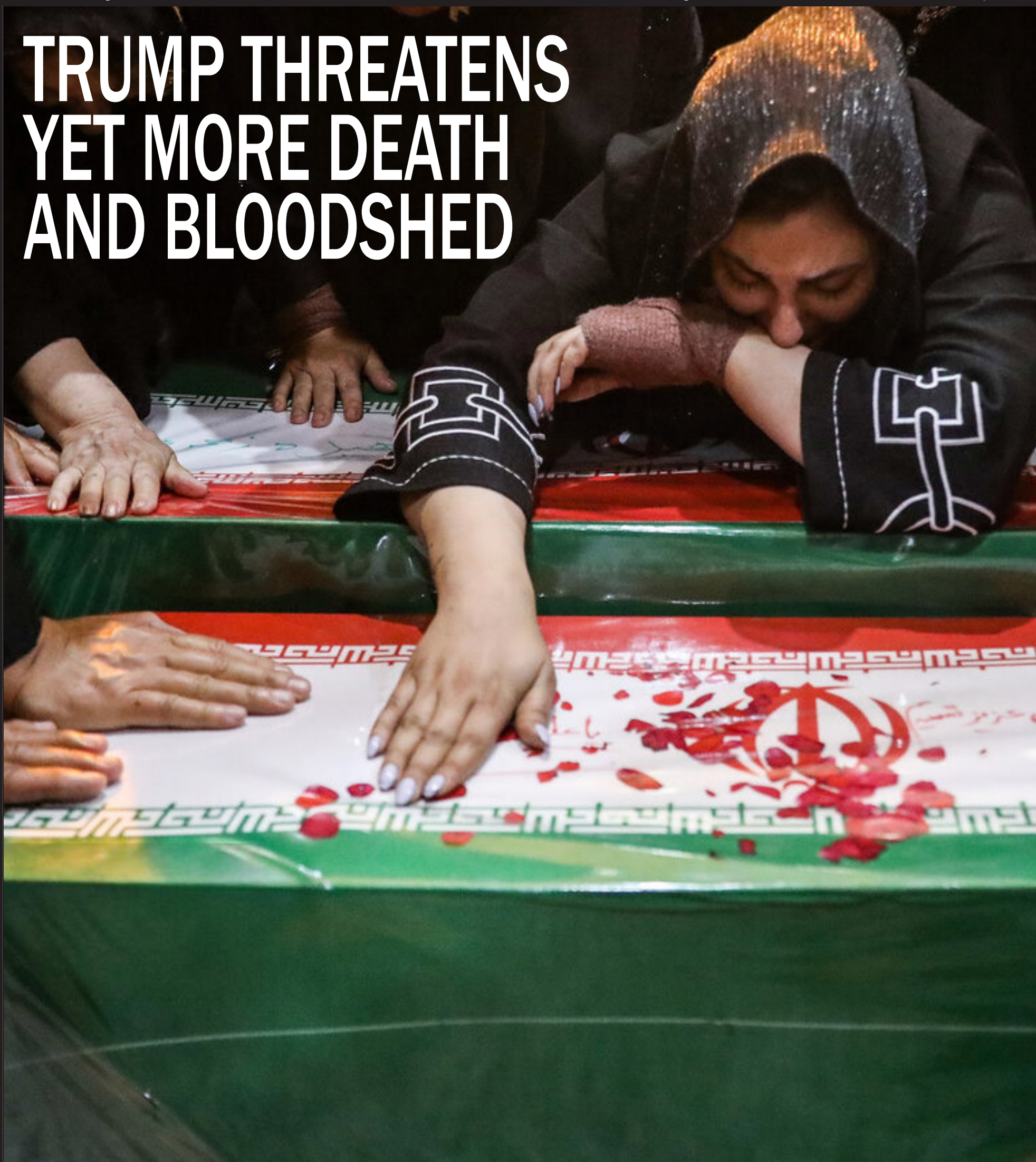
- Letters and debate
- Trump and red cards
- YP death throes
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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TRUMP THREATENS YET MORE DEATH AND BLOODSHED



LETTERS



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

You're all mad

Corbyn destroyed Your Party, and the ex-YP left is in absolute shambles. This is while the Labour Party is rebuilding its very shallow support under Burnham, and Restore Britain is poised to grow from Farage's gaffes.

Needless to say, the moment is quite dire for the working class. Attacks are coming, first from Burnham, then from Farage, maybe even Lowe. And what is the left doing at this moment? Debating whether it's OK to say the 'N-word', when quoting Marx's letter on Lasalle, and expelling Ian Donovan for alleged anti-Semitism. No need to mince words - comrades, this is tragically stupid and imbecilic. How did we get here?

In the aftermath of Your Party, comrades from different left groupings got together to form the Socialist Federation and the Connections network. In the midst of this, comrades among these made a sensible proposal: to form a debate network to discuss the key questions facing our movement, and not shy away from the fundamental debates on the left. This is the Socialist Education and Debate Association (SEDA).

I was moderately excited for this prospect. The one good thing about YP is it brought together leftists who knew each other, but never debated with each other, to actually discuss concretely how to unite our forces against the right and the Labour government. I hoped that in the aftermath of YP, these links would be preserved, and the debates and joint work could continue. But alas, the British left strikes again. We have yet to prove Marx's hopelessness in us wrong.

Someone in some SEDA planning meeting quoted Marx's letter on Lasalle and said the 'N-word' (hard R). Why this passage was quoted is beyond me. It should go without saying that this should be confronted - not only for its blatant insensitivity, but its total irrelevance from any actual struggle facing our movement. But the response from the SEDA leadership was not to confront this politically, but to put forward a motion to ban anyone that says the 'N-word' and also ban Ian Donovan.

On the 'N-word' issue, frankly I'm not familiar with the context in which this quote was uttered, so I won't comment on how best to deal with this concrete situation. All I can say is that I am sceptical that a blanket exclusion of anyone who quotes a racist slur without racist intent will clarify why comrades shouldn't be fast and loose with quoting these words.

On Ian Donovan, I think it's quite clear why we should not exclude him from debates. His views on Jews are not far from the classic anti-Semitic trope of a Jewish cabal secretly running the world. However, this view is unfortunately becoming increasingly dominant amongst the pro-Palestine movement in its downfall, especially among immigrant and Muslim layers. As long as Ian and his like-minded comrades don't spout open hatred or calls for violence against Jews, it's worth debating these ideas to show how they actually disarm our movement from fighting the pro-imperialist leadership of the Palestine struggle. Excluding Ian only lets him and his comrades dig their hole even deeper, and prevents us from

testing how to actually deal with this existing reactionary consciousness in the movement.

SEDA's response to the backlash against this proposal was incredibly bureaucratic - closing down the chat, and restarting SEDA, open only to people who agree with excluding Ian and banning any person that has quoted the N-word, even without racist intent.

On this, I agree with the *Weekly Worker*. However, the problem with SEDA's approach isn't just its moralism and bureaucratism, but the fact that it fed into the absolutely idiotic, libertarian response of the *Weekly Worker*.

Jack Conrad's recent talk was frankly bizarre and tragic. Comrade, do you really think the 'N-word' is just some word whose definition can just be changed, like 'queer'? Have you gone postmodern? Have you gone mad? Perhaps this question is clearer in America, but casually saying the 'N-word' just does not fly. Imagine making the argument that it's OK to pull out the P*** word in a debate in Britain.

Comrades, yes we defend democratic rights and free speech, but are we libertarian bourgeois democrats? No, we defend free speech *against the bourgeois state*. In the workers' movement, we shouldn't uphold abstract notions of free speech, but we should fight for open debate and actions which advance the class struggle. Can someone please explain how Marx's letter on Lasalle is relevant to anything going on in the world? How is this a key question to debate on the left?

Why are we debating whether we can quote Marx saying the 'N-word', and not, say, the best strategy to unite white, BAME and immigrant workers against far-right pogroms? Or, say, our stances on Ukraine, Palestine, Iran, immigration, LGBT rights, US imperialism, Nato, etc?

Why are we reading a letter from "a Black Communist" that gives Jack Conrad the 'N-word pass' and jokes about American TV shows and comedy podcasts (Letters, July 9)? Are communist newspapers now just for ironic laughs amongst an increasingly small number of readers?

An Immigrant Communist
email

Anti-Zionist fool

I'm always amazed by the misuse of August Bebel's "socialism of fools" polemic that is common on the semi-liberal western left against those anti-Zionists who confront without flinching the genocidal creed of Jewish chauvinism and supremacism that is political Zionism.

Bebel never encountered modern political Zionism or its genocidal manifestation in the Israeli state. He was denouncing the crude and backward politics of the likes of the French anarchist, Pierre Proudhon, who crudely equated Jews with capitalism and called for their extermination. Rarely can such an out-of-context quotation have been so misused of a socialist leader denouncing backward, incipiently genocidal, racist garbage to promote liberal guilt and political softness on a racist movement today, which is carrying on genocide right now.

This is easy to illustrate: if someone says, 'Communism is Jewish', that is anti-Semitism. If someone says, 'Zionism is Jewish', that ought to be a banal truism. But it isn't. Not for the western left. Why not? Because it is increasingly universally recognised that Zionism - that is, political Zionism that is dominant today - is just as genocidal

as Nazism. And the Zionist-created IHRA definition of 'anti-Semitism' says that it is anti-Semitic to compare Israel to the Nazis.

The idea that political Zionism is Jewish is therefore anathema to much of the liberal left. Because they have internalised at least part of the collection of Zionist tropes and amalgams that is the IHRA pseudo-definition of anti-Semitism. This means that the liberal left has subliminally internalised a number of notions that are characteristic of Zionism. Even when they swear opposition to Zionism.

Note that there is nothing derogatory about Jews in the above. Only about left liberalism.

Ian Donovan
Consistent Democrats

You're unwelcome

The last time I wrote to the *Weekly Worker* letters page (March 20 2025) was before Your Party had even been formed, back when I was briefly a member of the Socialist Party. You impressed upon me then in your response, made in passing in Jack Conrad's 'Zionism opens gates of hell' (March 27 2025), and lack of response to my April 3 2025 follow-up letter, that you had no real understanding of class politics and just said whatever you wanted to say, regardless of whether it was true or logically consistent. I, of course, stopped reading your paper as a result.

I am therefore very welcoming of the fact that increasing numbers of people now see you for what you are, thanks to your insistence on your right to say racist, as well as transphobic, things. However, as I have pointed out on Twitter, your article last week, 'Karie's clampdown and a mini-me' (July 9), contains two important lies about the Socialist Federation.

Whoever runs your Twitter page informed me that I don't know as much about the views of the leadership of my own organisation, of which I have in fact been one of the most public-facing leading figures, than I do myself. I have been on the 'admin team', the closest thing we have to an executive since April 19, and I co-authored the founding documents of the Socialist Federation - its 'Initial platform and proposed structure'. We have had months of rigorous internal debate and the views of everyone else in the admin team as well as their political histories. Yet apparently you know more than I do.

Specifically you have said our leadership team is divided on issues of trans rights, and that we are run by Workers Power and share their views on Ukraine. In fact, as the most cursory research would have told you, our initial 'Points of unity', adopted on April 23, already contained clear commitments against transphobia and a clear rejection of Nato.

Yes, there are *former* members of Workers Power in our group, just as there are former members of the Anarchist Federation, the Revolutionary Communist Party and various other groups. The former WP member among us left the organisation partly due to the very position on Ukraine which you incorrectly attribute to us, on the basis of no evidence, and flying in the face of our publicly issued communications.

Our conference on June 28 made our pro-trans and anti-imperialist positions even stronger. So the truth is completely the opposite to what you have claimed. I don't expect you to print an apology, because you probably think being asked to apologise for telling lies goes against

your freedom of speech. But I do encourage all comrades who read the *Weekly Worker* in the misguided hope it may lead to the forming of a new mass socialist party to go to www.socialistfederation.org and to read our initial platform and structure documents.

Do so and you will see that in fact it is the SF which is laying the groundwork for building such a mass socialist party, not the so-called "Provisional Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain", also known as the *Weekly Worker*.

We are building an organisation which is *not yet* a party precisely because we recognise the need for the disparate forces of the socialist movement to first come together to debate and vote on what the programme of such a party should be - not in one hurried meeting, but over the course of two or three years, with a combination of online debates and hybrid conferences, which will vote on adopting specific sections of the programme.

During the time it takes to build the buy-in for a programme necessary for the new party to likely be successful, the organisation conducting these debates must be run very democratically with strong mechanisms in place to prevent capture by any faction wanting to force through their own ideas. That is precisely why we are proposing a federal structure with clear mechanisms, by which any delegated authority can be recalled by the base. If you disagree with anything in our proposed platform or structure documents, you can submit amendments, of course.

The Socialist Federation is committed to dual membership and welcomes all socialist organisations or individuals who want to join. But no-one will be allowed to say the 'N-word' or any other bigoted comments, so don't worry, you needn't fear the *Weekly Worker* turning up!

Joseph 'Raz' O'Connor Meldau
SF volunteer team member

N-word shocking

The debate around the *Weekly Worker*'s usage of the 'N-word' has, in an entirely expected turn of events, resulted in a massive shit fight on Twitter. This has also shockingly seen a new wave of debates about the cultural issues of the CPGB, the political and organisational prospects of the group and, most interestingly, small discussions on the British left's relationship to racism.

Now for the record, I am of the full belief that the decision made by the SEDA steering body was fundamentally undemocratic. I also believe that the way to fight this is not by using the word proper, nor by retreating into the most sterile and moronic arguments of the 90s and early 2000s on the right on whether or not to use 'ze' instead of 'he' or 'she', and in fact, by focusing on that aspect, the baby of radical democracy has not simply been thrown out, but placed into a catapult alongside the bathwater. Politics is the art of making 'the impossible' possible, and part of that requires the tactical ability to use some level of tact in arguments - not out of opportunism, but out of the simple fact that this is the way which debates become convincing.

On the usage of the slur itself I have a simple perspective: everyone has the abstract right to use it, but that right very much should not be exercised. After all, as far as I am concerned, if a cis man strolled up to me and called me a tranny, he has

every right to say the word, and I in turn have every right to sledge him in the face for it. Even if someone off-handedly said the word not directed at me, the usage of it nine times out of ten by cis people is intended to be as an attack on trans people (and more oft than not trans women), unless they happen to be a particularly old-school mechanic. The 'N-word', however, is shockingly a word with a very different social context and indeed is generally seen as (for lack of a better phrase) the worst possible slur one can say. 'Tranny', 'dyke', 'Balt', 'sheep-shagger', 'Kraut', so on and so forth, are all seen as much lesser slurs.

Now of course, I'm using 'tranny' here to make the point that, just because someone may have the social right to say a slur, that doesn't really mean that they should. I think my own record in this paper should shut down any discourse over whether I have the right or not to call myself a tranny (or a faggot, a dyke, a Balt or any of the myriad of slurs that apply to me). In fact, for the record, I would like to say simply for the absurdity of it I am happy to give Conrad the 'tranny' pass, though I would also request he does not use it for the simple sake of not being a massive asshole. But the fact of the matter is that I really shouldn't use it because there are other ways of making my point.

The relationship of Marxism and racism is absolutely something which needs discussion, especially in the context of the current nativist chauvinism sweeping much of the world. But frankly there are two discussions to be had about Marx/Marxism and racism. One is word-mining and squabbling over the mega and a few letters which have aged very poorly; the other is a serious examination of the historic relationship of Marx and his political project to questions of racism, imperialism and chauvinism. Frankly, despite my immense respect for the CPGB, it does not seem that they have left this actual debate on the table and retreated into the same debate I have to have with my grandfather every Christmas around the survival of indigenous people in Tasmania, or the occasional rant on Facebook about how there's nothing really racist about 'gollywogs' or whatever random discourse has been set off this week by demented grandparents with too much screen time.

The most embarrassing thing about this whole fucking moronic discourse, however, has been the shame of looking at the utter mess in which the British section of our movement currently seems to be. In the period where nearly every other organisation in the partyist tendency is growing, developing and increasingly looking abroad (a project in which I am proud to say it seems Communist Unity is spearheading), this is the wretched condition, which our British comrades are stuck in. For an organisation which loves to promote the fusion process of the original CPGB there is a seeming refusal to look towards an actual modern-day variant of that fusion with the groups that both exist and share a concrete political perspective and strategy. Maybe that will require some cultural concessions, but for a cause as vital as reforging communism I would like to think that comrades could grow up and learn perhaps how to phrase things in a slightly less cutting way.

I have always been quite partial to comrade Conrad's argument that the only thing that can discredit

Marxism is Marxists. Currently it seems the only thing which can discredit partyism is partyists.

Brunhilda Olding
email

N-word secondary

I have been mildly perplexed at the response to Carla Roberts' 'Karie's clampdown and a mini-me' - especially as relating to use of historical language, precisely the 'N-word'. I don't think I've ever used this word, although I may well have within the flow of conversation, who knows - I've been consciously anti-racist my entire life, largely given the family labour movement imprint.

Central point - we benefit as a class through free and open exchange and *especially* in areas of controversy. As a consequence of the airing of this article, the trans question has emerged with further calls to isolate. Further issues of division can be anticipated, cutting yet more people further away from political exchange (ie, working class politics - especially when solution-focused), encouraging the retreat into silos.

The 'N-word' itself is secondary and it's more the increase in secular blasphemy protocols that seem antithetical to the ABCs of Marxist inquiry.

Paul Cooper
email

Anti-Semitism

I was surprised and admittedly somewhat amused to see two letters and one long article in last week's *Weekly Worker* debating the use of the 'N-word', while citing historical documents - the case in question being a certain letter that in recent years has come to define the legacy of Ferdinand Lassalle.

Now, I agree with the arguments made that leftists should not lay down *a priori* laws for preventive language policing; any censorship we practise should be the result of motions of *censure*, to be judged by members present on a contextual basis, whether or not the language a comrade uses is warranted. It goes without saying, therefore, that I disagree with the move by the Socialist Education and Debate Association initiators to exploit their admin password to pre-emptively ban even a debate over pre-emptively banning certain words.

With that said, please, for the love of scientific atheism, have some common sense. Don't make it a point of principle to say 'nigger'. when nobody objects to 'the N-word'. According to the Black Communist's letter last week, Jack Conrad argued that using the 'N-word' was "crazy, because we all know what your brain thinks". Well, comrade Conrad, when it comes to troubling topics like racism, there is a big difference between thinking about something and seeing or hearing it. There is a reason why scenes depicting sex and violence in media often happen 'off camera', for example. If even one comrade is offended by your saying 'nigger' instead of 'the N-word', in this case I see no principled reason not to accommodate her.

On to another, more important subject. I was very much amused to see that, when comrade Conrad defended his right to use "insulting language", he used the example of calling Ian Donovan "an adherent of the socialism of fools", because, as far as I could remember, "the socialism of fools" phrase was itself a bowdlerised translation of the real phrase used by August Bebel, "the socialism of idiots". I have seen both variations used in political discourse

- I, for example, am said to subscribe to "the anti-imperialism of idiots" - and indeed I found a 2023 article by Paul Demarty which states outright: "August Bebel described anti-Semitism as the socialism of fools - *Idiotensozialismus*."

"Fools" has come to acquire a different meaning than "idiots"; fools are implied to be just that - fooled - and can change their mistaken ways, whereas idiots are implied to be beyond help due to neurological impairments. I don't mind making an effort to avoid using the neurological insults, like "idiot", "stupid", etc, even at the risk of mainstream mockery, but we should not claim that our modern adapted slogan is what Bebel supposedly coined more than a hundred years ago.

I said "supposedly coined", because I did some research into the "socialism of fools" phrase and discovered two surprising things: first, Bebel did not coin the phrase, and second, he did not call it "Idiotensozialismus". A short Wikipedia article on the "socialism of fools" phrase sources Bebel himself attributing the phrase to the Austrian left-liberal politician Ferdinand Kronawetter. In a speech made in 1889, his words in German were: "Der Antisemitismus ist nichts als der Sozialismus des dummen Kerls von Wien" ("dummen Kerls von Wien", from my limited understanding of German, literally translates to "dumb dudes from Vienna").

From there, I found an entire article deconstructing the history of the "socialism of fools" phrase, published by our esteemed comrades of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. It's called 'The "idiot of Vienna"' by Dale Street, and I think it's well researched (if not well-sourced), and well worth reading. Its central claim is that Bebel and the SPD at large thought that anti-Semites were *not* idiots; they were right about the "overrepresentation of Jewish capital", to use Ian Donovan's phrase, and it would only be a matter of time before they shifted their focus from Jewish capital to capitalism in general. Hear it from August Bebel himself in 1894: "In your country [Austria] someone once said - I think it was Kronawetter - 'Anti-Semitism is the socialism of the idiot.' That's a clever saying. But it's not right. The actual bearers of anti-Semitism, small-scale business and small landowners, are, from their own point of view, not that wrong. They are confronted by capital mainly in the form of the Jew ... All the negative effects of capitalism thereby always appear to people in the form of the Jew, and so it is quite natural that these social layers succumb to anti-Semitism ... Anti-Semitism can be fully explained on the basis of the existing conditions, and in addition it is artificially encouraged and whipped up by all kinds of people."

Or from Eduard Bernstein in 1893: Anti-Semitism is "the intermediary link between socialism and the reactionary parties, apparently a dam against the former, but in fact a stage prior to the former." Or from Karl Liebknecht "in later years": "Yes, the anti-Semites plough and sow, and we social democrats will harvest. Their successes are not in any way unwelcome to us."

All of these quotes were selected, mind you, to persuade the reader of "the anti-Semitism beneath the surface of 'anti-Zionism'", which only the AWL is brave enough to recognise through its 'critical' support for the state of Israel and its sanguinary acts of 'self-defence'. So, while I think this article raises some valid points - we should stop attributing the phrase to August

Bebel, for one - we should not let the Atlanticists for Workers' Loyalism have the last word on this subject. A well-researched rejoinder is in order.

Bill Wright
USA

Don't say it

First, I want to state that there was an Australian comrade on Twitter who said that the comrade who wrote that letter last week (July 9) is indeed a real person. It was not, as some people seem to assume, Jack Conrad pretending to be someone else, so he could grant himself the ability to say the 'N-word'.

As to the issue of saying the 'N-word', I think it should be noted that the core of the CPGB's argument - that saying a word that is part of a quote and merely trying to discuss a historical text is fundamentally different from the utilisation of that word as a slur - is not itself any sort of racist argument and is not just an excuse to be able to say the 'N-word'. *However*, when trying to argue the case for this, it is incredibly important to argue effectively, to ensure that nobody thinks that you are just trying to get an excuse to say the 'N-word' and that you understand the very genuine reasons why people would rather not have that word said at all.

Unfortunately the CPGB arguments have failed to be effective and have used the word both during the Online Communist Forum and within the *Weekly Worker*, and never seem to properly acknowledge the genuine reasons why people might want the word to not be said at all.

It is not Stalinism, or even really a form of considerable speech control, to not say the 'N-word' during discussions. It doesn't stop any actual content of the speech itself from being said if you use the 'N-word' instead of spelling it out or speaking it. The purpose of people agreeing to not say the 'N-word' is simply the fact that it might make non-white comrades uncomfortable, particularly if they just joined the organisation and all of a sudden a bunch of white people around them are saying the 'N-word' and they won't really be able to tell if there is any animosity, because after all this is a group of people they don't know.

While the one non white comrade at the SEDA meeting was apparently opposed to banning the 'N-word', that may not be true of many other non-white comrades. If there was a substantial group of non-white members of the organisation and the majority of them thought it was OK if people said the 'N-word', then perhaps it would be different. However, a non-white person joining a meeting where everyone except one person is white might be uncomfortable if people start saying the word itself. Of course, debate could make people politically uncomfortable and intellectually uncomfortable, but we shouldn't be making people *personally* uncomfortable.

The CPGB needs to understand this, and at least discuss how they might counteract this discomfort that the word can cause people. The CPGB have been absolutely overly polemical about this issue and usually, of course, the CPGB's polemical style is warranted. However, this is a unique issue where they need to understand the potential discomfort caused by their stance and think through their arguments.

Ultimately the CPGB have acted horrendously during this debate; declaring the opposing stance to be Stalinism (which is just absurd), that they can say a word because

it has been 'reclaimed' (whether a word is reclaimed enough for Jack Conrad to say is not the decision of the CPGB). However, deciding to bureaucratically take control of SEDA, because anyone who disagrees with you on certain issues must be completely removed from the organisation is just absurd. The argument that saying the 'N-word' within the context of a quote without any intention of being cruel and merely trying to discuss a historical text is not itself racist, and to act as if the comrades who have this opinion cannot be included in the organisation is absurd.

I do hope the CPGB can consider that perhaps they didn't properly think through their arguments, that this debate really isn't worth it, considering the significant effect to their reputation that arguing it badly can cause (and they very much argued it badly) and try to properly understand why this is such an issue for many comrades.

This drama has, of course, effected the Democratic Socialists, despite almost the entirety of the organisation being opposed to the CPGB's stance on this issue - the fact that some of our most prominent members have been very much at the centre of the debate has caused people to think otherwise.

The Democratic Socialists, despite this, are the organisation that people who want to establish a multi-tendency democratic socialist party should join. There is no other organisation at the moment that can be the advocate for this type of politics that the Democratic Socialists can be. I hope all those that gradually quit over the previous few months can rejoin.

I also hope that the CPGB can stop sitting in a corner talking about

how it's Stalinism to not be allowed to say the 'N-word'.

Dovah
Oxfordshire

Off kilter

I'm not sure if is the heatwave, but I thought Jack Conrad seemed slightly off kilter in his Online Communist Forum political report this week. Two small points.

I agree wholeheartedly that electors should choose their MPs and that quangos, 'ethics committees', 'Parliamentary Commissioners for Standards' and such bodies should have no arbitrary powers, as is currently the case in the UK parliament. However, we also stand for the right of recall. It's right there in the CPGB *Draft programme*, as it should be. For this to be an exercisable democratic power, there needs to be *some mechanism* by which to initiate this. Petitions, parliamentary examination, and so on. Can't parliament, or a future popular assembly, have some oversight of an MP's activity (expenses, corrupt payments, bribes, misdemeanours, etc) without power to compel any action? Voters need full transparency in order to make such decisions.

Further comrade Conrad seemed to imply that there should be - on principle - a socialist candidate in the Clacton-on-Sea by-election. Maybe, maybe not. These things are tactical questions. And why not let a clown challenge a buffoon? Maybe the tyranny of distance has befuddled me, but I imagine most class-conscious voters in Clacton will rally behind Lord Binface to try to inflict maximum embarrassment on Farage - a dangerous, yet pompous, windbag.

Martin Greenfield
Australia

Online Communist Forum



Sunday July 19 5pm
Meet the new boss, same as the old boss: political report from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

Sunday August 2 5pm
Mike Macnair: Against Robert's rules and all that bureaucratic crap

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

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

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

WORLD CUP

End dictatorial control

Whether it is Spain or Argentina, the lasting legacy of the 2026 World Cup will be the open violation of football's integrity by its own governing body. The game cannot be left in the hands of FIFA, insists **Paul Demarty**

As I write, the final outcome of the World Cup has yet to be decided, yet its final *meaning* is surely settled.

The meaning of the tournament will hinge not on the winner, but on what should have been a relatively minor matter - the sending off of Folarin Balogun, a star player of the US national team in the match against Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the round of 32 teams. By all accounts, this was a soft red card, but not scandalously so - as the pundits like to say, 'You've seen them given'. But it seems to have dawned slowly on many Americans, whose interest in the sport they call by its old Eton nickname of 'soccer' is tenuous at best, that part of the punishment is a suspension. Balogun was to miss the last-16 tie with Belgium.

Rumours began to circulate of efforts to get the suspension rescinded. The American soccer association was considering its options; and a legal team headed by Andrew Giuliani - son of the former New York mayor and increasingly grotesque Trump flunkie, Rudy, and Trump's man on the World Cup organising committee - was planning on going after the referee. Within a few days, it seemed FIFA (the Fédération Internationale de Football Association) had capitulated to pressure, invoking unilaterally its right to suspend the sentence, and therefore clear Balogun for the Belgium game. Speculation that the pressure may have come from the very top came to an end a day later, when Donald Trump boasted of having achieved this outcome by calling his good friend, FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

The *immediate* matter was resolved quickly, by the Belgian team, who dealt the Americans a memorable 4-1 spanking. Their Twitter account posted a photomontage of the goal celebrations, captioned "overturn this!" Pro-Belgian sentiment on a level unseen since the opening moves of World War I had spread widely in the football world, and their victory at least gave us all a bit of catharsis. But the fundamental problem remains: FIFA, the administrator of the World Cup and the governing body of world football, had been shown unambiguously to have interfered in its own competition, in order to keep a local strongman sweet.

Integrity

That, of course, raises the question: how many *other* matters have been tweaked to the satisfaction of the FIFA people? There were already questions in the air. A red card suspension for Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal - by some measures the most famous man in the entire world - had already been suspended in the same way at the very beginning of the tournament. The four remaining teams in the tournament are all big commercial propositions - and, of course, include at least two genuine megastars: the French striker, Kylian Mbappé, and Argentina's Lionel Messi, widely regarded as the greatest player of all time and having a very good tournament, in spite of his age.

Argentina's victory over Egypt was clouded with controversy over refereeing decisions. Meanwhile Norway's manager was apoplectic to see England awarded a goal in the July 11 quarter-final, which began with the ball apparently colliding with a TV camera cable (which should have resulted in possession being handed back to Norway). FIFA insisted that the ball's internal microphone had



Red card should mean a ban

recorded no conflict, but who could believe them *now*?

This culture of pervasive suspicion of official decisions has already begun to blight the game, especially in this country. Large numbers of fans seem to believe that the referees are involved in a vast conspiracy against them. The threatened American lawsuit in the early days of the Balogun affair is a depressing sign that power in the global hegemon has been captured by the sort of puce-faced men whom we find insisting that dark forces are behind the poor luck of Arsenal with penalty decisions.

Now we have, effectively, an official mandate for such idiocy. FIFA has shown it will do it. It has shown that there is no depth to which it will not sink to keep its big quadrennial party on the road.

It was only 10 years ago that Gianni Infantino was elected president of FIFA, at an extraordinary congress, following on from the organisation's last great scandal: the arrest of half its executive committee on corruption charges by Interpol agents the previous year. Beyond the circumstances, there was probably not very much extraordinary about the congress, whose political result was obtained by the usual combination of back-

scratching and *quid pro quo* dealings.

Nonetheless, under the circumstances, Infantino could not avoid making the right noises about being a new broom. A little spring cleaning, after all, was desperately needed. Infantino, in reality, was the continuity candidate. Bizarrely, he and his predecessor, Sepp Blatter, hail originally from the same Swiss canton.

Blatter, by the by, launched his own broadside against the Balogun reprieve, to much amusement. This is worth mentioning because there is a link between Blatter's downfall and all this recent insanity. The FIFA arrests of 2015 ultimately concerned alleged corruption in the decision to award hosting rights of the 2018 and 2022 World Cups to Russia and Qatar, frustrating bids by Britain and the US. Blatter had shored up his own position within FIFA by favourable relationships with the mass of member associations outside the main markets, and other powerful countries like the US. The mass arrests sent a message: you *must* pay tribute to the big dog in global affairs. It is from here, rather than from Infantino's personal degeneracy, that we got to the FIFA 'peace prize' and the Balogun scandal.

So the new broom, sure enough,

turned out rather like the old broom. This is surely a matter of political-economic structures, and not the particular perfidy of the sons of Valais. As liberal critics of FIFA often point out, the organisation takes on two distinct roles that have contradictory incentives. On the one hand, it is a regulatory body, the last court of appeal in disputes over the rules, formally requiring that member federations submit audited accounts and so on. On the other, it is an event promoter. The World Cup is a big deal. A lot of money is floating around, and FIFA has a direct interest in maximising it.

The division of matches at the current tournament into quarters, American-style, is ostensibly in the name of offering thirsty footballers "hydration breaks", but referees were free to do that already. Its real aim, with comic obviousness, is the introduction of two extra ad breaks into broadcasts. The loss of trust in the disciplinary process is so insidious because, bluntly, if Cristiano Ronaldo cannot play, Infantino loses money, and we all know it.

Patronage

Despite widespread outrage at the open corruption of the current tournament, Infantino's position looks secure, and this is, again, for structural reasons. Where does all that money go? Directly into the pockets of Gianni and his cronies, to an extent, but also into the coffers of FIFA, which he controls. Relatively small sums in FIFA's terms - a few million dollars here or there - can make a big difference to a more marginal football association in terms of building stadiums or grassroots facilities. There thus developed - especially under Blatter, as mentioned above - a complicated patronage regime that could deliver votes when it counted.

There is also the stick - we mentioned those audited accounts deliberately, because member federations are appalling at delivering them on time. FIFA tolerates this, but, of course, can *decide* to demand compliance at any time.

There is thus a peculiar problem with the recent anti-FIFA backlash, which is that its chief protagonists are to be found in the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA). This is, without a doubt, the second-most powerful organisation in world football. The European football system is vastly more lucrative than any other market; the English Premier League is the greatest power within it, but there remain major leagues in Spain, Germany and Italy, and to a lesser extent France, the Netherlands and Portugal - to say nothing of the European international tournament.

European money has a hugely distorting effect on the global game. Many have noted the importance of diaspora players in some teams, especially in Africa. In a way the most spectacular example was Cape Verde - an archipelago off the west African coast with a population roughly equivalent to Bristol - whose team gained enormous respect for its determined and highly respectable performances, getting out of the group stages and forcing reigning champions Argentina to extra time in the last 32, when they were expected to be tournament whipping boys.

Most of their players are from Portugal (Cape Verde is a former Portuguese colony), and play in the Portuguese lower leagues, including that universal fan favourite, icy-veined goalkeeper Vozinha. Central

defender Pico Lopes is a Dublin boy, who plays for Shamrock Rovers, and was famously recruited to Cape Verde on LinkedIn. (The Irish team itself, of course, has long relied on the Irish diaspora.)

There are many more eligible males, let us say, in the home country than the diaspora in most cases. But the sheer disparity in the resources available to the big European leagues and everyone else ensures that people who have been through the associated training systems - even at lower levels - emerge as far stronger footballers on average. For the same reason, ultra-talented youngsters tend to wash up on the shores of these academies very early in their lives (Messi joined the Barcelona academy at 13, for example).

Danger of death

If then the fight for the future of football devolves to a slugfest between the UEFA and FIFA hierarchies, there is little hope. It is merely a fight between two corrupt bureaucracies, whose principal interests are commercial. This will, before long, be the death of football.

And I mean *death*. The skulduggery of this World Cup is a stark reminder that, under purely commercial pressure, compromises must be made to ensure a high-quality 'product'. The terminus of this logic is, for practical purposes, professional wrestling. Ronaldo and Messi are not the sport's first global stars - one could at least name, in addition, Pele and Diego Maradona. The sheer extent of their *individual* fame, however, is already distorting the football of their respective national sides, albeit far more egregiously in the case of Portugal. The *product* is a soap opera - like pro wrestling. It must have its faces and heels, its melodramatic beefs, and its *catharsis*, ideally under the control of some creative team.

Football is worth saving, because it is one of the only truly global forms of popular culture that does not, yet, have its storylines centrally administered, as in the 'five year plans' of Marvel Studios. Its rivalries arise spontaneously; hardcore fans, especially in continental Europe and South America, insist on disciplining their teams' owners. Even given the vast disparities in resources, this is a game that has ways for low-quality teams to beat good ones. Cape Verde were really not that far from ejecting Messi from this year's tournament, after all. Goals are so rare; even a true minnow only has to be lucky once, after the whistle is blown for kick-off.

Should football go much further on its current path of total capitalist dominance, it will be replaced. Its replacement will look more or less like football. People will kick a ball towards a net, more or less successfully. But it will be robbed of its carnivalesque plebeian libido, and of its ability to generate chaos. It will cease to be an art form, whose materials are opposed teams and frenzied terraces, skill, athleticism and psychological terrorism. It will, instead, be merely an entertainment product, like all the others.

Control of the sport must be devolved to the practitioners and fans themselves, in truly democratic arrangements. Certainly its future is not safe until the last FIFA president is hung with the guts of the last one from UEFA ●

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Anyone but England?

Despite going down to Argentina, there is still England vs France. Should we apply Lenin's revolutionary defeatism to this and other matches? Can such an approach win the masses to revolution, or does it leave revolutionaries isolated from the masses? **Carl Collins** looks at football culture

My five-year-old nephew had barely finished colouring in his 'Come on, England!' poster before I removed it from his hands and deposited it in the recycling. "I'm sorry, Harry," I explained, while reaching for a flannel to remove the St George's Cross painted on his cheeks, "but your support for the England football team represents nothing more than regressive nationalism. It's all there in the *Socialist Worker* editorial." He looked at me puzzled. "Have you given any thought today to the systematic starvation of Bengal?" I asked him. He admitted that, until a few moments earlier, he'd been mainly thinking about how many goals Jude Bellingham might score.

My family protested that he simply liked football and was joining in watching the game with the rest of them - like they did for most tournaments, indeed as they do every weekend when supporting the local domestic club. Undeterred, I replaced my nephew's plastic St George Cross flag with a placard reading, "The main enemy is at home", and suggested he critically support Argentina instead! As the rest of the family blithely gathered around the television with crisps and beer, committing the grave error of enjoying a football match together, I remained vigilant against outbreaks of class treachery. Every cheer for England was met with a brief seminar on the "plantation of Ulster". Every rendition of 'Sweet Caroline' was interrupted with a lecture on African slavery. By full time, my nephew had retired to bed to dream about dinosaurs, my sister-in-law had asked me to leave, and absolutely nothing whatsoever had happened to British capitalism.

Confiscating a five-year-old's 'Come on, England' flag is, of course, absurd. Yet the little story is useful because it exposes what happens when political theory is applied mechanically, detached from concrete conditions. Marxism insists upon concrete analysis of concrete circumstances. It is therefore worth examining why the July 8 *Socialist Worker* article's treatment of football, national symbols and revolutionary defeatism departs from that method and becomes mechanical.

Firstly, we must ask what social relation is actually expressed by displaying the England flag. The editorial mistakes the object for the social relation. It argues that because the St George's Cross has been associated with empire and British nationalism - both historically and contemporarily - displaying it during the football World Cup should be understood as reproducing that political tradition.

This is a simplistic, perhaps idealist, approach. It assumes that a symbol possesses a fixed political meaning, determined by its historical associations rather than by the social practice in which it appears.

Historical materialism proceeds differently. Objects do not possess intrinsic political meanings. Their significance depends upon the concrete social relations in which they are embedded. A church may function as a place of worship, a polling station or a food bank. A red flag can signify the demand for revenge in Shia Islam, international socialism or a warning sign on the railways.



England team: 1893

The same applies to football. For the overwhelming majority of England supporters, displaying the St George's Cross expresses participation in a mass sporting culture. It signifies support for the football team, encompassing family traditions and collective enjoyment. Millions of people who would never support chauvinist nationalism or an imperialist war enjoy international football. Their activity cannot simply be reduced to an endorsement of Britain's colonial past.

Marxism has always distinguished between the ruling class and the people. The British working class did not create the East India Company, organise the plantation system in Ulster or engineer the Bengal famine. Those were all the result of the ruling class. To identify ordinary workers with the history of their rulers is erroneous.

The *Socialist Worker* editorial therefore fails to recognise that form can be given more than one content. Because the same flag was once used by feudal Crusaders and then formed the centre of the Union flag, it assumes that displaying it during a 21st century football tournament necessarily carries the same political meaning.

Contested terrain

Popular culture is contested terrain, not nationalist or fascist property. This does not mean denying that the far right attempts to appropriate football culture.

Reactionary movements have always sought legitimacy by attaching themselves to existing forms of mass culture. Fascism did not invent football... or popular music. It sought to colonise them. In reality, football supporters remain politically diverse rather than inherently reactionary.

The *Socialist Worker* editorial appears to move from the reasonable observation that reactionaries seek to exploit football culture to the conclusion that football culture itself is politically suspect. This is guilt by association rather than historical materialism.

Taken seriously, the logic quickly becomes untenable. The far right has attempted to utilize punk music, skinhead culture, environmentalism, anti-globalisation rhetoric and even the language of working class solidarity. No serious communist concludes that these cultural forms are

therefore intrinsically racist or fascist. Instead, Marxists should understand them as sites of ideological struggle.

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony is useful here. Popular culture is neither politically neutral nor permanently owned by any one social force. It is a contested terrain. The political question is therefore not whether football has been used by reactionaries - it plainly has - but whether communists abandon that terrain or contest it.

Historically, the labour movement invested heavily in culture, because it understood that political consciousness is shaped not only in workplaces, but also through leisure, community and everyday life. Working men's institutes, choirs, brass bands, football clubs and educational societies all reflected the understanding that culture matters.

If millions of working class people derive identity, friendship and enjoyment from football, simply informing them that they are objectively reactionary does little beyond isolating socialists from the very people they hope to organise.

Although writing about participation in trade unions, parliament, etc., Lenin repeatedly criticised forms of socialism that confused political purity with political effectiveness. Communists do not win workers by demonstrating moral superiority over their everyday lives. They engage with existing popular culture, while challenging the bourgeois ideas that exist within it.

Treating ordinary football supporters as politically equivalent to fascists because both may display an England flag refuses to distinguish between appropriation and ownership, or between sporting enthusiasm and chauvinism.

The *Socialist Worker* editorial hints at extending the 'bread and circuses' idiom into a full adoption of a sort of revolutionary defeatism when supporting national football teams - from imperialist war to international football. Revolutionary defeatism, however, is one approach to an imperialist war, not sport, ignoring the conditions in which Lenin adopted the stance.

Revolutionary defeatism is remembered mainly from World War I. Most socialist parties abandoned internationalism and supported their own ruling classes in the inter-

imperialist conflict. Workers were being mobilised to kill one another in the interests of competing capitalist states. Lenin's insistence that "the main enemy is at home" addressed a specific political reality: participation in imperialist war strengthened the domestic bourgeoisie, while weakening the prospects for socialist revolution. Football occupies no comparable social relation.

Supporting England on a football pitch does not strengthen British imperialism in the same sense that supporting Britain's participation in an imperialist war would. A football match is not a military campaign, however enthusiastically politicians may attempt to exploit sporting success for patriotic purposes.

States undoubtedly seek to harness sporting victories for ideological legitimacy. But this does not mean every supporter becomes an active participant in that ideological project. Otherwise one could argue that using public healthcare represents support for capitalism because bourgeois politicians and governments celebrate the NHS.

Choosing not to support England may be a perfectly legitimate personal choice. It is not, however, revolutionary defeatism in the Leninist sense, nor is it inherently anti-imperialist or anti-racist.

In demanding that readers of *Socialist Worker* stop waving the flag when supporting the football team, we must ask, whether, if they do that, capitalist power has been weakened. Has working class organisation advanced? Has imperialism or racism suffered a setback? The answer is no, of course. Refusing to support England remains primarily an impotent symbolic gesture rather than a revolutionary act. After all, bar pitch invasions the crowds can only boo and cheer. They are not active agents in bringing about victory or defeat. That is decided by 22 players... well and the ref.

This article's opening scene illustrates the point. Nobody seriously imagines that removing a child's face paint and replacing his England flag with a lecture on colonial history advances socialism. In reality, it is likely to do the exact opposite. The absurdity lies not in anti-imperialism itself, but in mechanically transplanting a slogan developed in the midst of an inter-imperialist war into an entirely different social sphere.

Communists should oppose racism, challenge chauvinism and resist every attempt by the ruling class or the far right to monopolise popular culture. But none of that requires treating football supporters as unconscious agents of empire or transforming revolutionary defeatism into an injunction to prefer whichever team happens to be playing against England.

Nationalism

Socialist Worker also appears to collapse patriotism, nationalism and chauvinism into a single category. Yet this is not how Marxists have traditionally approached the national question.

Marxism has never treated nations as eternal or sacred. Nations are historical formations shaped by material conditions and class relations. The political significance of national feeling therefore depends upon the

interests it serves.

Lenin opposed Great Russian chauvinism, while defending the right of oppressed nations to self-determination. Communist and anti-colonial struggles globally have consciously mobilised patriotic sentiment against imperial domination. Whatever one's assessment of particular movements, they demonstrate that not every expression of national feeling is politically identical.

A ruling class may invoke patriotism to justify war or austerity. Ordinary working people may experience attachment to their country through local traditions, shared institutions, language, family history or indeed sport. These experiences are not automatically progressive, but neither are they automatically reactionary, as *Socialist Worker* suggests.

For precisely that reason, communists have generally sought to distinguish popular patriotism from chauvinism rather than abandoning patriotic symbols altogether. This is not because patriotism is inherently progressive, but because politics cannot be conducted by surrendering every area of popular culture that reactionaries attempt to occupy.

If socialists insist that displaying an England flag necessarily places ordinary football supporters alongside racists, many workers will conclude that socialism has little to say about the cultural life they actually live. The beneficiaries of such an approach are not the left, but those on the far right, who wish to monopolise national identity.

Patriotism

Socialist Worker closes by saying, "there's no such thing as progressive patriotism". Is this correct? As a universal statement I do not believe so. Whether patriotism is progressive, reactionary or politically ambiguous depends on its class content, historical context and material function.

As I have outlined, chauvinism and patriotism are not the same thing. Chauvinistic nationalism subordinates the working class to its 'own' ruling class, encouraging workers to identify with the interests of capitalism against the global working class. Patriotism, by contrast, can simply denote attachment to a country, its people and its revolutionary and democratic cultural traditions.

Could a strong patriotic feeling against colonialism, invasion or occupation not be funnelled towards progressive movements and outcomes? Did Marx, Engels and Lenin not support Irish independence from British colonial rule? Would not the patriotism of the Irish people towards their country and culture be a component of any successful independence movement?

This point in particular is what surprised me most about the editorial, given the Socialist Workers Party's participation in supporting the Palestinian national liberation struggle, where it frequently uses Palestinian national symbols - including the Palestinian flag. If one argues that there is no such thing as progressive patriotism, then it becomes difficult to explain why the patriotic attachment of Palestinians to their homeland is treated as something to champion ●

YOUR PARTY

Final death throes

Rebellion on the YP leadership cannot save the Corbyn party, says **Carla Roberts** - and not only because it will continue to be dominated by his right-hand woman, Karie Murphy

It is good that the botched suspension of three Grassroots Left supporters on Your Party's central executive committee (CEC) on July 4 has woken up some of the more placid members on the leadership, including the 'independent', Sam Gorst, and a handful of those who were elected on the slate of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership faction, The Many.

Up until now, those who were elected for The Many had gone along with the bureaucratic mismanagement of the party without as much as a peep. None of them expressed any outrage when a raft of socialists were expelled and whole organisations proscribed - some openly supported that move. None of them made any effort to publish the full CEC documents or criticised the fact that every single decision had been outsourced to the officers' group (which is tightly controlled by Corbyn's right-hand woman, Karie Murphy).

But, clearly, even some of the previously loyal Corbyn supporters - let's call them 'The Few'! - have had enough. Maybe not because of the lack of democracy and transparency - but they have clearly had enough of having to front what has turned into a very failed project.

Fourteen CEC members attended a 'special meeting' on July 12, which was called after Jo Rust (elected in the East of England, as part of The Many slate) put forward a motion of no confidence against chair Jenn Forbes and secretary Dawn Aspinall, who together fronted the three suspensions. As an aside, the attempt to backtrack has produced a rather hilarious exchange between Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi and Dawn Aspinall ... the first complaining of Labour Party type behaviour, the latter desperately backtracking and writing about "learning opportunities".

A motion of no confidence against membership secretary Cassie Bellingham was added just before the meeting. As we have reported, there are still very few branches that have been 'allowed' to officially meet, and those meetings are generally very badly attended, with most not hitting the stupid 20% quorum. In Liverpool of all places, the deadline for nominations for positions on the branch committee had to be extended, as there weren't enough candidates. This is not helped by the fact that Bellingham is moving at glacial speed and has been entirely sidelining CEC members, some of whom wanted to help out with the 'branches rollout'. Anybody who is not on the small officers' group is basically just there to give the illusion of democracy. All decisions are made upfront by the officers and then just waved through by The Many's majority on the CEC.

If that strategy was successful and YP was going places, we suspect most of The Few who are rebelling now might have swallowed their anger about being kept out of the real 'action'. But the opposite is happening. For example, the grand 'summer programme' of various commissions being formed, with events supposedly taking place weekly, has mostly evaporated. YP hovers at around 0% in the polls. Membership numbers will have seriously plummeted - though the details are being kept a closely guarded secret.

As a serious political alternative, Your Party is as dead as a dodo. As we have previously explained, that is of no real concern to Corbyn and those around him - he has no interest



Arch bureaucrat: Andrew Jordan - from SLP, to LP, to Transform, to YP

in building a real party of the working class. YP would not exist if Zarah Sultana had not bounced him into launching it. The Corbyn clique is working hard to make sure it will be nothing more than a tightly controlled vanity project - a nice retirement number that allows Labourite Corbyn to travel the planet, giving worthy speeches.

Embarrassment

It is different for the CEC members - YP has become a bit of an embarrassment for them. There were originally 24 members on the CEC, but Grace Lewis, elected in the 'public office holder section', had to leave after she lost her position as councillor. She was on her way out anyway. Former MP Laura Smith resigned last week, without giving a public reason.

The short statement published by those in attendance on July 12 says a maximum of 14 members were present for the three and a half hour meeting, with 13 supporting the no confidence vote against Forbes; 12 against Aspinall and 11 the motion against Bellingham. Unfortunately, the names of those present and voting are not listed, as some of The Few did not want to be named. Why on earth

not? Karie Murphy will know very well who was there - it is YP members who are being kept in the dark.

We know that all seven Grassroots Left supporters were present, as was Sam Gorst - which means five of The Few were present and voted in favour of *some* of the no confidence votes. Missing were Hannah Hawkins (elected in the North East), despite the fact that she previously mouthed off in various WhatsApp groups that "none of us were best pleased" about the suspensions. She has now left those groups instead. Just the type of courageous person you would want on any leadership.

Of course, Corbyn was not there either - he does not get his hands dirty with such matters. We suspect Monique Mosley (Yorkshire) stayed away too - she attends very few CEC meetings anyway - and we believe Cath Davis (elected in the North East) was not there either. Jim Monaghan (who replaced Niall Christie in Scotland) claimed, on Facebook: "I wasn't invited. Whoever is organising it didn't invite every CEC member. Hadn't even heard about it until I saw this post." The three people named in the motions also did not attend.

Everybody else was present,

though some people left the meeting halfway through. Either they only attended to have a look at who was there, or they got cold feet - or both. We hope the forthcoming 'minutes' of this meeting will shed some more light on all of this. We should know what our elected leaders are doing.

The three no confidence votes taken on July 12 may have, on paper, met the requirements demanded by the CEC standing orders.¹ These state that CEC 'special meetings' may be convened "at the request of 50% of all CEC or OG members"; that CEC meetings are quorate when 50% of members attend and that "a 2/3 majority of members present and voting will be required for the vote of no confidence to pass".

However, just before the meeting, all CEC members received an email from Andrew Jordan threatening not to attend, because it was "not compliant" with the standing orders. Jordan was national president of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, then moved on to the Labour Party under Corbyn, before joining Transform (where he acted as 'election officer'), after which he transitioned to Your Party, where he officially holds the position of 'returning officer'. A lot of jobs in a lot of parties for somebody who looks

about 21 - but clearly, he is a useful bureaucrat. He was not *elected* to the YP position, needless to say, and we suspect sending CEC members threatening emails does not fall into the job description either.

Nevertheless, here he writes with some kind of authority, probably bestowed on him by Karie Murphy (who presumably does not want her name on it, despite being the *de facto* general secretary of YP - unelected too, of course):

It has come to my attention that some CEC members have scheduled a 'CEC meeting' for this evening. Comrades will be aware that the CEC Standing Orders under item 5.2, 'Special Meetings', the provision exists for "Special meetings of the CEC ... may be convened: at the request of 50% of all CEC ... members ..."

I understand that certain CEC members are insisting on the meeting taking place today and have even produced an agenda for it - as well as circulating invites to some, but not all, CEC members.

There is no provision in the CEC Standing Orders for any member(s) of the CEC to insist upon the date of a meeting and/or a specific agenda and/or to circulate an invite other than those whose role this ordinarily is. To this end the provisions as outlined in items 6 and 7 have not been complied with in reference to this evening's proposed meeting and therefore this meeting is not compliant with the CEC Standing Orders. Item 5.2 provides for a request only.

On this basis the proposed meeting should not go ahead this evening and instead those comrades wishing to request a Special Meeting can of course do so, as per item 5.2 of the CEC Standing Orders, but must ensure compliance with CEC Standing Orders items 6 and 7, if wishing to do so. I understand a CEC meeting is scheduled in accordance with the CEC Standing Orders in any case within the next 10 days that has been properly convened by the Chair/Secretary.

I would advise members that an unofficial meeting in advance of our next scheduled meeting is not properly convened under CEC Standing Orders and would not be considered in order.

Andrew Jordan

This is a funny email, isn't it? Jordan admits that CEC members have, in theory, the right to *hold* a special meeting - however, they do not have the right to actually *convene* it, he claims. Only the secretary and chair have that right, he says. A bureaucrat's escape clause. Of course, those in the crosshairs are in no rush to call a meeting that could get rid of them! Forbes and Aspinall are, incidentally, also the only people who are allowed to put the agenda together for the next 'official' CEC meeting, scheduled for Sunday July 19. They can simply decide not to table any motions of no confidence. No wonder the statement by the attendees of the July 12 opposition meeting pleads: "It is our collective hope that the leadership of the party acts on the outcome of this constitutional meeting, so that we can work together to build the party our members hoped for - and that this country deserves."

Leaving aside the hopeless appeal

for ‘unity in the national interest’ (yuk), the comrades clearly know that they hold no power at all. There is no higher authority to appeal to, nobody that could implement these votes. It was a pyrrhic victory, at best. It is very clearly not the CEC that is in charge of Your Party. If Murphy decides Forbes and Aspinall should stay in office, they will stay. If she thinks they should be replaced, they will go.

But to be replaced by whom? Surely the seven Grassroots Left members remain ‘out’. They are too unreliable. Would somebody vaguely competent like Sam Gorst or Louise Regan in the chair really make a difference? They might make CEC meetings feel slightly ‘nicer’, but do we really think either of them would be able to rescue the sinking ship? Would they lead to an influx in membership? Overturn the undemocratic structures of YP? Make it into a vibrant party?

While Gorst at times supported the fight against the anti-Semitism witch-hunt in the Labour Party, he has also been something of a side kick of Liverpool YP bureaucrat Alan Gibbons, who used to run Momentum, loyally enforcing the witch-hunting constitution written by Jon Lansman. Gorst is one of the CEC members who openly supported the banning of left groups. Louise Regan is a leading member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, but also a long-standing supporter of the shadowy sect, Socialist Action, which is known for propping up Labour bureaucrats like Corbyn and playing (a very lucrative) Praetorian guard to people like Ken Livingstone - some of their members earned absolute fortunes, while running the Greater London Authority and various of its quangos. Their commitment to democracy and transparency is patchy, at best. There will be similar ‘issues’ with rest of The Few - which is why Murphy picked them in the first place. They are not reliable allies, by any stretch of the imagination.

To make matters worse, while there is certainly disappointment among the CEC opposition about how things are going in YP, there seems to be no agreed way forward - and it is difficult to think of one, at this late stage.

There is absolutely no chance that the 13 or 14 will follow the ‘advice’ of Richard Gerrard, who thinks that “the CEC opposition should declare themselves the majority and appeal

to the branches to recognise them as the CEC, preparing to break away” - so that they can join his Socialist Federation, presumably. Not only is SF a numerical dead end (there were 80 people at the last ‘conference’, down from 120 at the previous one) - its method is entirely wrong way around. As we have reported, political differences are brushed under the carpet through the forced amalgamation of vastly different perspectives, discussed in two-minute speeches, in an attempt to ‘get on with the job’ of launching various ‘mass actions’. This kind of culture of ‘we all pretend we sort of want the same thing’ can smooth over the cracks only for so long.

An issue like the ‘trans question’ could blow such a shaky endeavour out of the water in no time: Gerrard is a gender critic, who used to viciously attack all and sundry on Facebook over the issue, but has now gone very quiet about it and even deleted his FB account - no wonder, seeing as most of the active SF supporters adhere to identity politics. One of many ticking timebombs. There is a very good reason why Marxists dedicate serious time to discussing our programme - to avoid such problems. The shiny SF website will not hold things together for very long.

In reality, the Socialist Federation and Your Party are cut from the same opportunist cloth - it is just that YP is still an awful lot bigger. And why would CEC members go for the mini-me version? Not even the majority of the Grassroots Left members on the CEC are getting involved in it and there is no chance Zarah Sultana would touch it with a bargepole.

On the other hand, it is clear that a new chair and secretary would not and *could not* do away with the bureaucratic overall control exercised by Karie Murphy. She has fought tooth and nail to shape YP into what it has become, at the behest of Corbyn. They will do everything in their power to stop any real, significant changes. And if that does not work, they could always press the nuclear button and blow the whole thing up - or simply walk. The result would be the same, because Your Party without Corbyn certainly would not work. But we doubt it will come to that.

For a start, it remains to be seen if The Few really keep their bottle until

the next meeting on July 19. There will be a lot of pressure on them at that meeting not to support any votes of no confidence (if they are even tabled). Perhaps there will be a few sweeteners, too. Most CEC members probably *do agree* with the general gist of how Murphy has been doing things, just not with the fact it has been so staggeringly unsuccessful. After all, Murphy’s bureaucratic method is just a slightly crasser version of how much of the left today organises: either they have no programme to speak of - or they demand total ‘agreement’ with every single dot and comma; either they set up extremely bureaucratic top-down structures - or pretty much no structures at all; either they entirely dismiss the need for democracy and transparency - or they claim to adhere to it, while in reality enforcing bans and (self-)censorship. The outcome is the same: it creates sects - nothing more.

The left desperately needs a real cultural revolution if it ever wants to be in a position to build a real party of the working class. This hesitant mini-rebellion looks, unfortunately, very much like a case of too little, too late.

Dying on hills

Talking of bad culture, if you were following the recent ‘scandal’ over the CPGB’s attitude to free speech only on social media or WhatsApp groups, without reading any of the relevant articles in the *Weekly Worker*, you would think that the organisation has suddenly become a fan club for Tommy Robinson and/or Adolf Hitler. Apparently, the CPGB has “gone entirely mad”, its attitude is “bizarre and insane”, it has chosen “an unbelievably stupid hill to die on”, it “just wants to insult trans and black people” and, the most common charge, repeated in a number of variations: “The CPGB fights for the right to throw around racist slurs in meetings.”

As happens in the midst of a moralistic outrage, clearly some people have lost all sense of rationality. Our opposition to the bureaucratic shutdown of the nascent Socialist Education and Debate Association (SEDA) - which we thought might have played a useful role in trying to overcome the sect culture of the left, but which has now reinforced that culture - has created quite a scandal. My article in last week’s *Weekly Worker* has been deleted from a number of WhatsApp groups and online forums, as was a video with Jack Conrad from the July 5 Online Communist Forum, and there are calls, too, to ban CPGB and *Weekly Worker* supporters from those forums. To make sure they are “safe spaces”, you see. All sorts of presumably very ‘safe’ insults have been hurled at us in the process.

The most hysterical of those comments come from people who, funnily enough, also vehemently protest against our “toxic bullying” - a short cut for us arguing in favour of full transparency, when it comes to Your Party. Our calls on Grassroots Left supporters on the CEC to publish all documents - even those that Karie Murphy stamped with the word (shock, horror) ‘confidential’ - have been met with utter outrage; our publishing some of those documents described as “sabotage”. We therefore do not take the current outrage of Richard Gerrard *et al* particularly seriously: they are enjoying a sort of rather obvious anti-CPGB ‘gotcha’ moment.

We are particularly tickled by a self-declared “communist”, who goes by the name of Ryan Higginson on X. He simply cannot understand our “obsession” with free speech - he says what a lot of people on the left clearly believe: “Since when has the left ever been for free speech? We are rightly for the suppression of speech in all sorts of situations. To imagine otherwise is

pure liberalism”, followed by: “Surely you’re in favour of the terror? If so, how can you maintain the ‘principle of free speech’? You have to accept that its openness or limitation is dependent on the needs of class struggle, and has to be argued on that basis, not your current faulty liberal one.”

He is right, of course, that most of the left is indeed in favour of speech controls, the micromanagement of members and bureaucratic centralism. As is all too evident, that culture does not build you a real party of the working class: only small and entirely ineffective sects. As soon as differences of opinion emerge in those organisations, they have to split - into smaller and smaller grouplets. As for being “in favour of the terror”... well, yes, but we would rather avoid such an outcome. The better organised we are and the more people we have won over, the less need there is for violence. We believe the Chartists got it right when they argued “peacefully if we can, forcefully if we must”.

This understanding of needing to win over significant sections of the working class to our programme for socialism is *precisely* why we fight for democratic centralism and a culture of *unrestricted* free speech. People in this alienated, atomised society hold all sorts of funny ideas. In general, we should seek to explain, expose, convince and persuade - not to ban and censor. In fact, the cancel culture and bureaucratic control in many leftwing groups plays a large part in putting off ‘normal’ working class people.

Slightly more concerning is the fact that some groups and comrades who *profess to share* our commitment to ‘partyism’, free speech and an opposition to censorship and bans have joined in the outrage - in particular comrades around the Democratic Socialists and the Marxist Unity Caucus in Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (RS21). Quite a few in those circles have expressed “utter disbelief”, “total surprise” and “real concern about the conduct” of CPGB members. Perhaps the most common reaction here is along the lines of a plea to just shut up already: “Why would you double down when you can see how it is putting off those you’ve been trying to win over?”, we have been asked.

Most of these comrades argue in favour of free speech and against censorship and bans - *in theory*. However, *in practice* they demand self-censorship (as a minimum). Not only should we not have printed and spoken the ‘N-word’ (even if it was as part of a quote by Karl Marx) - why on earth would we want to look at Marx’s use of the word in the first place? That is just needlessly offensive, they say, with more than a nod to identity politics. And there is no need, is there? We can just ignore the fact that he used it five or six times in private correspondence to his comrade, Frederick Engels.

Well, the ruling class is not quite so easily persuaded to ‘drop it’. During the height of the anti-Semitism witch-hunt in the Labour Party in particular, there were plenty of bourgeois and Zionist commentators (for example, *The Guardian*’s Jonathan Freedland²) who used exactly that charge against the left: look, Marx was an anti-Semite and anti-black racist, here is the proof - and this explains why Corbyn and his followers are racists, too, even though they’re pretending they aren’t! It is a widely known and common attack strategy. We therefore supported the plans of a comrade - who is not a member of the CPGB - to run an ‘ABC of Marxism’ education and discussion series as part of the (now probably stillborn) SEDA. The comrade was planning on discussing a long list of issues, including Marx’s attitude to racism - surely an important subject for all socialists. This would have been impossible without looking

at the problematic sides of some of Marx’s writings, too. We are not sycophants - we are able to look at Lenin, Marx and other socialist greats without rose-tinted spectacles.

Having heard the comrade speak about the subject before, we know that he was seeking to clear both Marx and socialists of the charge of racism, and we think that would have been a very useful exercise in sharpening our weapons for confronting the renewal of this fight against the left by *actual racists and Zionists*. Instead, the CPGB is now called “racist” for wanting to do just that. This irony escapes our comrades, obviously.

We must also take up a rumour going round - spread by former supporter of the Democratic Socialists, Tom Gann, of the *New Socialist* - that four of the seven members of the executive committee of the Democratic Socialists “resigned over this”. Utter nonsense. One person, James Kulmar, who is heavily involved in the Socialist Federation, did indeed resign because he supports SEDA founder Alex Green’s diktat that only those people should now be allowed to get involved who “agree” with his list of banned words and organisations. But, seeing as comrade Kulmar never attended a meeting of the EC anyway, that does not weigh particularly heavily. He clearly used the opportunity to unburden himself of yet another WhatsApp group.

The other people who resigned are all members of the Marxist Unity Caucus in RS21, which had already made a decision to withdraw from leadership positions in Democratic Socialists a few weeks ago (though one comrade, Jon Benson, continues to put a lot of work into the Democratic Socialists). None of them mentioned this ‘scandal’ in their staggered resignation letters - one comrade resigned in fact many days beforehand, another one cited ‘capacity’ issues and comrade Benson thought Democratic Socialists members’ original decision to get involved with SEDA was a total waste of time altogether (he was right, as it turns out). This might well spell the end for Democratic Socialists, which is a shame, but not entirely surprising, if, in fact, all it takes to implode this political trend is to read out a quote from Marx.

Former CPGB member Lawrence Parker thinks that Jack Conrad has mentioned the ‘N-word’ on purpose, for “sect cohesion” purposes. No, it is precisely because we *fight against* the sect nature of much of the left that we take the struggle against cancel culture and speech controls so seriously. Our ‘partyism’ is based on the understanding that censorship and bans are a very slippery slope to building, at best, yet another sect. At worst, projects like SEDA might not even take off, having been strangled at birth with bureaucratic micro-management. Censorship and bureaucratic overreach go, by definition, hand in hand.

Like much of the left, Democratic Socialists has struggled with a lack of purpose or sense of direction during the slow death of Your Party. The ‘scandal’ over quoting Marx really is a reflection of the fact that what remains of the left in and around YP is now eating itself up. Most will probably drift out of politics altogether, some might end up in this or that small sect - and maybe a few will join in the struggle for a genuine Communist Party, which fights uncompromisingly for real, extreme democracy and against bans, censorship and self-censorship ●

Notes

1. docs.google.com/document/d/14F5EXEnhQCy36KUBcVKqqGanmwgijvumDuVTEpHTW18.
2. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/09/jews-money-antisemitism-judas-shylock-capitalism.

Fighting fund

Essential campaign

With half the month gone, as I write, we’re quite a bit behind the going rate if we’re going to make that £2,750 target for July.

Over the last seven days we received £510 in donations - thanks very much, comrades MM (£100), PB (£80), TW (£75), OG (£24), plus a tenner each from comrades PM, CC and MD. All those contributions came our way via standing order or bank transfer, while another six comrades clicked on that PayPal button - thank you also, TB (£95), PM (£50), ST (£20), AB (£11), plus SO and AR (£5 each).

Finally we got a cheque from comrade IR for £10 (yes, we still receive the odd one of those!) and the usual £5 note from comrade Hassan. As I say, all that came to £510, taking our running total up to £1,178. In other words, we still need another £1,600 in the second half of July. True, we’re approaching that time of the month when we receive a quite a few sizable standing orders, but, on their own, they won’t be

anywhere near enough to see us home.

So can you help us out? Play your part in helping the *Weekly Worker* to continue its non-stop campaign for what our class is sorely lacking - a single, united, principled Marxist party, based on genuine democratic centralism! That can only be achieved if the majority of the existing left groups give up on their individual sectism and agree to join us in that essential campaign.

So please help finance the only paper that prioritises that essential campaign. For more information on how you can contribute, please go the web address below. We can do it! Let’s make sure we not only reach that monthly target, but go shooting past it.

Thanks, comrades ●
Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are
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DISCUSSION

Principles and guidelines

Ever expanding rules, elaborate procedures and three-minute limits are a gift to bureaucrats and the full-time apparatus. **Mike Macnair** argues for openness, time for debate and the right to organise around alternative perspectives

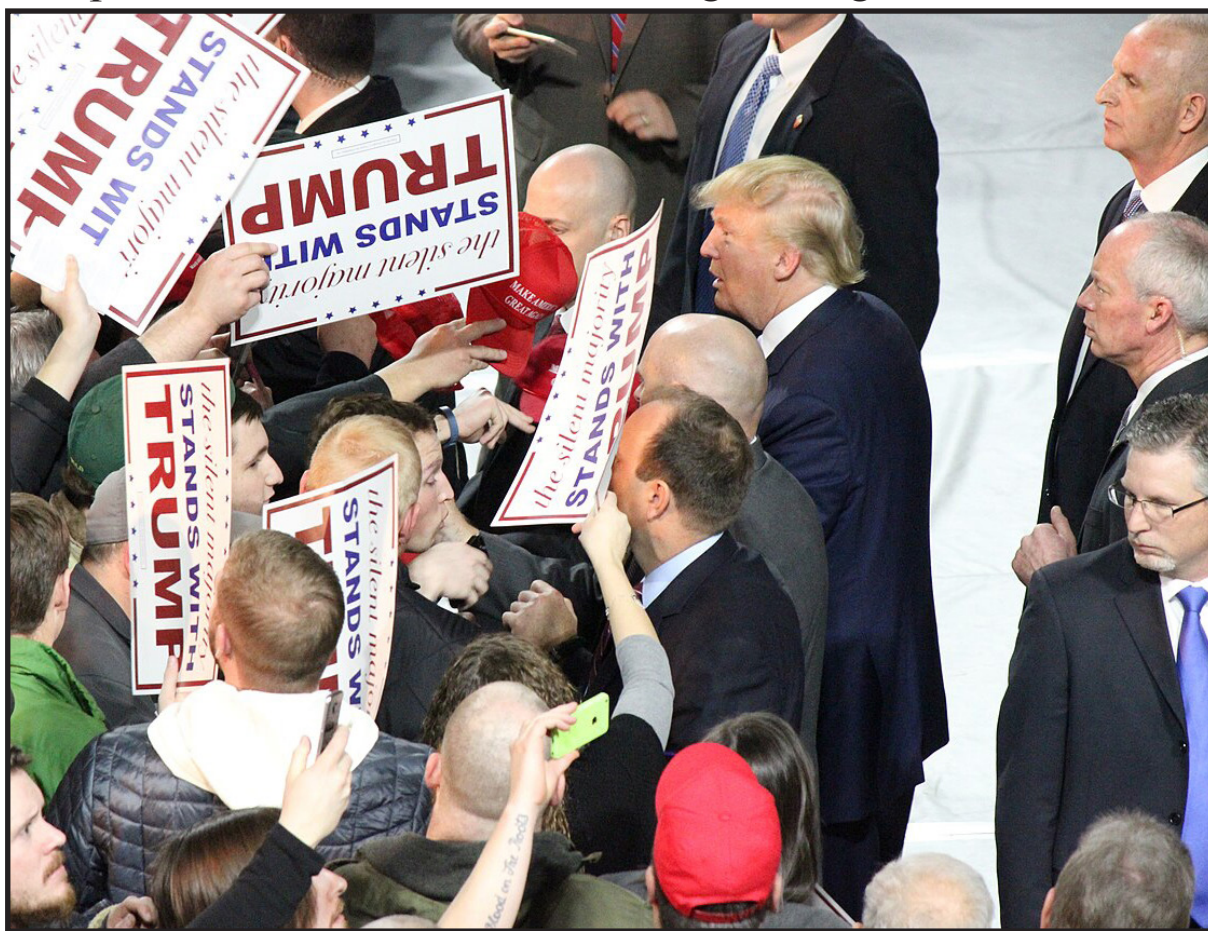
In the first three articles in this series I have been concerned largely with negative criticisms: in the first article, four weeks ago, I was arguing against the idea that questions of procedures of decision-making are a diversion from 'real politics'. Three weeks ago I was arguing against ideas that democratic decision-making procedures are time-wasting in general, and against claims that the urgency of the situation, or the need to seize the moment and the initiative, may require *undemocratic* procedures. Two weeks ago I argued against the bourgeois liberal 'constitutionalism' of *Citrine on chairmanship* or *Robert's rules*; and drew out of those arguments the more fundamental points that rules need principles to serve their interpretation, and seeking to decide everything by rules inevitably results in their overproduction (as in *Robert's rules*).

This week we move to the paramount principle - which will reassert itself at all levels of concrete detail - that people who are prepared to participate in the decision process should be able to take real decisions. The principle is two-sided. On the one hand, the 'silent majority' do not get to be 'represented'. On the other, those who do participate - as party, union, cooperative, and so on members, as voters, as jurors, get to take real decisions, not to have these pre-empted by officials or by unprincipled manoeuvres. The members - for shorthand, because we are not in power, so as to be organising the decision-making of the whole society - have to have the right to make mistakes. But equally, they need to be aware that their decisions *may* be mistakes - and therefore need to include minority views (which after the event may turn out to be right).

Within the framework of this principle, it will then be possible to approach *the conduct of discussion and of decision-making meetings*: meetings need chairs; how should the chair work (to draw out and promote the clarifying of disagreements); how to handle proposals for amendments; what about proposals that are counterposed to each other; and so on.

Decision-making on a larger scale involves specific considerations. The easiest example is national organisation, but the same issues would apply in a local or sectoral organisation that got big enough. *Sub-division* into local groups - cells, branches, and so on - is indispensable; and a large part of discussion can and must take place in these, before any larger conference. But, even so, large numbers imply too many choices available, and it remains necessary to narrow the range of possible choices beyond the procedural forms discussed for meetings in general. Part of this role can be played by factional groups and caucusing at conferences; but arrangements such as commissions (as used in the early Comintern) and compositing negotiations (as used in the Labour Party before the recent past) are necessary.

The same issue - too many choices available - poses in a different way the question of leading committees. These are as much needed by large local organisations as by national ones. Here the choice between *collective* leading committees and the cults of *individual* leaders (and the direct election of individual officers) is a choice between democracy and Bonapartism.



Donald Trump: another champion of the 'silent majority'

I reiterate the point that I made in the first article, that what follows are merely *my* views (though I draw on CPGB practice), while I may miss some important points and not everyone will agree with my arguments; and the point argued two weeks ago, and argued further below, that what is offered are *guidelines* for procedure on the basis of the *principle* that participants, not fixed rules, get to decide.

Participants

The first and most fundamental principle, as I said, is that people who are prepared to participate in the decision process should be able to take real decisions.

I referred two weeks ago to Ramsin Canon's identification of *Robert's rules* as "developed to protect the rights of... 4. Member non-participants (ie, absent members)", and made the point that this is the classic tale of the 'silent majority' invoked by Richard Nixon in 1969, and (without the language) Neil Kinnock against Militant in 1985, John Rees against left critics in Respect in 2004-05; and most recently the Your Party leadership. In the same issue of the paper, our letters column's resident Stalinist, comrade Andrew Northall, produced another variant. He argues:

But at whose expense would be this maximised impact and increased influence to the faction? It has to be at someone's expense! It is at the expense of the majority of all other members who are not members of factions. Factions therefore serve to reduce the democracy of the majority of the membership. That is one reason why they are antithetical to communist democracy.¹

This is, in reality, one of the standard pro-capitalist arguments against trade unions: that they are unfair to non-members. The argument only works on the pre-supposition that people *should not* organise themselves without the approval of those above them (the management; state officials;

the full-time officials and elected representatives). Back in April I made the point against Claudia Webbe's case for banning the left groups from Your Party, that:

Allowing factions does not deprive the silent majority - "the members who are not members of organised currents" - of any rights. They have the right to speak, to vote and to organise themselves against the organised minorities.

In contrast, the method of banning the organised groups also bans the silent majority from organising themselves. What they are left with is the choice exclusively between which of the full-timers and elected representatives to give allegiance to. This choice may be expressed as plebiscites on options selected by the full-timers, but it is actually merely an option of personal loyalties.²

The implicit idea in Webbe's argument, Northall's, and capitalist objections to trade unions, is that *permitting* collectivist organisation places people who disagree under a *de facto* obligation to organise themselves, if they wish to oppose those who do so already. Behind this is the presumption in favour of decisions being made by *private owners* - and therefore against collective action - which I discussed in the last two articles in this series.³

Communists are advocates of trade unions, cooperatives, mutuals and collectivist political parties: that is, that people *should* actively organise themselves for collective action. We are advocates of the "cooperative commonwealth": that is, that collective association for collective action should replace collective action organised and controlled by capitalists - and by capitalists' agents (management, state officials, and so on).

What communism offers is not - at least initially - a world without duties. At the most elementary level, trade unionism involves a duty not to scab.

The *Communist manifesto* placed among the initial "measures,

therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production", and specifically those "pretty generally applicable" "in most advanced countries": "Equal liability of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture."⁴ The point reappears in the 1848 *Demands of the communist party in Germany*:

4. Universal arming of the people. In future the armies shall be simultaneously labour armies, so that the troops shall not, as formerly, merely consume, but shall produce more than is necessary for their upkeep.

This will moreover be conducive to the organisation of labour.⁵

Harold Laski in 1948 asserted that the British Labour Party "have declared the equal obligation of all to work". The reference is probably to the industrial and agricultural conscription of the war years.⁶ The reality is that the capitalist class operates *economic* conscription - not only of soldiers, but of a wide variety of jobs; notably through the military and IMF attacks on poorer countries that drive migration as a form of imperialist exploitation.⁷

In one field, duties to work are very commonly accepted.⁸ This is jury service. There can be no trial by jury without the *duty* of jury service; a volunteer jury would (like the volunteer police force) display systematic bias. This is, incidentally, a fundamental problem with sortition of the sort used by Your Party (besides its anti-deliberative character and lack of transparency): in the absence of conscription, sortition cannot actually fulfil its claims to be politically representative.

I do not make these points in order to advocate that labour conscription and 'industrial armies' should be part

of our present minimum programme; or even to advocate that we should call for compulsory voting in elections (practised at present in a number of countries, and perhaps actually desirable).⁹ The point is merely that the idea that there can be no obligation to activity, which logically necessarily underlies 'silent majority' arguments like Canon's, Northall's and Webbe's, is inconsistent with any form of collectivism, including trade unionism and trial by jury.

Hence, back to my earlier point. The 'silent majority' or the unorganised are in no sense obliged to remain silent, or to remain unorganised. Giving those who turn up to meetings the ability to take actual decisions does not deprive the unorganised of any rights. On the contrary, the unorganised *ought* if they disagree to attend, to speak and to organise. We are concerned as much with duties to participate in decision-making (and to do so in good faith) as with rights to do so.

Officials

In reality, the claim of the officials and those elected to represent the silent majority is the claim to freedom *for the officials and elected representatives from accountability to those below*. And this in turn leads, under capitalism, to being enmeshed in the regime of institutional corruption that is the rule of the bourgeoisie.

In the absence of capitalism, it produces the dynamics of the USSR and other 'bureaucratic socialist' regimes: officials lying to keep their jobs, 'planning irrationalities', 'they pretend to pay us and we pretend to work', and the tendency towards capitalism either by way of collapse (USSR and eastern Europe), or of managed transition (China, Vietnam, etc).

The dictatorship of the proletariat or *la domination politique du proletariat* (proletarian political dominance) is not an immediate leap into communism or the abolition all at once of the wages system. It is the *subordination* of the state officials and the middle classes to those who continue to be wage workers (or dependents of wage workers, or dependent on the 'social wage'). The immediate *form* of this is the subordination of the full-time officials of trade unions and cooperatives, and of the elected representatives elected by parties, to the members. Thus Friedrich Engels, writing to Karl Kautsky in 1891 about the furore among the SPD leadership over the publication of the *Critique of the Gotha programme*, states:

It is also imperative that the chaps [meaning, the workers, or the SPD membership] should at last throw off the habit of handling the party officials - their servants - with kid gloves and kow-towing to them as infallible bureaucrats, instead of confronting them critically.¹⁰

As long as we cannot hold the officials and elected representatives in clear subordination (because we accept procedural schemes that give them control in the name of the 'silent majority'), the idea that there is a communist or socialist alternative to capitalism is not believable to the large majority of the working class (let alone to the rest of society).

Rules will not achieve this subordination - for the reasons given in last week's article. What is required is a *political culture* - both of officials themselves accepting subordination to

the membership, Trotsky’s “constant readiness of the leadership to hand over every serious dispute for consideration by the party”;¹¹ and of the membership treating the leadership with a degree of suspicion in order to keep them on their toes on this front - Engels’s “confronting them critically”, or John Philpot Curran’s 1790 “eternal vigilance” as the “condition” for liberty.¹²

What we can produce, therefore, are procedural *guidelines* that will tend towards the active participants in decision-making having the ability to make real decisions on points of substance: not merely agreeing who will *make* decisions, or indirect decisions through procedural game-playing.

What are these guidelines? I begin with discussion as a necessary element in the decision process, and in the role of the chairperson, before moving to methods of voting with a view to achieving clarity in real choices.

Discussion

The democracy we need is, as I said three weeks ago, ‘deliberative’: it involves discussion, in as much depth as is possible, having regard to time and the need to actually reach decisions, before going to the vote.¹³ (An aspect of this worth noting is that we may conclude, when a scheduled vote is due, that the discussion has shown that the vote needs to be postponed.)

It is convenient to deal first with *literary* discussion; though issues that need decision may arise first in meetings. The CPGB’s practice (attempted, not consistent) has two characteristics that are inherited from the practice of Comintern and from the Russian Communist Party before the actual *enforcement* of the 1921 ban on factions by the double police coup of late 1927 (against the left) and early 1929 (against the right).

The first point, which was shared by both the RSDLP and Bolsheviks and the early post-revolutionary Russian Communist Party with the major parties of the Second International, is that our political discussions are as far as possible conducted in public, through publication in this newspaper. We have argued this point repeatedly. I will only make three very summary points here.

(1) a Communist Party does not aim to take decisions for the working class: it aims to make choices available to the class - in particular the options of working class political action and of the struggle for workers’ political power, which the capitalist class and its various supporters (including ‘economists’/syndicalists, people’s frontists and intersectionalists) would like to keep off the table.

(2) our watchword is “educate, agitate, organise” - not the Trotskyist “agitate, agitate, agitate”. Debate is in itself educational, strengthening the ability of those who pay attention to form and defend their own judgments on an issue. It is as educational for the readers of the paper (and for people more widely, to the extent that they pay attention) as for members of the party.

(3) these are arguments for *party* openness of political discussion. The arguments are even stronger for openness of *state* political discussion. It is very notable that, as long as the franchise was restricted, *parliament* was a deliberative and not merely a voting body. As the franchise has been extended, parliament has been made into a theatre for electoral campaigning and the MPs into a sort of local ombudsmen. Serious deliberative discussion has been withdrawn first into the cabinet, and more recently into inner circles within the cabinet. We stand for radical democracy: that requires deliberation among everyone who is willing to participate, which in turn requires openness.

The second point, which is related, and is Comintern and not Second International practice, is that we put to the vote theses and resolutions with numbered paragraphs, which include the immediate reasons offered for a proposed decision, and not merely the ‘action points’. We try as far as possible to publish/circulate these well in advance of their going to the vote.

The point of including immediate reasons is the need for openness, already mentioned. We cannot include *all* reasons, because every argument has in it deep-going assumptions (general physics, biology, etc; the basic claims of Marxism about historical materialism, class politics and the critique of bourgeois economics; the content of our *Draft programme ...*). But we can include immediate arguments, and thereby open them to criticism and amendment.

The reason for using numbered paragraphs is to facilitate amendment, and also taking votes in parts where necessary. The design is to maximise clarity, as opposed in particular to unamendable texts, and to voting on the ‘general line’ of documents, both of which take actual decision-making away from the voters.

Conversely, where people have differences that are too substantial to be dealt with by amendments, we *urge* them to produce counter-line alternative texts. This does not mean that we encourage the multiplication of frivolous alternative texts, where the differences involved could perfectly well be dealt with by amendments. Nor that we ‘encourage’ the production of counter-line documents in the sense of avoiding sharp criticism of them, so far as is necessary, when they are offered. (We favour equally sharp criticism of leadership-proposed texts, so far as is necessary.) As with the question of the ‘silent majority’, what is involved is *duties* to contribute to discussion.

Meetings

Meetings are again deliberative institutions. If we needed only to vote without discussion, no meetings would be necessary. The consequence is that the discussion element of the conduct of meetings needs, like literary discussion, to seek to draw out points of difference that need to be settled; while at the same time providing space for issues that may not yet have been considered to be raised (which may, as I said above, lead to a decision that it is too early to vote and discussion should be continued).

The shape of discussion should, then, be as open as possible. The proposers of a resolution or theses should introduce them; any counter-proposals should be introduced, and any amendments; then there should be an open discussion from the floor; this should, in turn, be followed by replies from the proposers. The discussion is not bit-by-bit (as in, one for and one against motions, taken in some order selected by the chairperson or standing orders committee). Open discussion provides the possibility that amendments may be accepted, withdrawn or altered in response to discussion, or that new points may arise.

I made the point in the second article in the series that sufficient time should be allowed for discussion, and in meetings for individual interventions. The currently standard Brit left practice of three minutes per floor speaker is enough for soundbites, but no more, and therefore entails that real deliberative decision-making takes place outside the meeting (usually among the officers).

Meetings need chairpeople. Very small meetings, like small cells working on a particular task, can discuss informally. Anything larger needs a chairperson.¹⁴ This is not the same thing as “facilitators” in workshops and “assemblies”. ‘Facilitators’ start with the supposition

that the meeting is *not* a decision-making body; decisions are made elsewhere, and the job of the ‘facilitators’ is to steer the workshop, etc, towards a pre-ordained end and at most to report back the ‘sense of the meeting’. The chairperson’s job is different. It is also not, as in a meeting run under Citrine, Robert’s rules, and so on, to be a neutral arbiter applying fixed rules in the procedural games played by participants.

Rather, the chairperson has to work in the discussion phase to *draw out the differences of views that exist in the meeting*. This is an active role. The chairperson should not pre-empt the decision process; but, on the other hand, he/she has an active job to do securing the hearing of majority and minority views *and* interventions ‘at an angle’ to disputed issues.

I have focussed on this point on chairing in decision-making meetings. But it actually applies also to non-decision-making meetings (mainly educational ones). The reason is the point made above: that debate is in itself educational, strengthening the ability of those who pay attention to form and defend their own judgments on the issue.

Online or hybrid meetings inevitably make these tasks more difficult. I do not think that there is a simple solution to this problem.

Voting

Should we vote? Organisations’ rules commonly contain a *quorum* - a minimum percentage of those entitled to vote who should be in attendance before a vote is to be taken (or is to be binding). The origin of the quorum is in Tudor commissions of justices of the peace; most local gentry were included in the commission, but the regular sessions of justices had to include members of the quorum. These were individual JPs who were legally qualified, or were regarded by government as politically reliable (the two were connected, because crown patronage of lawyers’ professional opportunities made many lawyers politically reliable).¹⁵ Quorum rules have subsequently been adapted into percentages of those entitled to vote, and widely adopted as part of what Ramsin Canon calls protecting “the rights of ... member non-participants [ie, absent members]”, the silent majority. But, as I have already argued, this is still protecting *government*, meaning the officials, against the membership.

This does not mean that every meeting, however badly attended, should take binding decisions. But the point is a matter of *political judgment*. Decisions that are relatively uncontroversial may perfectly legitimately be taken in badly attended meetings, though they must, like all decisions, be open to revocation by later meetings. On the other hand, where a meeting to discuss a controversial question turns out to be badly attended, this is a legitimate political reason for deferring voting.

In what order should votes be taken? I made the point in the third article in the series that the Roberts’ rules/ Citrine political form entails that the chair, or standing orders committee, can use the *order* in which motions are taken to manipulate both the outcome of votes and the information available to voters about the level of support for minority views.¹⁶

(It is worth noting at this point that ‘first past the post’ election of single MPs for constituencies has the same effect of reducing the information available to voters about support for minority views, by forcing a choice between the two gangs of bribe-takers. The single-MP constituency is part of the reduction of the democratic elements of the constitution in response to the extension of the franchise in the Reform Acts.)

The starting point for deciding

the order of voting is that it is necessary to decide whether motions are *counterposed*. They are counterposed if passing them both would create a contradictory set of decisions. Amendments may also be counterposed to one another. If motions, or amendments, are counterposed, they should be voted *against* each other: those for the first, followed by those for the alternative. The point of this procedure is that it allows the real support for each alternative to be seen. It may be desirable to subsequently have votes for, against and abstentions on the motion or amendment that is preferred in the voting against each other; but this is only really called for where multiple counterposed proposals have been voted against each other, so that there may, in fact, be no majority.

Amendments should obviously be voted on before the motion they seek to amend. A few additional points relate to conduct in relation to amendments. The first is that it is desirable to avoid wasting the meeting’s time with trivial or drafting amendments. Obviously, what falls into this category is a matter of opinion; but, as usual, it is not a rule, but a guideline. It is also as much a guideline for the movers of motions (who should be willing to accept trivial or drafting amendments to save time for substantive discussion) as for the movers of amendments (who should initially contact the movers of the principal motion informally).

The second point is that ‘delete all/ insert’ amendments are undesirable, as creating obscurity. They are usually used to circumvent submission deadlines for motions. There is a political objection to this course of action, which is that the membership needs to be given time to read and discuss motions. From this point of view submission deadlines are democratic. On the other hand, it may only appear in the course of pre-meeting discussion that the differences require a counter-motion rather than amendments in the proper sense. In this situation it is better to accept the late counter-proposal and consider deferring the vote if necessary. The choice is, as usual, political: and the issue is whether those participating in the decision process get to take a considered decision.

The third point is that people should only vote for amendments if they would vote for the motion if the amendment passed. If people who would vote against the motion even if the amendment passed vote on the amendment, the result is to create a false majority in the vote on the amendment and perhaps to block the ability of the proposers to put forward their own motion (the ‘wrecking amendment’ is a tactic not uncommonly used in trade unions, and so on; it is unprincipled).

My last point on voting is that votes should be taken formally as for, against, abstention; in voting on counterposed motions, for each of the motions, and abstentions.¹⁷ The reason for this is again information: to register clearly what the weight of opinion in the meeting is. Recording votes as “nem con” (nobody voted against) is a tempting shortcut, but one which is undesirable.

All of this, is, as I have said, *guidelines*, with the underlying principle remaining that the participants in the decision process get to actually deliberate and take actual decisions. So far it has proceeded on the basis of the ‘local’, whether geographically or sectorally ‘local’ (trade union factions, and so on): larger than a cell, which can work informally, smaller than a local or national organisation of any size, which needs subdivisions, leading committees, and mechanisms like commissions and compositing to narrow the range of choices.

This last issue, of organising democratic decision-making on a larger scale, remains to be discussed in the final article in the series ●

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Notes

1. Letters *Weekly Worker* July 2. I am concerned here only with comrade Northall’s general claim; the editors made, by the headline they gave the letter, the point that “Bolshevik” means “Majority-ite”: ie, Bolshevism was a *permanent public faction* of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party between 1903 and 1917. I make only, in this footnote, the point that the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain would not exist, and the paper would have been shut down, but for its supporters’ factional opposition in the old CPGB in the 1980s.
 2. ‘New proscriptions for old’ *Weekly Worker* April 30: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1583/new-proscriptions-for-old.
 3. ‘Time is on our side’, June 25: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1591/time-is-on-our-side (under the subhead, ‘Question time’); ‘Legalism and labyrinthine rules’, July 2: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1592/legalism-and-labyrinthine-rules (subheads ‘Serving capital’ and ‘Left support’).
 4. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm (emphasis added).
 5. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/03/24.htm.
 6. tribunemag.co.uk/2020/02/labour-and-the-communist-manifesto. On industrial conscription, outline information can be seen at www.iwm.org.uk/history/second-world-war/home-front/the-workers-that-kept-britain-going; with more detail in M Gowing, ‘The organisation of manpower in Britain during the Second World War’ *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol 7 (1972), pp147-67.
 7. Economic conscription to the military: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_conscription has an outline of the usage; M Day, ‘Ending Economic Conscription’ *Jacobin* October 19 2018: jacobin.com/2018/10/military-recruits-full-employment-welfare-state; www.theguardian.com/society/2026/jun/05/economic-draft-young-neets-military-divides-opinion. More generally, there is an interesting discussion by EC Toussaint in ‘The law and political economy of food oppression’ *Southwestern Law Review* Vol 55 (2026), pp141-85, on political action to block food supplies as a means of forcing the acceptance of low wages, etc. See also I Ness *Migration as economic imperialism* Cambridge 2023.
 8. Not just in Anglo-American countries: for civil law countries there is a convenient outline discussion in X Liu, ‘A comparative study of jury systems from a global perspective’ *Frontiers in Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol 6 (2026), pp331-42.
 9. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compulsory_voting has an outline and references.
 10. Engels to Kautsky, February 21 1891: *MECW* Vol 49, p131. There are several other related comments in this correspondence. “Servants” carries a clearer sense of explicit subordination than “employees”. “Chaps” is, according to Google’s AI overview, Engels’s English usage for German *Kerle* or *Geselle*, but is obsolete English; “guys” or “blokes” might work better.
 11. G Breitman and S Lovell (eds) *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-31)* New York NY 1973,p 155.
 12. The common expression is “the price of liberty is eternal vigilance” and the common attribution is to Thomas Jefferson (which turns out to be false): conversableeconomist.com/2017/07/05/notes-on-eternal-vigilance-is-the-price-of-liberty, elaborating on jeffersonlibrary.wordpress.com/2010/08/23/eternal-vigilance. For Curran see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Philpot_Curran. He is not only the first attested user, but closer to our present concerns, since in the passage quoted he was condemning the usurpation of Dublin mayoral elections by the aldermen, due to the lack of opposition from the Commons: “It is the common fate of the indolent to see their rights become a prey to the active. The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance, which condition if he break, servitude is at once the consequence of his crime, and the punishment of his guilt.”
 13. ‘Time is on our side’ *Weekly Worker* June 25: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1591/time-is-on-our-side (under subhead, ‘Question time’).
 14. ‘Chairman’ is sexist. ‘Chair’ works fine in oral usage, but the statement “meetings need chairs” in this article would read like a claim about furniture.
 15. E Hasted, ‘General history: Justices of the peace’ *The history and topographical survey of the County of Kent* Vol 1, Canterbury, 1797: see British History Online www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-kent/vol1/pp215-221. There is a detailed study of JPs and quorum JPs in JM Kendrick, ‘What makes a JP? A socio-economic and character study of Justices of the Peace in Elizabethan Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire’ (PhD thesis, Nottingham Trent University, 2025).
 16. ‘Legalism and labyrinthine views’ *Weekly Worker* July 2 2026: www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1592/legalism-and-labyrinthine-rules, subhead ‘Left support’.
 17. The old International Marxist Group and its successors, while I was a member, had a fourth category: the “no-vote”. I was never clear what was the point of a “no-vote” as distinct from an abstention, and I do not see any point to it now.

IRAN

Return of the military option

Trump is threatening to dramatically escalate attacks. In return Iran strikes against America's regional allies. There is a distinct danger, warns **Yassamine Mather**, of a wider conflagration

The renewed military conflict between Iran and the United States is no accident. It arose from the vagueness of the Memorandum of Understanding that had temporarily reduced hostilities, especially over the status of shipping going through the Strait of Hormuz. The MoU did not settle who would police the waterway, what counted as 'safe passage', or whether either side could impose fees or restrictions on commercial vessels. Those unresolved questions created the conditions for a rapid return to military action.

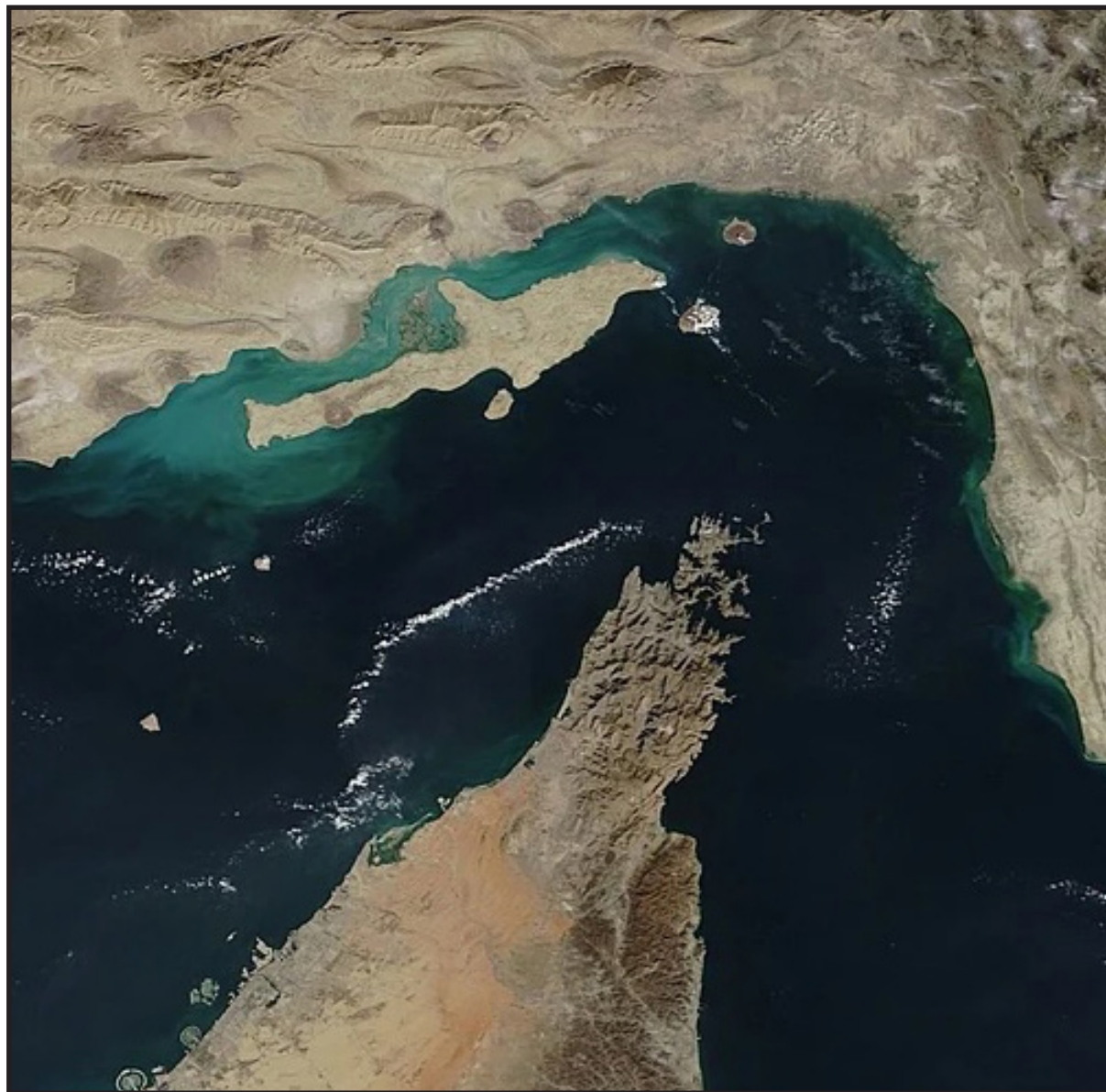
On July 13, Donald Trump announced that the US was reinstating its blockade of shipping to and from Iran and presented the US Navy as the "guardian" of the strait. He also proposed charging passing vessels a fee equal to 20% of the value of their cargo. The proposal was extraordinary: Washington has traditionally justified its naval presence in the Gulf in the language of freedom of navigation, not as a toll-collecting operation.

The proposal was reversed on July 14.¹ Ironically, US secretary of state Marco Rubio had earlier said: "It's an international waterway. No country is allowed to charge tolls on an international waterway. That's international law. That's the way it is all over the world, and that's the way we expect it will be here." But Iranian foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, responded by insisting that Iran, not the United States, had historically protected the strait. He mocked the proposed charge as excessive, while repeating Tehran's own argument that whoever guarantees security should be compensated. Behind the exchange of sarcasm lay a serious struggle over sovereignty, commercial power and control of one of the world's most important energy routes.

On July 15 Iran announced formal withdrawal from the MoU with the US, signed four weeks ago. In fact, verbal confrontation has been accompanied by renewed military action. US forces have attacked Iranian air-defence systems, coastal radar sites and missile and drone facilities. Iran retaliated against American military installations and warned neighbouring states that bases used for attacks on Iranian territory could themselves become targets. The danger is therefore not confined to Iran and the US. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Jordan are all exposed to the consequences of hosting US forces or assisting US operations. Indeed, on July 14 Saudi forces launched attacks on Yemen: Sanaa airport was hit. In return the Houthi regime struck back against Saudi Arabia. A general conflagration looks like a distinct possibility.

Meanwhile, Trump's demand that the Persian Gulf monarchies reimburse Washington for their protection also exposes the irony at the heart of US policy. The states hosting American forces are expected not only to accept the risks created by bases, but also to finance the military system that turns them into targets. The result is not regional security, but a chain of dependency, in which Washington's allies are drawn ever more deeply into a war whose results are impossible to predict.

In Iran itself the killing of supreme leader Ali Khamenei and the succession of his son, Mojtaba Khamenei, has created a highly unusual political situation. Mojtaba's continued absence from public view



Rival 'guardians' of the strait

has encouraged rumours about his health, his political authority and even whether he is capable of exercising power. Some reports suggest that he was severely injured during the strike that killed his father. In the absence of clear evidence, however, claims that he is permanently incapacitated or whatever should be treated as speculation rather than fact.

The more important issue is institutional. The Islamic Republic has spent decades constructing overlapping centres of power: the Revolutionary Guards, the Supreme National Security Council, the judiciary, the presidency, clerical bodies and the leader's own office. These institutions may allow the state to function for a period, even when the supreme leader is weak, hidden or incapacitated. This does not mean that the regime believes Iran no longer needs a supreme leader: it means that the office has become embedded in a wider security and bureaucratic structure that can 'preserve continuity' during a crisis.

Calls for revenge during Ali Khamenei's funeral ceremonies were unmistakable. They came not only from some officials, but from sections of the crowds, many of whom carried images of Trump and demanded retaliation. Yet the presence of such slogans does not prove that the government is able or intends to carry out spectacular assassinations abroad. Iranian officials understand that an attack on a senior American political figure could provide Washington with the justification for a much wider war.

The funeral gatherings nevertheless demonstrated a real political shift. Before the war, the Islamic Republic faced deep hostility over repression, corruption, economic decline and

the subordination of social life to the security apparatus. The external attack has allowed the state to mobilise national feeling and to present itself as the defender of the country. People who remain opposed to the regime may still rally against foreign bombardment and the threat of national disintegration. Opposition to the Islamic Republic and opposition to US-Israeli war are not contradictory positions.

This is the central political effect of the war: it has, at least temporarily, stabilised a government that was previously losing legitimacy. The killing of Khamenei has strengthened the regime's claim to embody national resistance, even among sections of society that had little sympathy for him. The mourning ceremonies combined Shia symbolism with Iranian nationalism and defence of the homeland. Palestine and Lebanon were less prominent than the language of Iran's survival.

That stabilisation, however, has strict limits. National unity produced by bombardment cannot repair a collapsing currency, unpaid wages, destroyed workplaces or mass unemployment. A state may gain support as the victim of foreign aggression, while simultaneously *losing* support, because it cannot meet the elementary needs of its population.

Catastrophe

The social consequences of the war are already severe. This week's estimates, cited by Iranian officials and international reporting, suggest that roughly two million jobs have been lost directly or indirectly. Around one million are associated with damaged factories and businesses, while a further million may have

disappeared through disrupted supply chains, shortages, transport problems and falling demand. These numbers remain difficult to verify, but the direction of the crisis is clear.

Thousands of factories and firms have reportedly been damaged or disrupted. Refinery workers, textile workers, lorry drivers, airline staff, journalists and employees in online businesses have all been affected. Factory closures in one sector quickly spread to others: manufacturers cannot obtain steel, food producers cannot secure packaging, transport firms lose contracts, and retailers face shortages and collapsing consumer demand.

Internet shutdowns have added another layer of destruction. Millions of Iranians depend on stable connectivity for freelance work, online retail, transport, communication and small businesses. Academic research on the 2026 shutdowns found that the disruption was centrally coordinated and that most Iranian network prefixes became unreachable. These measures were intended to restrict communication and political organisation, but they also devastated incomes and made the scale of unemployment harder to document.²

Official unemployment figures may therefore give a misleading impression. Informal workers, women, migrants, freelancers and those placed on unpaid leave are especially likely to disappear from official statistics.

Wages have been crushed by inflation and currency depreciation. Even a large nominal wage increase cannot protect workers when food, rent and basic goods rise faster.

The International Monetary Fund's projected consumer-price inflation of about 68.9% in 2026 alongside a

severe contraction in real output point to an economy experiencing both rapidly rising prices and shrinking productive capacity. Millions of households are therefore forced to reduce basic consumption, postpone medical treatment, or exhaust savings simply to meet daily needs. Even those who remain employed often face delayed salaries, partial wage payments, or months without pay, reflecting the acute liquidity problems confronting both private firms and state-owned enterprises. The combined effect is a deepening humanitarian and social crisis in which inflation, unemployment and declining incomes reinforce one another, leaving a growing share of the population unable to maintain previous living standards.

The labour unrest spreading across Iran must be understood in this context. There are reports of 135 separate protests, strikes, and demonstrations across Iran during June 2026 alone, involving nearly every sector of society. Pensioners are demanding payments and legal entitlements; healthcare workers are protesting against wage discrimination; drivers are striking over pay and costs; farmers are protesting over water shortages; and laid-off workers are demanding unemployment insurance. These struggles are not marginal disturbances. They are the social expression of an economy in which the burden of war, sanctions, inflation and state mismanagement is being transferred to the working class.

Iran does not permit independent trade unions, so much of this activity takes place through informal syndicates, retiree associations and spontaneous work stoppages. The state continues to treat labour organisation as a security threat. That approach may suppress individual protests, but it cannot eliminate the material causes of unrest.

Structural issues

Long before the military escalation of 2026, energy experts classified Iran as suffering from a severe, structural energy crisis. Despite holding some of the world's largest natural gas reserves, the country has chronically failed to supply enough electricity to its population due to several core factors.

Iran relies on natural gas to generate roughly 79% of its electricity. However, domestic gas consumption in the residential sector is so heavily subsidised and inefficient that during peak winter months the government routinely chokes off gas supplies to power plants and heavy industry to keep homes warm, forcing plants to burn highly polluting mazut (low-quality fuel oil) or cut output entirely.

Severe international sanctions have locked Iran out of global capital markets and blocked the import of modern, efficient gas turbines (like combined-cycle systems). The domestic power sector has struggled to maintain, upgrade or expand existing plants to keep pace with growing demand.

Intense droughts and record-breaking heatwaves over the last several years have severely depleted Iran's hydroelectric capacity. At the same time, rising summer temperatures drive up air conditioning usage, pushing the fragile grid past its breaking point every summer and triggering predictable, localised rolling blackouts.

The baseline fragile state of the grid was completely fractured

following targeted military strikes on essential energy infrastructure during the heights of the conflict. The balance completely shifted when precision strikes targeted critical nodes. Notably, the March 2026 strikes hit vital natural gas infrastructure at the South Pars Gas Field in Asaluyeh, instantly choking off the primary feedstock for the country’s thermal power plants. Additional airstrikes on refineries and oil depots severely limited the availability of back-up middle distillates and fuel oil.

While major thermal plants like Damavand (supplying Tehran) are heavily guarded, strikes on regional distribution hubs and transmission towers have created cascading destabilisation of the main grid. Unlike localised generation shortages of the past, physical destruction of high-voltage transmission architecture prevents power from being rerouted effectively from unaffected regions.

The destruction of the electrical architecture has triggered severe humanitarian and economic consequences this year. Heavy manufacturing sectors - including steel, cement and petrochemicals - require completely stable energy environments to run. The combined effect of structural deficits and bomb damage means these sectors have faced forced, prolonged shutdowns.

Power and water are inextricably linked in Iran. Striking power facilities instantly disabled water treatment systems, pumping stations and regional desalination plants. This has triggered acute water shortages for dozens of municipalities, compounding an already severe climate-driven drought.

While essential services like hospitals rely on diesel generators, banking and telecommunications have buckled under the 2026 blackouts. Mobile phone network towers in Iran generally rely on backup batteries that last only a few hours. This dynamic - layered on top of state-enforced national internet blackouts, implemented during domestic protests - has left large swathes of the civilian population entirely cut off from communications and financial systems.

This week, president Masoud Pezeshkian told Iranians: “I ask my people, please reduce your electricity consumption. What would happen if two lamps were lit at home instead of ten? The US and Israel targeted our infrastructure, they are putting us under siege.” Of course, the reality is that the problem is far more serious than this - switching off lamps is unlikely to make much of a difference.

Meanwhile, the slogan of the most conservative factions of the regime is ‘War, war until victory’. However, this is totally delusional.

The external attack has strengthened the Islamic Republic politically, but this should not lead the left to prettify the regime or exaggerate its strength. The government remains authoritarian and capitalist. It represses independent workers’ organisation, protects powerful clerical and military

interests, and forces ordinary people to bear the cost of its economic failures. Nevertheless, the crimes of the Iranian state do not justify the US-Israeli war, blockade or regime-change operations.

A serious internationalist position must oppose the attempt by Washington and Jerusalem to reorder Iran through military force, while also supporting Iranian workers, women, national minorities and democratic movements against repression from their own state. The alternative to the Islamic Republic cannot be imposed by foreign aircraft, naval blockades or intelligence operations. It must emerge from the independent political organisation of the Iranian people themselves.

The immediate danger is that both Washington and Tehran will misread temporary political advantages as permanent strength. Trump may believe that military pressure can force Iran to surrender control of the Strait of Hormuz. On the other hand, Iranian leaders may believe that the nationalist response to foreign attack has solved their crisis of legitimacy. Both conclusions are false. A wider war could devastate Iran militarily and economically, even if the state survives. It would also spread across the Gulf, deepen global inflation and expose millions more people to displacement, unemployment and death.

The decisive question is whether the anger generated by unemployment, inflation and repression can develop into independent working class politics - one that opposes imperialist aggression without subordinating itself to the Islamic Republic.

Iran and Israel

In a surprising development drawing international attention, reports published on July 13 - spearheaded by a joint investigation from *The New York Times* and *Haaretz* - alleged that former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been placed under house arrest. The detention is reportedly being enforced by the highly powerful intelligence wing of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The investigation details an astonishingly complex, multi-year espionage saga that reads like a political thriller.

According to leaked intelligence files, Israel’s national intelligence agency, Mossad, spent years actively recruiting and cultivating Ahmadinejad as a high-value intelligence asset. Code-named ‘Operation Puss in Boots’, the covert regime-change strategy was designed to exploit Ahmadinejad’s populist appeal. Israeli planners allegedly envisioned installing the former president as a stabilising leader to head a transitional government if the Islamic Republic collapsed under external military pressure or internal uprising.

The reports outline a sophisticated logistical network designed to keep Ahmadinejad in contact with Israeli operatives without triggering

the alarms of Iran’s pervasive internal security apparatus. Mossad operatives - allegedly including former head David Barnea - met with Ahmadinejad under the guise of international academic and environmental summits. These secret rendezvous allegedly occurred in Guatemala (2023) and Hungary (2024 and 2025), leveraging Ahmadinejad’s frequent travels to global forums. The investigation claims Israel covertly financed Ahmadinejad’s travel expenses and routed secret payments directly to his personal spokesperson to secure cooperation and maintain the channel.

The plot escalated dramatically early this year during a major military escalation in the region. In February 2026, as US and Israeli forces initiated targeted military strikes inside Iran, Israeli special forces took advantage of the chaos. A precision airstrike targeted Ahmadinejad’s compound, successfully disrupting local IRGC surveillance. Under the cover of the strike, Mossad operatives extracted Ahmadinejad and moved him to a pre-established, highly secure safe house deep within Iranian territory. The alliance quickly deteriorated. Ahmadinejad reportedly became deeply disillusioned with the realities of the Israeli plan and the mechanics of being installed via foreign intervention. He ultimately abandoned the safe house under circumstances that remain highly opaque.

Last week, after months in hiding, Ahmadinejad made a high-profile, unexpected public appearance at the funeral of Ali Khamenei. According to these reports, this public re-emergence proved to be his undoing. Having painstakingly reconstructed his movements, timeline and alleged communications with Israeli intelligence over the preceding months, Iranian authorities moved quickly. Ahmadinejad was arrested shortly after the services and transferred to an IRGC-controlled facility, where he remains.

While western audiences remember Ahmadinejad for his fiery, anti-western rhetoric during his presidency (2005-13), his relationship with Iran’s ruling clerical establishment dramatically soured during his second term. He frequently clashed with supreme leader Khamenei and the IRGC, attempting to claw back executive power from the clergy. In the decade following his presidency, Ahmadinejad repositioned himself as a populist critic of the regime’s economic mismanagement and corruption, earning him deep suspicion from the IRGC. He was repeatedly disqualified by the Guardian Council from running for president again.

The resurfacing of Ahmadinejad at Khamenei’s funeral is highly significant. The former supreme leader’s passing marks the end of an era and has thrown Iran into an intense, behind-the-scenes succession crisis.

In the meantime, western and Israeli intelligence agencies have sought to cultivate ‘reformist’ or moderate factions within Iran. Attempting to install a hardline populist figure like Ahmadinejad suggests a radical shift in strategy: exploiting nationalism. If the regime collapsed, a known nationalist leader might be seen as more capable of preventing total anarchy than an exiled intellectual or a western-style ‘democrat’.

In an official statement, Ahmadinejad’s office rejected the entire *New York Times* and *Haaretz* reports as “completely false” and made up of “Hollywood-style claims”. His team accused *The New York Times* of publishing fabricated narratives, designed to “mislead public opinion” and stoke internal factional divisions within Iran. They also vehemently denied that he is currently under house arrest or in the

custody of the IRGC’s intelligence wing, insisting that he continues his work as normal.

To support this, Iranian state media broadcast footage of a wan-looking Ahmadinejad attending a memorial service in Tehran. The veracity of the specific operational details - whether the Mossad truly whisked him away in a black Peugeot or met him during his bizarre trip to a climate conference in Budapest - is, in many ways, secondary. The real significance of this episode lies in what it exposes about the mechanics of foreign-backed ‘regime change’ and the domestic illusions surrounding it. The fact that Mossad planners - even tentatively - viewed Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as a viable vessel for a ‘democratic’ or ‘post-theocratic’ Iran exposes the sheer, desperate hubris of external engineering.

Ultimate paradox

For years, Ahmadinejad was the poster child of hardline anti-Zionism, holocaust denial and domestic crackdowns (especially during the 2009 ‘green movement’). That intelligence services could convince themselves that a deeply divisive, populist hardliner could smoothly become a western-friendly transition leader reflects the same strategic myopia that characterised past disastrous interventions in Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan. It assumes a nation’s political landscape is a chessboard, where pieces can be exchanged in a vacuum, entirely ignoring domestic legitimacy and the inevitability of a chaotic power structure.

This episode also deals a severe blow to the narrative pushed by Iranian monarchists and supporters of Reza Pahlavi, the son of the last shah. For decades, the royalist diaspora has operated under the assumption that Pahlavi is the west’s - and specifically Israel’s - natural and preferred choice to lead a transition if the Islamic Republic collapses. They have structured their entire lobbyist strategy around presenting him as the sole credible alternative.

The revelation that Israeli intelligence was actively looking elsewhere proves that foreign intelligence agencies do not share the romanticised, nostalgic illusions of the royalists. When push comes to shove, foreign powers seeking regime change prioritise pragmatic disruptors who already possess established networks of domestic power (even compromised ones within the security apparatus) over exiled figures who have spent decades abroad and lack an organic, organised boots-on-the-ground apparatus inside Iran.

The entire saga serves as a sobering reminder: foreign-led transition plans are almost always built on ‘wild fantasies’. They ignore the complex realities of Iranian society, bypass genuine democratic movements and rely on backroom deals with figures whose domestic credibility has already been thoroughly spent ●

Notes

1. See apnews.com/article/iran-us-hormuz-strait-war-july-14-2026-abd060c55feca216625689e57d8f76be.
2. Academic studies by Giuseppe Aceto, Valerio Persico and Antonio Pescapè, and by Ali Sadeghi Jahromi and Jason Jaskolka, on Iran’s 2026 internet shutdowns are available at www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Iran’s-January-2026-Internet-Shutdown/%3A-Public-Data/%2C-Aceto-Persico/289dff849784c17d4729d914ae8ba941ccb55795.

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What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called ‘parties’ on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, ‘One state, one party’.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women’s oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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weekly Worker

Mainstream politicians are corrupt too

Nigel Farage and rule 5

The mainstream media is bigging up a candidate dressed as a bin. But the only way to really see off the threat from Nigel Farage and the far right is by fighting for independent working class politics, argues **Eddie Ford**

Various people have said that the reason Nigel Farage triggered a by-election in Clacton was to knock down Rupert Lowe's Restore Party and confirm him as the dominant figure on the right - either that or he wanted to steal the headlines from Andy Burnham, who will, of course, shortly become prime minister.

But it is crystal-clear that he is not doing it for any of those reasons. Rather, he is under investigation from Daniel Greenberg, the parliamentary commissioner for standards - a post first established in 1995 to investigate the 'cash-for-questions' affair.¹ Farage has been charged with breaking rule 5 of the code of conduct. This requires that new MPs "must register all their current financial interests, and any registrable benefits (other than earnings) received in the 12 months before their election within one month of their election".

Initially, this investigation began by examining a £5 million payment from the Thai-based cryptocurrency investor, Christopher Harborne, that did not appear on Farage's declaration of interests - only becoming public knowledge after first being reported in April by *The Guardian*. This prompted the Conservative Party to write to the parliamentary standards watchdog, making an official complaint.

We all know the story, of course. Farage first said that it was a purely private donation intended to cover his personal security costs, and therefore did not need to be declared. In May, however, his line changed, when he said in an interview that it was a "reward" for campaigning for Brexit for 27 years. He bought a £1.4 million Georgian property in central London shortly after receiving Harborne's donation - just a coincidence, of course! This house was one of at least five owned by Farage, whose partner owns another property that he uses in his Clacton constituency.² Then in June the story shifted again: he had received an "unconditional gift" that he could use however he wanted - telling LBC Radio: "I can spend it on Ferraris if I want" or "put it on the horses", but anyway it is "not any of your business".³ What happened to the security costs, Nigel?

On top of that, we have George Cotterill's £80,000 loan, but, of course, Posh George comes from a "good" aristocratic family, according to Reform's deputy leader, Richard Tice. His grandfather was the third Baron Manton, who inherited a "family soap empire" and his mother was a former girlfriend of King Charles.⁴ She also donated £500,000 to Reform in September 2024, and Farage is now being investigated for that too.⁵ Furthermore, he is also being investigated for allegations of lobbying the governor of the Bank of England, Andrew Bailey, to loosen regulations around cryptocurrency - Bailey saying he can spot someone who is up to that trick a mile off - and the non-declaration of several houses that are part of his £4 million "property



Keen on crypto ... wonder why

empire".⁶ Additionally, if that was not enough, it was reported that the Harborne "gift" has been forwarded to the National Crime Agency by bankers under the anti-money-laundering Suspicious Activity Report scheme.⁷ Other donations to Reform UK have also been flagged under the scheme.

Spivs

Therefore Nigel Farage decided to pre-empt the investigation - or attempt to derail it - by triggering a by-election with the polling date on August 13. Of course, as widely commented upon, if Daniel Greenberg's investigations resulted in Farage being suspended from parliament for more than 10 sitting days (or 14 calendar days), it would open up the possibility of a recall petition, forcing another by-election - this time at a date not of Farage's choosing. Equally, when he wins the contest - barring a miraculous set of circumstances, since, of course, all the other major parties decided to boycott his stunt (see below) - the parliamentary standards committee investigation would just restart. It could possibly restart even if the miracle happens and Farage loses to one of the improbable candidates standing in Clacton.

Anyhow, Farage describes the by-election as a "people versus the establishment" contest and a "real election with real people". Reform actually offered to pay for the costs of the by-election, estimated at around £200,000 (offer refused).

It does have to be said that Farage is hardly a horny-handed son of toil, a former City trader who recently got £270,000 for promoting gold bullion - amounting to an estimated four hours per month across a three-month period.⁸ Tough work, but someone's got to do it!

But, more than that, if you look at the people who have donated to him, then you are dealing with the spiv side of capitalism - cryptocurrency and so on. George Cotterill, for example, is a convicted fraudster, who has spent time in prison and is now seeking a pardon from Donald Trump. Believe it or not, he had a book published this

year actually called *How to launder money*.⁹ This gives you some idea as to the sort of capitalists we are dealing with: they are not producing anything or organising labour power. Essentially, we are talking about *speculators*.

Having said that, we need to recognise that Farage is not just a spokesperson for spiv capitalism. He has also made himself into the champion of a real section of the population that resents liberalism and 'political correctness' (or 'woke politics'). They resent the fact that, however many politicians promise to make their lives better, they do not get any better. Meaning it is not shocking that Reform UK is still in the lead, when it comes to opinion polls. Of course, the key to Farage's undeniable success is not just bashing 'wokeness' - it is called *migrants*. The wrong sort of people for Nigel and his base that come with dark skins and, in particular, are Muslims. They are the central target and perhaps the major explanation of Farage's popularity, and the popularity of Reform - and his various other outfits before that.

Fringe

So, we come to last week's *Socialist Worker* editorial and front page proclaiming "kick out the far-right fraudster".¹⁰ There can be no doubt that Farage is far-right and corrupt. But let us not forget the Tories. They are far-right by any reasonable measure. What about corruption? The fact of the matter is that *all* mainstream political parties are corrupt. Some of it is overt, some of it is petty. But the relationship between the mainstream political parties and the institutional architecture of power is one of systematic corruption. After all, Tony Blair's ability to amass a £45 million fortune since leaving office in 2007 is not due to his ready smile.

Then there is the question of kicking out Farage. That can only happen if some other candidate gets more votes than him on August 13. So who does *Socialist Worker* recommend? As of July 15, there were nine named opponents - all of whom

you would call fringe candidates.¹¹ Of course, the one that tops the list and is featured in almost every headline from the mainstream media is Count Binface - AKA the comedian and Oxford graduate Jon Harvy - who stood in Makerfield against Andy Burnham.¹²

At the moment, Binface appears to be the main 'challenger' to Farage, as all the mainstream or 'serious' parties (Labour, Tories, Greens, Liberal Democrats) quickly announced a boycott - even Restore Britain declined to participate in a "Reform-sponsored media circus". Farage himself claimed to be surprised at the other parties' decision not to field candidates, which he described as "showing contempt" towards the electorate. Presumably regarding it as a bit of fun, 33% of the 1,000 British people questioned in a nationwide poll conducted by Ipsos wanted Count Binface to win the by-election, as opposed to the 21% who said Nigel Farage.¹³ This shows the power of the media to frame the story: the idea is to turn the whole thing into a Farage versus Binface laugh. Of course, it will be people in Clacton itself who will decide (note, in the last general election Farage secured 46% of the vote).

But there are other candidates. Lots of other candidates. Apart from Binface, some are worth mentioning. There is Laurence Fox, the former TV actor. He is a semi-professional when it comes to standing in by-elections and is nowadays a far-right activist. Then we have Jeremy Corbyn's embarrassing elder brother, Piers, a conspiracy theorist who wants to scrap net-zero targets; and Luke Worley - a local candidate who appeared briefly on the TV show, *Married at first sight*, before being removed after an altercation with another contestant. There is also Adham Alkhatip of the Forward Party, which seems like a one-man show, but apparently is an "anti-corruption, pro-worker platform" - which tells you nothing.¹⁴ Who is *not* "anti-corruption" and "pro-worker"? And we have the 21-year-old Kai Stephens from the British Democratic Party, posting on X that it is the only organisation that is seriously patriotic and "most importantly *nationalist*". The Climate Party, the Monster Raving Loony Party and Rejoin EU have all announced their intention to stand, but so far do not seem to have found candidates.

So who exactly is *Socialist Worker* going to urge us to vote for? In the form of Stand Up to Racism, it is promising to 'flood' the constituency with activists and leaflets in the attempt to "convince people, in ones and twos, not to vote for the far right".¹⁵ Yes, great, but *who* should they vote for then - Binface or Luke Worley? How about Mr Fishfinger, whose 'manifesto' calls on voters to "Say tartare to Nige" and "you'll Findus much better"? But it is a genuine dilemma, as there are no left candidates of any sort - no-one from

George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain or the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, let alone Your Party. Therefore the only thing you can really do is bin your ballot paper - pun intended. Admittedly this is not a profound piece of political advice or stunning electoral intervention, but the only thing worth the bother.

Alternative

But the main question, surely, from our point of view, is *why* is there not a leftwing candidate? There ought to be someone who, unafraid of Nigel Farage's 'stunt' or 'media circus', makes the most of the publicity and presents the people of Clacton with a *genuine* working class alternative (sorry, Count Binface, for all your 'good intentions').

Certainly the track record of 'joke' candidates has not been impressive: Beppe Grillo in Italy, Michel Colucci (Coluche) in France, Pat Paulson in the US. The only way to see off the threat from Nigel Farage and the far right, which is very real, is with a clear, anti-capitalist, pro-working class, internationalist, revolutionary democratic platform. That is what we urgently need, not the lowest-common-denominator platitudes peddled by the Stand Up to Racism popular front.

In the same way, relying on commissioners and the standards commission is the politics of failure. We certainly favour the recall of wayward MPs - but only in the conditions of proportional representation. Parties should be able to replace a sitting MP with the next person on their list of candidates without any fuss or bother. The provision allowing a parliamentary vote to suspend or expel an MP and trigger a by-election is something we reject. Having a petition signed by 10% of an atomised electorate might sound democratic to the determinedly naive. However, it is open to crude manipulation by other parties and by the capitalist mass media ●

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Notes

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