



Covid-19 and the Plague of Neo-liberalism



Demands for the Covid-19 Pandemic crisis:

We have an imbecilic Prime Minister and a Government behaving like a rabbit in the headlights. Now Johnson claims he can resolve this crisis in twelve weeks. As one wag in the media noted, this slogan could be painted on the side of a bus.

They are lurching from one U-turn to another, reacting to events clearly overtaking them. Much of their policy-making has been in response to what others have already decided. Advising self-isolation and staying away from pubs, clubs and theatres were measures that the public and even some businesses had already decided for Johnson and the Government.

The same could be said about the closure of schools, which already had large numbers of pupils and teachers missing. The Government then found itself having to respond likewise after devolved Scotland and Wales announced schools would close from Friday. The largest teachers' union, the National Education Union, had already called for this.

The government has been dragged reluctantly toward implementing some of the advice of the World Health Organisation, 'a day late and a dollar short', and is still dragging its feet. A Tory government that has almost wrecked the NHS since 2010 with austerity; deliberate underfunding that has overseen the cutting of 17,000 beds; savage cuts to social care services; operations delayed and cancelled; and a de-

cline in staffing resulting in a shortage of 100,000 NHS staff; the Tories tried to destroy the NHS and cannot care less about healthcare for the poor and the working class.

Already two London hospitals are at crisis point with a chronic lack of beds. Northwick Park Hospital has declared this critical requesting help from other hospitals. One senior doctor described the situation as "f***ing petrifying." The same can be said of the Tories' complete disdain of workers who have been treated with utter contempt, seeing their real wages decline year on year since 2010.

The Chancellor's 'rescue package' was just a public relations exercise, a headline grabber, which soon unravelled. The £330 billion package is simply a money printing exercise by the BoE, a bail out with a loan package that would be underwritten by the taxpayer. Small businesses and workers, already finding themselves in difficulties are being 'supported' by saddling them with even more debt and interest added to boot, albeit after a 12 months interest-free period.

The government have since announced further measures, such as its job retention scheme: employees unable to work are paid 80% of their wages, stopping employers making them unemployed; tax breaks such as VAT deferral for three months; and raising benefits. While welcome to a degree, these people cannot be trusted. This must be implemented without delay and be accessed easily. There is ambiguity around protecting those in the 'gig economy' on zero hours contracts and workers need vigilance and organisation through unions etc. to stop employers taking advantage.

This pandemic has exposed the Tories catastrophic economic programme and the crisis within the capitalist system, which has not recovered from the economic crisis in 2008. The system is convulsing, and workers are in danger of yet again paying the price for the failures of the capitalist class. We need a workers' government to put the needs of the working class before the needs of people like the billionaire Richard

Continued overleaf

Branson, who are yet again demanding bailouts. We are witnessing a major shock and upheaval to the system, small businesses going to the wall and workers being laid off.

We, the Trotskyist Faction of *Socialist Fight*, recognise the bankruptcy of the capitalist system and as Marxists we understand that it needs to be overcome, i.e. overthrown and abolished root and branch. While we demand reforms in the here and now, under the present bourgeois ‘democratic’ system such changes can only be forced upon capitalism through fear of working-class people below. With the public health crisis unfolding we must hold the Government to account, we must put forward a simple set of demands to defend the interests of workers who now find themselves in difficult circumstances.

HEALTHCARE

We demand immediate requisition and nationalisation of all private hospitals, facilities and staff, as the Spanish government has done. Sickness should not be profited from. We see no reason why the government (i.e. the taxpayer) should pay £2.4 million a day for additional beds during a national crisis.

NHS staff are having to share masks, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) out of date, and in some cases none. We demand that all front-line NHS staff are fully protected.

Testing for COVID-19 must be increased without delay following WHO guidelines; the government’s increase from 4,000 per day to a target of 25,000, while welcome, is nowhere near enough. Testing must be available to all who need it. Despite claims of improvement and upgrading the numbers, at present only 6,000 per day are being carried out. We have seen elsewhere how testing is crucial and the ability it provides the authorities to have adequate information to contain the virus.

Private testing is costing £300, while NHS staff are unable to get tested. Tests must be free, and top priority for NHS staff.

The government must immediately commence large scale production of ventilators and other essentials required for the NHS, and must commandeer industry to do this.

WORKERS

Workers are already losing jobs, facing reduced hours, or unpaid leave. They must not be made unemployed; there must be no redundancies, no loss of pay during this public health crisis. No attacks on workers’ rights, or jobs, should be permitted or tolerated.

While we welcome the workers retention scheme, no worker should lose 20% of their wages. We demand full pay for those affected. This should include workers from the gig economy, on zero-hour contracts and the self-employed.. We must demand the abolition of zero-hours contracts and fake self-employment. Workers must have legally-binding hours with sick pay, holiday pay, paid maternity and paternity leave etc. as of right. If the employer cannot provide hours workers should be paid anyway. This is a basic minimum.

While the government has offered a ‘mortgage holiday’ of three months (which has not been guaranteed by the lenders), we demand mortgage, rents and utility bills be paid by the government in full during the pandemic which threatens workers and their families. Banks and corporations are bailed out and supported; government must do the same for workers, whose exploitation is the basis of capitalist economy.

SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

We welcome the closure of schools, and the plan to temporarily convert them to child care facilities for the children of essential workers, such as nurses, doctors,, other healthcare staff, emergency services personnel, delivery drivers, essential manufacturing sector staff, essential public service staff, etc.

Testing must be available to staff and children for safety. Parents who look after children must get paid leave for the duration and compulsory job security, enforced by the state.

Children unable to take examinations must not be disadvantaged. Marking on previous mock exams and work throughout the school year is subjective and ignores students who may ‘perform’ during a real examination. We demand provision for students of all ages whose education is disrupted to re-sit course years at the state’s expense as an exceptional measure.

Schools now have online learning platforms for homework, which can be utilised for lessons. However, disadvantaged children from poorer families may not have access to the internet or a computer. Facilities for these must be provided free.

Food must be provided to vulnerable children who no longer find themselves at school and having access to a nutritious meal. Over 4 million children live in poverty and being fed at school is their only chance of a decent meal. This needs to be co-ordinated with local authorities.

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THE HOMELESS

The government must ensure that the homeless are given immediate protection with a roof over their head. Statistics published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) put empty homes in England in October 2018 at 634,453. *Shelter* showed that there were 320,000 homeless for the same period. With one person dying on the streets every 19 hours, individuals vulnerable to exposure to the virus, we demand that these people are housed.

PRISONS

This week (18 March) a prisoner was diagnosed as being positive with COVID-19. The prison system is extremely overcrowded and as such would be an ideal environment for a rapid outbreak of infection. Under the Ministry of Justice's own definition of safety and decency, the prison estate should not hold more than 74,954 people. There are currently 8,759 men and women held above this level.

Overcrowding is not evenly distributed, which results in some prisons holding many more than they are designed for. We demand those held for low level crimes, or due to be released within 12 months are released to ease pressure on the system.

DETENTION CENTRES

There are 12 in the UK. Many of them overcrowded with refugees detained in appalling conditions. There are no restrictions on how long people can be detained in these centres. We demand refugees, many escaping conflict zones, and all detainees are not treated like criminals and caged but released. These detention centres, just like prisons, are ideal hubs for the virus. They should be closed down, and removals stopped, as the possibility of migrants and refugees dying of disease just underlines that they are in fact concentration camps.

PANIC BUYING AND RATIONING

The government really need to get a grip with panic buying, and ensuring that the supply chain is able to keep up with demand to enable stores to have adequate stock so the elderly and healthcare workers (many who are working long shifts) are able to put food on their table. Many supermarkets are seeing large queues, which presents a huge health risk, and empty shelves after just a few hours trading.

If this crisis deepens there will be a serious risk of anti-social manifestations, such as the riotous pushing in that took place at a London Aldi branch with hundreds defying attempts at rationing. According to the government, there is a shortage of delivery drivers. If so, coach drivers should be redeployed to drive delivery vehicles.

A proper rationing system must be put in place by the government for foodstuffs and sanitary-related goods, just as a basic necessity for health and hygiene. This should be overseen and

supervised by rank-and-file trade unionists at local level who must seek to draw in the poor and those most at risk from this crisis. We need collective organisation not 'dog-eat-dog' and lumpen violence among those at risk. We cannot depend on the 'goodwill' of chains like Tesco and Sainsbury's to bring about a fair rationing system. There needs to be workers inspection of profiteering and businesses that abuse the shortages to raise prices must be expropriated.

GOVERNMENT POWERS AND THE CORONAVIRUS BILL

The government are set to give police sweeping powers to arrest and detain suspected coronavirus sufferers, and stop all public assemblies, which would remove the right to protest. The police will have powers to take blood and swab tests, demand personal information (which at present people arrested have the right to withhold). Refusal will be a criminal offence.

The bill extends the validity of warrants under the Investigatory Powers Act of 2016 and relaxes protections for those cared for under mental health acts. It cancels local elections in England this spring; and empowers government to potentially cancel other elections, should the crisis continue into 2021.

The pandemic must not be allowed to be used as an excuse to trample over civil liberties. While we acknowledge the need for the quarantine to protect public health, there are serious dangers with the new law. Labour are correctly opposing it being on the statute books for two years, without any control by parliament, who ought to have the duty to expire it if the threat from the pandemic is overcome.

This crisis signals the total discredit of Thatcher's neoliberal economics. Working class people of this country, seeing a second bailout in 12 years are now starting to see through the lies being told, they will not easily buy the austerity agenda a second time around. The public health crisis and the impoverishment of the working class is a permanent issue. Now a pandemic has forced even this Tory government to back-peddle and make a show of saying they will put this right, to avoid huge unrest and struggles that would follow inevitably from their allowing hundreds of thousands of deaths from COVID. This is the result of a fundamental push from the bottom up.

Once the pandemic and quarantine recedes, this crisis has the capacity to develop on the streets like the *Gilets Jaunes* movement in France. This is the last thing that the capitalist class want. The virus is not man-made but the public health crisis it has exposed was made by neoliberalism. This may well turn to anger and a working class that has again become conscious of its power. We on the left need to promote a correct programmatic perspective to point the working-class masses towards the need to take power and abolish the root cause of the neoliberal attacks: capitalism itself.

Trotskyist Faction of Socialist Fight

What is Covid-19 and How Should it be fought?



Coronaviruses, are viruses and named for their crown like spikes that protrude from its surface with the name COVID-19 given to this particular virus by the World Health Organisation (WHO), which derived from the first letters of the words 'coronavirus', 'virus' and 'disease' with the number 19 representing the year (2019). This virus (COVID-19) has symptoms (which take approximately 14 days to appear) that ranges from mild, and similar to a common cold, to being extreme with a cough, fever, fatigue, respiratory difficulties with laboured breathing, and diarrhoea, potentially leading to pneumonia and possibly causing organ failure in extreme cases.

Those with underlying health conditions and the elderly are at high risk with a mortality rate varying between 1% to 3% with unidentified cases factored in. The 6% of fatalities recorded in Italy was taken in relation to confirmed cases and with a high elderly population, despite having the second-best healthcare system ranking in the world, provided an explanation why the mortality rate is so high when comparing to elsewhere.

How did it start?

It is suspected that COVID-19 originated in the Huanan seafood market in Wuhan, the provincial capital of the Hubei region of China, a market that had both live and freshly slaughtered animals for sale. The virus was first seen to have infected people who were either working or who had shopped at the market, suggesting that the pathogen had crossed over from an animal host to humans. However, the Lancet does report that the first person and 13 others out of the initial 41 cases identified as having the virus had no connection at all to the market in Wuhan.

The virus, which was first officially reported on 31st December 2019, and by 7th January 2020 had been identified. It is confusing experts who are trying to determine its exact source and as the virus is considered novel (a type of virus that has never been encountered before), there is an opinion that the virus may have originated in bats which then spread to humans via a snake or pangolin. There is a study that supports this theory published in the Lancet which can be accessed here:

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30251-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30251-8/fulltext)

Other pathogenic coronaviruses have crossed over from an animal host; Ebola (SARS), and Middle East acute respiratory syndrome (MERS) are recent examples, both of which have very high mortality rates; 50% and 36% respectively. However, the speed at which this virus has spread and the unpreparedness of governments in how to respond has caught everyone by surprise. This resulted in the announcement by the WHO on 11th March 2020 that it had become a global pandemic after it had spread beyond China and having seen an increase in cases of coronavirus illness, 118,000 cases in over 110 countries and territories around the world with the sustained risk of further global spread.

It seems to spread very easily from person to person, particularly in closed environments such as homes and hospitals. In less than two months it has spread on a global scale over several continents. The pathogen can travel through the air, enveloped in tiny respiratory droplets that are produced when a sick person breathes, talks, coughs or sneezes. Testing has been available since 13th January 2020 but availability to testing in the UK has only been reserved to those admitted into hospital. Today it has been announced that self-testing kits developed by a British company will be available to the public from next week.

Chinese intervention

China has shown the world what happens if it is slow or doesn't react and what can also be achieved with co-ordinated state intervention. In late December the Chinese doctor, Li Wenliang, who worked in Wuhan Central City Hospital, posted a warning on social media about a cluster of cases of a flu-like disease that had been treated at his hospital. Seven patients were in quarantine with disease symptoms that

reminded him of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and on 30th December 2019, he sent a message to fellow doctors in a chat group warning them about the outbreak and advising they wear protective clothing to avoid infection. He was reportedly reprimanded for spreading false information and instructed not to put out any further posts. Li Wenliang, 34, died on 7th February 2020 after operating on a patient who unknowingly had been infected with the coronavirus.

The Chinese state, despite what seems to be the suppression of initial reports by local authorities, then took decisive action building two new hospitals in as many weeks as the outbreak unfolded. The first 60,000 sqm hospital built in Wuhan has space for 1,000 beds and 30 intensive care wards, all modular construction was built in just under 10 days, the second hospital was built 25 miles away and opened days afterwards. The government also mass mobilised medical teams to the affected areas in an attempt to contain the spread of the virus.

This is a testament to state intervention and would never have been built so quickly by relying on the private sector with its need for profit. At the time of writing (14th March 2020) the spread of infection has slowed down considerably in China and it now shows that aggressive intervention has worked, with only 11 new cases reported today, in a country that is home to a population of 1.42 billion people. However, the total number of identified cases 80,824, has resulted in 3,189 deaths: a mortality rate of 3.95% of reported cases. The real time figures globally can be seen here:

<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries>

The spread of the virus

Globally 154,279 cases have been reported with 5,798 deaths, resulting in a 3.79% mortality rate. According to the WHO, the new epicentre for the disease has now been transferred to Europe, with the crisis now being concentrated in Italy which has reported 3,497 new cases, bringing a total of 21,157 nationally. Italy, the worst hit country after China, initially locked down 16 million of its citizens in the northern region of Lombardy and its 14 neighbouring provinces to try to combat the spread of the coronavirus. However, this was short-lived and had to be rolled out nationwide after people panicked with thousands attempted to move south.

Today Spain announced that it is introducing similar measures to contain the outbreak. The Spanish government is poised to declare a 15-day national lockdown from Monday 16th March 2020 to battle the disease. This would allow people to be allowed out only for emergencies, to buy food, or for work. With 191 deaths and 6,043 infections, Spain is the worst-hit country in Europe after Italy. China, which has already sent medical assistance to Iran and Iraq and only last week confirmed that it is sending medical specialists and equipment to help the beleaguered Italians.

The official Sichuan Daily reported that a seven-member team including an expert from the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and two respiratory disease specialists from Sichuan University's West China Hospital will be travelling to Italy. For all the accusations against the Chinese government, the Director-General of the WHO, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, praised President Xi Jinping and other senior Chinese officials for their commitment to transparency after their meeting in Beijing.

Johnson's ineptitude

Meanwhile Boris Johnson's and the British government's response has been woeful. Johnson has completely shown himself lacking, his disappearance during the flooding in parts of the country in recent weeks has shown the absolute contempt that he harbours for the general public of this country. During his interview on 'This Morning' on 5th March, he spoke about efforts to delay the spread of the virus, which he said that one of the theories is that the disease should be allowed to spread without taking "as many draconian measures" such as cancelling public events or closing schools. He previously in the interview referred to stopping public gatherings as "quite draconian" before suggesting that one theory was to allow the disease to spread through the population and "take it on the chin".

This strategy of working towards 'herd immunity' conflicts with the advice being provided by the World Health Organisation and its policy against the virus, with the WHO questioning the British government's approach. Anthony Costello, a paediatrician and former World Health Organisation Director, wrote that 'it's not even clear yet that catching the coronavirus will result in immunity'. Costello urged the UK to change course, asking: "Is it ethical to adopt a policy that threatens immediate casualties on the basis of an uncertain future benefit?" For this strategy to work, 60%-70% of the population would have needed to be exposed and to have built up immunity to the virus, which works in conjunction with vaccination.

At present there are no known vaccinations for COVID-19. Dozens of teams of scientists around the world are frantically attempting to develop a vaccine, with British scientists ready to test on humans after successful trials on mice. With the prediction that 80% of the UK population will potentially become infected, a conservative 1% mortality rate will result in just over 500,000 deaths. The UK government are playing with fire, late today at the time of producing this article, 322 UK scientists and 33 international signatories have written an open letter challenging the British government's approach, which can be read here:

http://maths.gmul.ac.uk/~vnicosia/UK_scientists_statement_on_coronavirus_measures.pdf

Worryingly the government seems to be surrounded by lunatics, and not only those that are kept in the public spotlight such as Dominic Cummings. Dr David Halpern, a psychologist and Director of the Behavioural Insights Team in what are part of the government's 'nudge' unit, said during an interview the on BBC News: "There's going to be a point, assuming the epidemic flows and grows, as we think it probably will do, where you'll want to cocoon, you'll want to protect those at-risk groups so that they basically don't catch the disease and by the time they come out of their cocooning, herd immunity's been achieved in the rest of the population."

The Behavioural Insights Team's own web site has a blog that claims there is a strong contender for word of the year; 'Misinfodemic' (noun): *the spread of a particular health outcome or disease facilitated by viral misinformation*. This is how it claims to tackle to Coronavirus outbreak: "The emerging epidemic of the novel coronavirus, now christened 'Covid-19', has brought into sharp focus how the spread of misinformation can propagate confusion, potentially undermining containment efforts. As this New York Times article explains, the dramatic way that the outbreak is being reported, focusing on fatalities and city-wide lockdowns in China, means that the most severe outcomes of coronavirus are being overrepresented in our minds. The resulting anxiety is potentially harmful if it leads to an increase in racist incidents and 'super-worriers' filling hospital waiting rooms."

Dr David Halpern has been closely associated with the Tory government, having been chief analyst in David Cameron's Strategy Unit (2001–2007). According to his organisation's web site, he.... "led numerous reviews, including the UK government's strategic audits and recent policy reviews; set up the Social Exclusion Task Force and drafted its action plan; and authored many of the Strategy Unit's most influential papers, such as those on life satisfaction, personal responsibility and behaviour change." His work has already been questioned in 2013, when the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) came under investigation by a health watchdog for administering "sham" psychometric tests to the unemployed and threatening to withdraw their benefits if they did not complete them.

We have a Prime Minister, who just like Trump in America, are both clearly out of their depth and have become bystanders while events unfold around them. It seems that psychology and the manipulation of the population and not medical health and the intervention of the state became priority, until the science caught up with them. It has been left to companies and organisations themselves, such as the premier league, to cancel football matches, other large gatherings like the London Marathon, and for businesses to implement their own social distances policies and instruct their workforce to work from home.

The British media today report that the Johnson's government will bring in sweeping emergency powers to be given to the Police, which would allow them to detain people with the virus, reduce elderly care and force schools and nurseries to stay open if they are 'deemed to have closed unnecessarily'.



Stock Market Meltdown

The Daily Mirror newspaper claims to have seen the proposed legislation, which will remain in effect for two years. The government are blatantly only interested in protecting capital with discussions on insulating the damage to the economy and not protecting UK citizens.

Responding to COVID-19

At the time of writing this article, the death rate in the UK from the virus almost doubled in one day to 21 deaths. Implementations need to be put into place quickly to prevent large gatherings and as such schools need to be closed. While children are at an age group that are likely to show the most resilience to the virus, schools are also likely to be ideal hubs for transmission. The argument provided by the government is that many healthcare workers and workers of other essential services would be prevented from working, having to remain at home to look after their children.

This is where the state needs to intervene and prioritise, schools could remain open as a crèche for the children of essential service workers only, which would reduce the risks associated with large gatherings. Instead the government are more interested in the economy, which is already under stress, and seemingly not concerned with the health and well being of its citizens. Boris Johnson announced on national TV that many people will "lose loved ones", which came on the back of a government warning that the Police will not be able to deal with low level crime and that hospitals will not have enough beds; situations that already exist prior to this outbreak.

The government are softening people up for the inevitable hurricane that is about to arrive. The British bourgeois state neither has the capability, resources, or the inclination to deal with the emergency which can be perfectly summarised in its

response when posed with a question of how it would cope with the shortage of 100,000 NHS staff.... simple was the response, it would consider bringing out people that had retired from the NHS, until the government had to be reminded that it was these very people from the age group that are at highest risk. Ten years of savage cuts by the Tories with its ideologically driven austerity programme has left this country and its population in bad shape to combat this virus.

The NHS has 17,000 fewer beds than at 2010. With an overcrowded and understaffed prison system, and healthcare homes with their elderly residents, these environments are at high risk from the viral infection. Many of these homes are being kept afloat with stressed out and poorly paid staff, most of which would find it economically difficult to take time from work to self-isolate. These care workers, NHS and other public sector staff will find themselves on the front line battling this disease. According to Shelter, over 320,00 people are declared as homeless in the UK, with someone dying on the streets every 19 hours. An estimated 14.2 million UK citizens are living in poverty, in what is considered to be the fifth richest country in the world, these people are at severe risk from this disease.

What this outbreak has shown is that how interconnected globally we all are, whether economically, politically or socially. The protectionist policies and the closure of borders have been compromised; disease cannot be shut out. However, this will not prevent the reactionary ruling class from attempting to mitigate the financial collapse and defend themselves. We already see travel bans, and we already see the attempts in blaming the economic situation, which has still not recovered from the financial crash of 2008, on the spread of the virus. This is a public health crisis that has been used as a smokescreen to cover over the economic crisis.

The capitalist system is built on foundations made of nothing more than sand, sand which is shifting rapidly. The stock market has already dived with £trillions wiped off the values of stocks and shares, and we now see Russia and Saudi Arabia disagreeing over oil production and pricing, which has resulted in 30% drop in oil prices. Governments are now scrambling around to ensure economic survival by propping up the system, to protect the capitalist system from an event that was not the cause of the financial instability, but one that has rather exposed its weakness.

As often is the case, the working classes, the poor, the homeless, the sick and the elderly will be the ones to bear the brunt of this epidemic. Hospital care will be limited, healthcare professionals will have difficult choices to make, which beds and ventilators are available, and which patients will be prioritised or denied medical care to be treated like a dispensable commodity. The rich will be insulated to an extent, today the Queen announced that she would flee London and retreat to her home in Windsor Castle. The majority do not have the

luxury to retreat to a country home, or even to self-isolate. Panic buying has resulted in those with poorer incomes being left behind, many people live hand to mouth and cannot afford to purchase in bulk in advance, and with empty shelves in supermarkets will find themselves at a stressful disadvantage.

This situation has the potential to cause severe economic hardship and cause social unrest. While many on the left could not see street protests developing due to atomisation of the working class, low trade union membership, low number of strikes and organised workers struggles taking place in the workplace; this could crystalize into working class action. During this crisis we must ensure that the workers are protected from losing their homes, whether through suspension of mortgage and private rent payments; unlimited sick pay for any workers who may find themselves having contracted the virus; empty buildings commandeered and made into field hospitals; ensure that the elderly and those that are homeless, or those that are living in poverty are protected; industries finding themselves facing bankruptcy need to be nationalised and



small businesses protected from going under.

The state needs to come up with a contingency plan for the wellbeing of all and not one that will protect just the capitalist class. Realistically these things could only take place under a socialist government and having a workers' state with a worker controlled planned economy producing for need and not for profit. To achieve this, we need a truly revolutionary workers' party, a party that acts as a tribune of the masses. The coming months may well define the future of this country.

Our Platform in *Socialist Fight*

22 Jan 2020

This platform is based on the proposition that the politics of Socialist Fight between 2015 and the beginning of 2020 were fundamentally correct, though obviously we cannot claim perfection.

We reject current attempts to fundamentally change them and consider the trend of some in SF to join in the demonisation of Jewish and Israeli-derived critics of the activities of the Zionist-lobby and its Jewish bourgeois material basis, and even more mainstream figures on the Jewish left, to be a capitulation to Zionism and a betrayal of the anti-imperialist programme of SF.

Our platform is Trotskyist and stands on orthodoxy as elaborated in the article *The Marxist Theory of the State*¹ on the concrete nature of post war Stalinism, the need for defence of the degenerated and deformed workers states against imperialism combined with political revolution to bring the proletariat to command of the workers state politically, while opposing counterrevolution. We saw and see today the proletariat as the only force that can defeat the counterrevolution whether emanating from the bureaucracy or elsewhere, with particular regard to the two remaining deformed workers states in Cuba and North Korea.

In common with SF generally we are defenders of semi-colonial countries, including Russia and China, against imperialism. We support the unification of Ireland and a single multi-ethnic state of Palestine, in the context of permanent revolution and in the case of the Middle East, a regional revolution centred on the Arab workers and leading to liberation of the Palestinians from Zionism.

Regarding Zionism and its international manifestation we endorse the 2014 *Draft Theses on the Jews and Modern Imperialism*², and note that this was the basis for SF's activity on this question over the last five years. We think this was fundamentally correct and principled, and is the only materialist explanation for the very visible and powerful role of Zionism in Western imperialist politics. We note that those who seek to junk it do not have an alternative materialist analysis.

We stand for the historic politics of SF on special oppression with regard to oppression based on perceived 'race', sex or sexual orientation. We stand for workers defence guards and a workers militia to crush fascist threats to workers and the oppressed, and we advocate that the workers movement take independent armed action to suppress fascist political activity, which is never about persuasion but mobilising for murder, as a matter of physical self-defence.

We reject male chauvinist, homophobic and transphobic ideology and stand for the liberation of women and also oppressed sexual minorities through socialist revolution. We reject both all kinds of sexual abuse of youth, and moral guardianship of youth by bourgeois

and reactionary moralists. We reject all state interference in the personal lives of consenting adults.

We stand as did Trotsky for the renewal of trade unions through rank-and-file activity and the advancement of new militant leaders against the bureaucracy, and the sensitive, tactically intelligent use of the transitional programme and the transitional method to build a revolutionary opposition in the trade unions.

Likewise we endorse the Trotskyist approach to bourgeois workers parties and class independence embodied in the approach of the Trotskyist movement, as maintained in the practice of SF and the material we published and republished rejecting the anti-Marxist, sectarian distortions of the Spartacist tradition³.

We condemn Brexit as fundamentally anti-immigrant and we stand for the abolition of all anti-immigrant laws and controls. We endorse Trotsky's 1923 essay calling for a United States of Europe⁴ and seek to apply this transitional approach to the current situation.

We also endorse the corrective on the question of the right of public criticism put forward by SF⁵, to the errors of the 3rd and 4th internationals regarding such criticism, which ultimately led to phenomena like Healyism, ie. to sects and cults which disgrace the name of Trotskyism, to its fragmentation and degeneration.

On this and on all other outstanding questions which cannot be addressed in full here, we stand on the politics of Marxism, Leninism and Trotskyism, which we consider to be the same movement. We therefore defend the programme of SF *as was* against the revisionism and unprincipled blocs now engaged in by comrade Downing [who we hope will come to his senses].⁶

Notes

- 1 <https://socialistfight.com/2019/06/14/the-marxist-theory-of-the-state-the-formation-and-destruction-of/>
2. <https://commexplor.com/2014/09/06/draft-theses-on-the-jews-and-modern-imperialism/>
3. See <https://socialistfight.com/2018/11/16/critical-support-popular-fronts-and-bourgeois-workers-parties/> for example
4. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1923/06/europe.htm>
5. <https://socialistfight.com/2018/12/22/communists-and-the-party-question-in-the-21st-century-a-corrective/>
6. The words in brackets are incidental to the platform, as far from coming to his senses, Downing subsequently betrayed both the anti-Zionist programme of SF and the position of SF on the Party Question, effectively destroying SF. For a fuller explanation see the article on the back page of this issue. But the Platform is still a principled Trotskyist Platform and addresses many key programmatic questions in this period.

No to Turkish Aggression, No to Imperialism

Just a little over a week ago (5th March 2020) saw a meeting in Moscow take place between Presidents Putin of Russia and Erdoğan of Turkey, which came on the back of a disastrous week for Turkey that saw 33 Turkish soldiers killed in Idlib with many more injured.

Circumstances around the air strike are hazy but there are suggestions that the Russian air force was involved despite the claims from both the Turkish and Russian military that it was the result of a Syrian airstrike. Syrian forces were involved in heavy fighting against Turkish backed militia when a one-and-a-half-ton demolition bomb was dropped from the air on a building.

Claims by Turkey that it had shared the co-ordinates of its forces with the Russians were met with counter-claims by Russia. This debacle proves that events on the ground (and in the air) are not always under control and under these circumstances' mistakes can be made, some potentially ending with disastrous unintended circumstances. This led to outrage in Turkey from both the critics of Erdoğan speaking out against his disastrous foreign policy, and from hawks angry that Turkish blood was being spilled in Syria.

Protestations to the Russians from the Turks and an insistence that Russian forces 'step aside' saw the NATO member pound Syrian government targets with a threat of all-out war developing. This was short lived and if anything, merely confirms what many already understand, Turkey cannot do anything in Syria against President Assad and the Syrian government forces without Russian approval and collaboration.

Both the US and the Europeans have taken up luke-warm positions with Turkey and its foray into Syrian sovereign territory, despite western Imperialist aggression being threatened against Assad and the Syrian government early in the conflict. Trump's abandonment of the Kurds to Turkish aggression, the confusion of the US's foreign policy being announced by Trump on the hoof with US troops being withdrawn, quickly followed by an announcement that the US was blatantly confiscating Syria's oil fields in Deir al-Zor has put the Europeans very much in disarray.

Russian objectives have been achieved; namely to prevent Assad being removed from power, stop Syria from

further destabilisation, and secure the Russian naval base at Tartus, a naval base that it has used since 1971 as a response and counterbalance to the US Sixth Fleet based in Italy.

Syria is now fully reliant on Russian support from Putin, and to a lesser extent Iran, with the only other player (and western 'backed' proxy) now in the country to contend with being Turkey. Turkey is caught in between a rock and a hard place, much being of its own design. From 2011 onwards it called for the removal of Assad and encouraged and allowed fighters to flood into the



region providing logistical support with arms, etc. It now finds itself isolated with its militias hemmed in and surrounded in the last remaining rebel stronghold of Idlib. Turkish advances into Syria to clear what it saw as a threat from Kurdish autonomy merely drove the Kurds into the arms of Assad and have bogged the Turks down in a stalemate with another refugee crisis developing.

Defend the Refugees!

Turkey hosts nearly 4 million Syrian refugees with another 1 million threatening to cross over from Syria due to the desperate situation now unfolding. The EU acting collectively for its Imperialist components has decided that it wants nothing to do with refugees. It came to an agreement with the Turkish government in March 2016 to stem the flow of migrants from Turkey with a bribe of €6 billion to be paid by 2018.

Syrian refugees in Turkey live in a precarious situation with no or little prospects: the number of work permits granted to Syrian temporary protection beneficiaries

from 1st January 2016 to 30th September 2018 was 27,930, which encourages many to enter into the exploitative labour black market, languish in poverty, or make the perilous journey by boat through the Mediterranean with profit to people smugglers. As with all conflicts it is often the working class, women, children, the elderly that suffer.

Erdoğan is now attempting to use the refugees in a cynical political attempt to gain leverage with his Western 'allies' either through military support, or else to gain additional funding, by opening the Turkish/Syrian border and allow refugees to pass through to Europe. Appalling treatment has been met out by Greek border guards, who shot dead one refugee caught crossing into Greece on 2nd March 2020. Two children were also found in the water after their boat capsized off the island of Lesbos the same morning upon which one died.

Greek border guards have been firing tear gas at refugees with film footage being published online of the coastguard threatening to ram boats filled with refugees, with one film showing attempts to puncture an inflatable dinghy with a boat hook. This week there have been reports of a warehouse housing supplies for refugees being burnt to the ground on the Greek island of Chios and a school for refugees on the island of Lesbos being torched. Many of these camps on the Greek islands are overcrowded with people living in inhumane conditions with a complete lack of medical care.



Devastation in Homs, Syria

According to UNHCR, more than 4,000 people eligible for transfer were stuck on the Greek islands of Lesbos and Samos in November 2019. Syrian refugees fleeing a conflict that has raged for 9 years are not pawns or collateral damage in a game of brinkmanship. The demonisation of refugees has led to nationalists being emboldened to take things into their own hands, often with impunity with fascists even travelling to the islands from as far afield as Germany and Austria to stir up hate.

Turkey, Russia and Iran in Syria

To de-escalate the situation an agreement has been struck between the Presidents of Russia and Turkey (in line with the Sochi Agreement that was signed in 2018). Part of this new deal includes the setting up of a 'corridor' along the M4 motorway with joint military patrols. However, anyone witnessing the press conference in Moscow could plainly see the differences that still exist between the two sides. Turkey still sees the creation of a safe haven in Syria to return refugees as a priority; how this materialises with Turkey acting as guarantor is difficult to see and reconcile with the Russian and Syrian government positions of retaking Idlib Province. Russia views the 'rebels' in Idlib as terrorists and that the area be retaken back as an integral sovereign part of Syria.

A Turkish retreat will be a difficult pill to swallow for Erdoğan both domestically and regionally and it is obvious that Russia intends to allow Turkey to disengage without losing face, in what is a valuable relationship with a country that it has developed closer economic ties recently. Turkey has become reliant on Russia, which has built the new TurkStream natural gas pipeline across the Black Sea (from Anapa to Kiyıköy) and is building a nuclear power plant in Mersin; the building of the Akkuyu power plant, at a cost of \$20 billion USD, is a joint project between the Turkish government with Rosatom and puts Turkey with a heavy dependency upon Russia for its increasing energy needs.

Turkish attempts to flex its muscles and vie for geopolitical dominance in a region where US dominance is being questioned have been met with resistance and are symptomatic of capitalism in complete crisis. The power struggle involving Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt can be seen being played out in the conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Libya and the dispute over the Cyprus gas fields with the maritime disputes in the Mediterranean. While much of this has taken on a religious dimension, it is ultimately a battle over resources and territory.

Turkish involvement in Syria has been costly with the dog biting the hand that has often fed it with bombings in Istanbul, Ankara, Reyhanlı, Diyarbakır and Suruç from the hands of Da'esh. Turkish soldiers coming home in body bags is not what the Turkish people will stomach and Erdoğan's foreign policy in Syria is being severely questioned domestically; over half of the population oppose Turkish involvement and the war in Syria. The Turkish economy is not in good shape and is more of a concern to the ordinary citizen than terrorism, which has often been the rallying cry as justification for Turkish involvement.

However, what must not be forgotten in all of this is how the Syrian crisis unfolded and led to civil war in the first place. This is a tragedy for the Syrian people, and it is they who are at the heart of the suffering. After 400 years of Ottoman rule, an empire that was multicultural allowing a certain amount of religious autonomy under the 'millet' system, Syria then found itself 'free' of the Ottoman yoke after the British encouraged and assisted an Arab revolt.

However, with the aftermath of WWI and the carving up of territories by the Imperialist powers with the Sykes-Picot Agreement, Syria then soon found itself under French colonial rule. The western carving up of territories failed to consider religious and ethnic lines and has been much of the reason for tensions throughout the region ever since, often exacerbated and exploited by outside interference.

Bashar al-Assad's ascension to the Presidency on 17th April 2000 followed the death of his father, Hafez. The Assad dynastic rule has not been one free of authoritarianism with uprisings that have been brutally suppressed; in 1973, 1980, 1982, and then of course 2011 that led up to the civil war.

For Permanent Revolution in the Middle East!

Against the backdrop of the 'Arab Spring' on 28th January 2011, a 36-year-old man, Hassan Ali Akleh, set himself alight in protest in the town of Hasakeh in north east Syria. This act of self-immolation came 6 weeks after a similar protest in Tunisia (when Mohamed Bouazizi set himself alight outside the local governor's office) sparked protests throughout the Arab world. Both were acts of desperation against the economic hardship and conditions that these two individuals found themselves in.

This was then followed by a protest in the central neighbourhood in Damascus, Hareeqa, on 17th February followed by a second 'Day of Rage' on 15th March when thousands came out onto the streets across Syria, in towns like Hama, Hasakeh, Deraa and again in Damascus. The Syrian government's response involved arrests, beatings and live fire with triggers that enraged people further; 15 schoolboys were arrested in Deraa on 6th March for graffitiing anti-government slogans and tortured. Protests against the detention of the children on 18th March resulted in the first deaths of protesters on the streets. The Omari Mosque saw thousands gather, who by now had demands on the government. These demands were again met with live fire and 15 people killed. Protesters set fire to the Baath Party HQ and the SyriaTel building.

This was the lighting of the touch paper that resulted in protests throughout Syria on 25th March in solidarity; Homs, Hama, Raqqa, Baniyas, Aleppo, and Lattakia all saw protests. After further protests the Syrian government responded with tanks being put on the streets of Deraa on 25th April, the city was in lockdown and government soldiers were given orders to shoot to kill on sight. The social unrest, the government's brutal response and the unfolding political collapse and vacuum provided the conditions that were exploited by outside powers.

It didn't take too long before arms and fighters were flooding into the country and on top of members of the Syrian Army deserting and joining the FSA led to further chaos on the ground. The instability and inability of the Syrian government to keep control allowed the rise of radical Islamist groups like Jabhat al Nusra and several smaller groups later taking control of areas, the most notorious being Da'esh. The Syrian government from early on relied on support from Hezbollah and fighters from different Iranian militias fighting under Iranian command to prevent the government completely collapsing.

Russia provided political support and military aid from an early stage in 2011, eventually with direct military involvement from 30th September 2015 onwards. Russian involvement has brought stability to the government and has allowed it to hold on to power and recapture lost territory with only the last rebel held area of Idlib remaining.



Syrian Refugee Camp

We consider that despite the initial genuine democratic and anti-neoliberal thrust of the Arab Spring uprising in Syria, that was fairly quickly buried beneath a major US and pro-Zionist proxy war funnelled mainly through Saudi-backed jihadists. To the bulk of the Syrian people, and to ourselves, a situation evolved where Assad, the initial target of the protests, became the obvious lesser evil even to the Kurds, and the intervention of Russia and Iran, progressive interventions by non-Imperialist, semi-colonial bourgeois nations defending Syria against an imperialist regime-change attempt by proxy.

As socialists we oppose Imperialism and the foreign intervention and destabilisation of a sovereign country in a region that has already seen constant conflicts. We say no to Turkish involvement, the removal of foreign fighters from Syrian soil and no to EU racism and discrimination towards refugees fleeing from Imperialist wars.

Until the working class of the oppressed nations throughout the region, can rise up and form govern-

ments that expropriate the means of production from private to collective ownership; a permanent revolution that mobilises all the oppressed layers of the population behind the working class in a struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, then nothing will change. This must go hand in hand with a world-wide revolution. Imperialism feeds off the constant cycle of decay that capitalism brings, the two are evil conjoined twins. Either socialism or barbarism.....down with Imperialism and the capitalist class!

Trotskyist Faction from Page 24

George Galloway in RESPECT, loudly proclaimed their anti-Zionism, hosted Gilad Atzmon at Marxism, and their members occasionally engaged in fisticuffs with the pro-Zionist, pro-imperialist Alliance for Workers Liberty. Now instead under Callinicos the SWP insist on the presence of "Friends of Israel" in their 'Stand up to Racism' front group events and strong-



George Galloway, John Rees and Lindsay German in the days of RESPECT

arm Palestinian supporters who protest. This is a major move to the right by the SWP.

Then there are some smaller groups: such as *Counterfire*, led by the aforementioned Rees and German, basically a more left wing version of the SWP. At least they are not pro-Zionist. But they are movement-ists – their main activity is building the Stop the War Coalition (STWC), the People's Assembly Against Austerity, or at one point Unite the Resistance, as single issue fronts, with reformist and/or pacifist politics. STWC led huge the Iraq anti-war demos but the SWP under Rees and German did not advocate a revolutionary programme within it – they were content with the politics of their left-reformist bloc-partners. To their credit they built RESPECT, making an electoral bloc with George Galloway when he was expelled from Labour for advocating Arab resistance to the imperialist war, but again they did not advocate a revolutionary programme within it and try to win support for it. There is a crying need to

recruit people to a revolutionary programme in all these situations, not just amorphous 'left organisation' which tends in practice to be left reformist by default.

Which brings us to the attitude of the left to a key strategic question of the revolution in Britain: the Labour Party: This saw a genuine leftward development with the Corbyn movement in 2015; it was able to seize on the forced error of the soft-left leadership of Ed Miliband, which tried to revive a decaying Labour Party after the defeat and discredit Blairism brought upon it. This left development came from the base of the Labour Party, including many Labour supporters 'exiled' by Blairism. It saw a mass influx of left-wing people that pushed Labour to the left.

Leftward Movement and Coming Together

In this context, of large but left-reformist sects and their inability to deal with the Labour Party question, individual revolutionary militants who seek to go further play a critical role. This was the context of the re-emergence of *Socialist Fight* in the mid 20-teens. Two Trotskyists militants played a major role in this group which did attract attention and play something of a polarising role: Ian Donovan and Gerry Downing, henceforth referred to by their initials.

ID was a product of Spartacism, who, episodically disillusioned with orthodox Trotskyism in the late 1990s due to the Spartacists' pathology and abuses, became a left-wing third-campist for a while, but was then re-radicalised by the Iraq war and pushed back far to the left. He was radicalised by the experience of being in RESPECT, an organisation subjected to a degree of racist political persecution, including by Zionists. Their persecution of Galloway and RESPECT was an anticipation of the later witchhunt against Corbynism. Notwithstanding this mistaken third-camp position, ID came to the most radical anti-Zionist/anti-imperialist position of all, in the tradition of Abram Leon, embodied in his 2014 Draft *Theses on the Jews and Modern Imperialism*.

GD, was an oppositionist in the Healyite Workers Revolutionary Party at the time of its 1985 explosion and collapse, one of

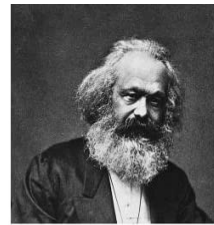
many active participants. He then went through various organisations: the Revolutionary Internationalist League, International Socialist Group, the Workers International League, *Workers Fight* with 2 other ex-WRP cadre with varied politics, then the Committee for a Marxist Party in alliance with the CPGB/*Weekly Worker*. He then founded *Socialist Fight* in 2009 with two other ex-ISG cadre, whom he then split from over the issue of their defence of the film director Roman Polanski, who admitted to statutory rape of a 13 year old girl and appears from the evidence to be guilty of actual rape. After breaking with his initial collaborators he then fused his rump group with some Brazilian and Argentinian Trotskyists groups in 2013 as part of an anti-imperialist response to imperialist intervention in Syria and Libya, to form the Liaison Committee for the Fourth International (LCFI). This gave an international dimension to his politics that meant it was no longer his operation.

Then GD got together politically with ID in 2015: ID won Gerry to his position on Zionism and GD conversely played an important role in ID re-embracing a better orthodoxy over the USSR and deformed workers states, rejecting the very-leftist third-campism of Walter Daum's League for the Revolutionary Party whose views on 'statified capitalism' ID had previously adhered to.

A Genuine Marxist Analysis of Zionism: the Tradition of Abram Leon

GD and ID thus both moved left in slightly different ways under the impact of the Corbyn movement. GD embraced ID's most radical position on Zionism, which treats Israel as an imperialist power in its own right, not just a puppet of the US, and notes that its power in the world is built not just on its territorial size and productive capacity but on a powerful Jewish-Zionist faction in the ruling classes in the Western imperialist countries, who mobilise on the basis of a common ethno-centric project with the Israeli ruling class itself. In fact Israel's racist 'law of return' quite consciously internationalises Israeli citizenship to all those born Jewish around the world. This has the effect of, even more importantly, internationalising a bourgeois layer particularly in the United States, to a lesser extent in Western Europe, where Jewish representation in the wealthiest layers of the bourgeoisie, is often a couple of dozen or more times greater than the percentage of Jews in the wider population.

In reality, this creates a situation where Israel's capitalist ruling class does not just live in Israel, but overlaps with the ruling classes of these traditional imperialist countries, and the dominant bourgeois politics among bourgeois Jews being political Zionism, produces powerful ethnically-based factions within the ruling classes of the older imperialist countries that are in fact part of the Israeli ruling class also. Zionism's internationalisation of Israeli citizenship is consciously designed to create



On the Jewish Question
Karl Marx



and nurture this situation, and a complete understanding of this issue is essential for the understanding of supporters of the Palestinians everywhere.

This phenomenon has deep historical roots; it is a product of Jewish history and socio-economic development. Karl

Marx, in *The Jewish Question* (1843) wrote of this: "Let us not look for the secret of the Jew in his religion, but let us look for the secret of his religion in the real Jew". And he went on to explain that "The chimerical nationality of the Jew is the nationality of the merchant, of the man of money in general". This was systematised by Abram Leon, who was subsequently martyred in Auschwitz, in his seminal Marxist work *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation* (1943).

Following on from Marx's original insight Leon elaborated the history of the Jews as a commodity- and money-trading people-class in medieval times, which is the reason why Jews as a distinct human group survived from antiquity whereas other ancient populations, such as Phoenicians, Romans, Assyrians, Babylonians, and many more, disappeared through assimilation into newer composite populations. The Jews survived as a distinct population because they occupied that niche in feudal society and, though the people-class that Leon described disappeared with the end of feudalism, it did not do so without trace. Jews as a people continued, not as a people-class anymore, but as a multi-class population with however a very different proportionality of the characteristic classes of capitalist society to that of the general populations within the societies they inhabited.

Their evolution can only be understood as a dialectical process; their unique history led them both to persecution, oppression and genocide; to Jewish intellectuals and artisan-proletarians playing a very prominent, vanguard role in the workers movement particularly in its early period up to the mid-20th Century, when the tragedy of the Nazi genocide led to the decisive defeat and destruction of that invaluable Jewish left, and to a dialectical inversion whereby the outsized Jewish bourgeoisie gained dominance over Jews, and in the second half of the 20th century that Jewish bourgeoisie, with Zionist politics, increasingly played a vanguard role for the bourgeoisie, in the offensive against the workers movement known as neo-liberalism from the 1970s onwards.

Indeed the entire strategy of Zionism as a movement was to take advantage of bourgeois anti-Semitism as a kind of perverse ally in order to raise Jews up as a people from being oppressed pariahs to one of the world's oppressor peoples, even at the cost of collaborating with the destruction of the most

progressive elements of the Jewish population itself. Again in a dialectical sense, this can be seen as a quite novel, if fearsome and colossally destructive, manifestation of class struggle within the Jewish population as a class-differentiated remnant of the people-class that they once were.



Ernest Mandel and Abram Leon

This has become particularly clear since the collapse of Stalinism and the counterrevolution in the Soviet bloc at the turn of the 1980s/1990s decade, with the eruption of post-Cold War conflicts centrally in the Middle East, such as over Iraq and then the manipulation of elements of the 2011 'Arab Spring' revolts in the Arab world. All this to try to strengthen Israel through the destruction of its most radical, pro-Palestinian opponents among the Arab regimes, starting with Iraq, moving onto the destruction of Qadaafi and then the crusade against Syria's Assad, which is still ongoing, and has been thwarted in large measure through resistance to US and Zionist imperialism's proxy war by Putin's Russia and Iran. The threat of war against Iran, as well as the crucifixion of the Palestinians by Trump and Netanyahu's openly genocidal 'deal of the century' is another manifestation of the bloc between Zionist imperialism and its Great Power protectors that has introduced a crucial modification, and a contradiction and weakness, into the 'normal' workings of imperialist capitalism.

Thus the Jewish question, because of the unique social relationship of Jews to commodity exchange under two social systems, has been strategically intertwined with the evolution of the capitalist system right from its very beginning, not for any teleological or still less biological reason, but simply because of their relationship with the historically evolved channels through which capital has flowed during its complex, dialectical process of coming into the world, and also the process by which it is beginning to prepare its own demise. Because of

this happenstance, Jews have been at the centre of such world-historic events as the colonisation of Palestine, the Second World War and the genocide, and the Zion wars of the early 21st century. Thus Marx's essay *The Jewish Question* has proved seminal to fully understanding the world in which we live, and this subject is of strategic importance for Marxists.

Again dialectically it can be argued that what is seen as an asset for their system by the wider bourgeoisie, to the point that there are no more ardent fighters against non-existent 'left-wing anti-Semitism' than the bourgeois class itself, is also a contradiction and potentially an explosive problem for them. Thus we see the extreme bourgeois hostility that confronts anyone on the left who attempts to analyse the Jewish question and the strategic aspects of it for the proletariat.

This provides the objective background, in terms of at least partially understanding this question, for the coming together and limited rise of Socialist Fight in parallel with the left-moving Corbyn current in the British Labour Party in the mid 20-teens, and the collapse of GD into Zionist apologetics as that movement went into meltdown in 2019 and early 2020.

The Beginning of Downing's Political Collapse

The manifestations of GD's collapse into pro-Zionism are very clear in his continuing drip-drip of Zionist propaganda into *Socialist Fight* in early 2020 for use as political weapons against the programme he had stood for over approximately the previous five years.

This appears to have begun after a 10-day family trip to Ireland that GD undertook in August 2019. We have no idea what actually went on there, but it does appear that some sort of political alliance was created between GD and his daughter ED to try to change the politics of *Socialist Fight* and make it 'respectable' on the left-Zionist-influenced, capitulatory 'far left'. Since GD had been very prominent over the previous four years and more in arguing for SF's hard anti-Zionist views and hostility to the Jewish ethnic bigotry and racism that is the content of political Zionism and its capitulators, he faces a serious problem in trying to live this down.

So his tactic for doing so seems to have been to attack others, and he engaged in some pretty ludicrous baiting of others on the left, including the Jewish left, as being amenable to fascism and anti-Semitism. His first target in this regard was Tony Greenstein at Communist University 2019.

Knowing he would not get the endorsement of *Socialist Fight* comrades for this, he put out his own personal leaflet attacking Greenstein for his expressed admiration for the sometimes left-Zionist, sometimes somewhat anti-Zionist, Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt, and particularly for her account of the 1961 Eichmann trial, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. GD attacked Greenstein as soft on Nazism for refusing to condemn Arendt



Tony Greenstein and Gilad Atzmon

her long-time relationship with the existentialist philosopher and dilettante Martin Heidegger, who joined the Nazi party when Hitler came to power, but dropped out of political activity when he became uneasily aware that Hitler suspected him of sympathy with the SA leader Ernst Röhm, whose followers were eliminated in the 1934 'Night of the Long Knives'.

It is clear that Heidegger was not a serious political figure in the Nazi regime; the claims that GD made that he was some sort of ideological inspiration for the Nazis are ludicrous. He was a marginal figure and Arendt's relationship with him is simply a personal matter of no political significance. This is just an example of GD echoing a characteristic Zionist attack on Arendt for her criticism in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* of Israel's laws against mixed marriage, which she condemned as similar to the Nazis' Nuremberg laws. Whose entire ethos her on-off relationship with Heidegger incidentally made a mockery of, though at the crucial period he betrayed her and she left Germany until after Hitler's defeat.

This irrelevant, guilt-by-association attack on Tony Greenstein was simply GD's grossly unprincipled, subjective manner of paying him back for Greenstein's wrong-headed condemnation and exclusion of GD, ID and Socialist Fight from Labour Against the Witchhunt in January 2018, not to mention his failure to defend GD against the witchhunt and his auto-exclusion from the Labour Party in March 2016, when Greenstein condemned him as a fool undeserving of defence for his defence of Islamic State against imperialist attack and his support for SF's position on Zionism and the Jewish Question.

Defence of Gilad Atzmon: a Litmus Test of anti-Zionism

for This was a bad sign, but much worse was to come. One thing SF had become known for, as well as our material on the Jewish Question detailed above, was our refusal to support exclusion and witchhunting against the Israeli-Jewish Jazz musician Gilad Atzmon. We defend him not only against Zionists, but figures on the Jewish left who denounce him as anti-Semitic for his renunciation of Jewish identity, his denunciation of the overseas Zionist lobby as driven by Jewish exclusivism and a desire for domination, his public expression of doubts about some aspects of the Nazi holocaust of Jews, and his belief that Jewish chauvinism was behind some of the crimes of Stalinism, particularly in the Ukraine in the 1930s. He also, as is well known, promotes his idealist philosophical criticism of Jewish identity widely and engages with people on the far right as well as the far left of politics.

We in *Socialist Fight* prior to GD's renegacy always regarded Gilad Atzmon as an organic product of the contradictions of Israeli politics, and refused to join in the witchhunts against him, despite disagreements with much of his political confusion. We do not consider his theory of Jewish identity to be anti-Semitic; this divides Jewish people into three overlapping categories, the first two of which, those simply born Jewish and those who merely adhere to the Jewish religion, are considered by Atzmon to be harmless and innocent categories. Atzmon only regards as problematic his third category, which consists of those who consider their Jewishness to be a political trait that is more important than any other trait, those who consider themselves 'chosen' and superior to others in other words. We do not consider his position to be an attack on all Jewish people and therefore we do not condemn his position as racist and anti-Semitic.

GD knew full well what Atzmon's views were on the Russian Revolution right from July 2015, when he reblogged one of Atzmon's videos, titled 'The Jewish Solidarity Spin'¹, on the website with an introduction by ID that criticised those same views. Though he was aware of Tony *Socialist Fight* Greenstein's antipathy to, and criticisms of, Atzmon in detail having supported Greenstein's anti-Atzmon campaign in 2009, GD changed his mind around 2015 and defended Atzmon for years with considerable pride. He even authored an article in December 2017, which attacked Tony Greenstein for having grovelingly noted that the Board of Deputies had earlier praised him for opposing Atzmon when Greenstein himself was suspended from Labour in March 2016. GD's article denounced Tony Greenstein thus:

"So when he is under attack his immediate response was to plead to the "Zionist Board of Deputies of British Jews (BOD) and other Zionists" to defend him because he has given them Gilad Atzmon's head on a plate and they should reciprocate the favour..."²

Then there is Atzmon's interview with GD during the dispute that led to the exclusion of *Socialist Fight* from Labour Against the Witchhunt (LAW) in January 2018. In that interview Atzmon asked him the following question:

"In the recent LAW meeting Greenstein and Walker reportedly said that 'making a connection between the number of Jewish billionaires in the US or who is Jewish amongst the richest sections of society and imperialist support for Israel is anti-Semitic.' I guess that Walker and Greenstein believe that Jewish politics and mammon are beyond criticism. Can you tell us which political school may adhere to such a peculiar approach? Is there any Left ideology or working-class politics that excludes criticism of Jewish mammon and influence?"

To which GD replied:

"Of course, that ideology is Zionism."

GD partially dissociated himself from some of Atzmon's views thus:

"I do not agree with Gilad on the question of Jewish identity. It is entirely wrong to equate Jewishness or Jewish cultural identity with Zionism. Zionism is a modern, right wing, racist political construct, that takes some aspects of Jewish history and oppression and uses this to distort and falsify the whole historical materialist basis of that history, as explained so well by Abram Leon in *On the Jewish Question*.

"I do not agree with ostracising him and his co-thinkers from the struggle against Zionism, despite these disagreements. I do not agree he is either racist or anti-Semitic".³

Yet despite these disclaimers, GD unilaterally took the decision to include Atzmon's interview with him, in the following print edition of *Socialist Fight*, because it filled an empty space and also likely because it raised GD's personal profile. But this was a tactical error, as the interview was not even our copy, and its prominence in the printed journal was a godsend to Zionists, who were able to put pressure on two left bookshops in London, Housemans and the SWP's Bookmarks, to ban *Socialist Fight* from sale at these outlets.

GD's dissociations are fair enough, as Marxists are not hostile per se to the expression of Jewish identity provided it does not trump the basic tenets of the class struggle, that class, not any kind of other identity, is the primary driving force of social struggle and human emancipation. But nevertheless GD was quite well aware, when questioned by Atzmon, that the hostility of the likes of Greenstein, Jackie Walker and others to SF's Marxist analysis of the diaspora Jewish bourgeois component of Zionism is derived from left-Zionist influence on their poli-

tics. He clearly defended SF's *Draft Theses on the Jews and Modern Imperialism* in this interview, as he did on Andrew Neil's *Daily Politics* show in March 2016, and to Atzmon he denounced the 'leftist' opposition to it as in essence Zionist. By his own then-criteria, therefore, his current politics are now left-Zionist.

Yet in September 2019, when Atzmon's associate Devon Nola posted an item on Facebook comparing a law banning BDS (boycotts of Israel) in the US with the 'Bolshevik' decree (in fact instituted by Stalin in 1932) that instituted the 'death penalty' for 'anti-Semitism', GD denounced this as 'Nazi propaganda' and characterised Atzmon and his supporters as 'Strasserites', i.e. left-wing fascists, an absurd comparison given the Jewish-Israeli origin of the Atzmonites and their clear solidarity with the Arab victims of Zionism. It should be noted that the Strasserites were German fascists who were just as hostile to the then-oppressed Jewish population of Germany and Europe as Hitler's own diehard supporters. They just took as good coin the Nazis' sometimes use of anti-capitalist rhetoric and tried to implement it, which is why Hitler had them suppressed and slaughtered.

The idea that Jewish or Jewish-led equivalents of 'Strasserites' could embrace Israel's victims is utterly ridiculous, and a sign that GD had begun to capitulate ideologically to Zionism, and to regard the Palestinian Arab population and its ferocious, genocidal oppression at the hands of Jewish-Zionist racists, as of little import or significance. What really mattered to GD even at his point, implicitly, was the attitude of every current, even Jewish ones, to Jews. Behind this is the Zionist conception that in every possible situation, even when Jews are the perpetrators of racist crimes, eternal Jewish victimhood is the overriding political issue that eclipses all others.

A fairly extensive literary discussion then took place on the *Socialist Fight* website in which some disputed questions about the Atzmonites, but not the fundamental question of the pan-imperialist component of Zionism, were explored at some length. But the discussion was inconclusive, and comradeship political relations had not broken down at that point.⁴

General Election and After: Downing's Political Meltdown

This discussion was a bad sign, of GD bowing to the reactionary pro-Zionist climate that was developing as the Corbyn movement began to decline. But the final straw was the loss of the General Election by Labour on 13th December 2019, when Boris Johnson's Tories, by 'fair' means or foul (and there may have been an element of foul) defeated Labour coming out of it with an overall majority of 80.

The differences exploded again with full force in a discussion about the likelihood of widespread electoral fraud in the General Election. GD denigrated the very idea as insane, despite considerable unease among Labour members that their expe-

riences of favourable receptions when canvassing for Labour, including in quite a few of the Northern seats that went over to the Tories, did not match up with the exit polls and the subsequent results. Neither ourselves nor the many Labour supporters with similar suspicions, who seem to number in the tens of thousands, have any way at this point of verifying these suspicions.

But such things as a doubling of the postal vote to 38% in some places, reported by Lord Ashcroft's highly respected polling company after the election, and the fact that two prominent Tory or sympathetic personalities, the BBC's Political Editor Laura Kuenssberg, and the Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, appeared to have broken electoral law by talking about, and for that matter knowing about, the contents of the postal vote before it was even legal to count it, is grounds for suspicion that there was something fishy about the election results.

Then there is Theresa May's remark, seemingly on behalf of the ruling class, to Corbyn at PM's Question Time in December 2017: "we will never allow you to govern"⁵. And there are the remarks of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, secretly recorded in June 2018 when meeting with 'Jewish leaders' talking about Jeremy Corbyn becoming British Prime Minister:

"It could be that Mr Corbyn manages to run the gauntlet and get elected,' he said on the recording. 'It's possible. You should know, we won't wait for him to do those things to begin to push back. We will do our level best. It's too risky and too important and too hard once it's already happened.'"⁶

In the view of GD, such speculation was lunacy, and 'conspiracy theory'. For him, the working class has chosen anti-immigrant racism and voted for the Tories over Brexit, and that was the end of it. The Labour defeat for him was due to the failure of Corbyn to stand up to the anti-Semitism smears (which was true, and this did weaken Labour) and also the failure of Labour to take a firm enough stand against Brexit. Though quite how a firmer Labour stand against Brexit was likely to win over a racist working class that was voting for the Tories in order to force Brexit through is not clear.

Some would argue that it is quite feasible that postal vote fraud could have been used to exaggerate known trends among some demoralised sections of the working class to vote Tory for Brexit and turn a known danger of a retrograde political trend into a Tory landslide. The idea that the British electoral system is untainted by fraud and that it is lunatic conspiracy mongering to even suspect something like this is an example of blind faith in the British ruling class to uphold 'democracy'. Such an attitude is unworthy of a Marxist.

But what really made GD show his hand was when comrade ID shared on Facebook a piece from *Veterans Today*, a US anti-

war, pro-Iran/Russia conspiratorial anti-Zionist website, which pulled together anecdotal evidence from Labour supporters around the UK pointing to there being something suspicious about the election results. The article also contained, right at the beginning, a statement that Boris Johnson was a 'Rothschild Stooze'. Then the gloves were off: for GD the post was 'anti-Semitic' and sharing it was an unforgivable crime, even though the evidence on apparent fraud that it contained was quite authentic.

And thus the dispute was revived again. *Veterans Today* had connections to Atzmon; he sometimes wrote for it, it has people who write for it who think that Israel was responsible for 9/11, who think that the Nazi holocaust was a hoax. However, GD had a problem even with this, as he had stood on a public platform at a joint *Socialist Fight* public meeting in July 2017, a rather large meeting attended by around 150 people, with Vanessa Beeley, a defender of the Syrian regime and an uncritical Assad supporter, speaking in defence of Syria against the US/UK/Israel backed jihadist destabilisation and proxy war. She has written regularly for *Veterans Today* for several years. So in denouncing ID for sharing material from *Veterans Today* calling into question the legitimacy of the result of the UK General Election, GD was also implicitly attacking some of his best known work. If it was impermissible to share articles from *Veterans Today*, then surely it was impermissible to share a platform with Vanessa Beeley?

Corruption and Fraud

Undeterred by such logic, he went on and drafted a 'Socialist Fight statement' attacking *Veterans Today*, Gilad Atzmon, and others around him as Strasserite fascists. He campaigned long and hard to try to get a majority in the organisation he founded to get this statement endorsed by a majority of the full, voting membership. But he failed. In two votes, one of London members in what was supposed to be a closed meeting, the vote was tied, as it was in a national vote of SF members with the deadline a week later. A tied motion falls. So GD was reduced to putting his statement out in the names of individuals who agreed to sign it, including a couple of overseas supporters and a number non-members, including his own daughter, who he tried to recruit at the last minute to the organisation notwithstanding the constitutional requirement for a 6-month non-voting candidacy subject to the approval of a vote of the existing membership.

So after that he tried fraud to get the majority he wanted. He insisted that an ex-member, who had neither paid regular subscriptions nor attended meetings for over a year, was still a full member and entitled to a vote. ID had disagreed and insisted he was obviously lapsed. He attempted also to pay for the votes of two candidate members six months in advance by paying their membership subscriptions up to July 2020 in the expectation that they would vote for his position when they

gained full membership in July. Not realising that normal Bolshevik practice is for the existing full membership in good standing to decide on questions of membership standards. And he tried to recruit his daughter into the organisation as a 'candidate', who in the last five years had shown no particular desire to join the organisation, again without the existing full members getting a vote on this, as is elementary. These being desperate acts of petty corruption designed to try to win a vote that he could not win with the properly politically recruited, active membership of the organisation.

Ten days after the voting deadline for the second vote had expired, and thus after the vote had been tied, GD claimed to have contacted the lapsed 'member' and secured his vote, giving him a 'majority', and so he reposted his original statement on the SF website fraudulently as a '*Socialist Fight* statement', abusing his personal position as custodian of the collectively paid-for website to do so.

A Principled Trotskyist Faction Faces Racism and Abuse

In the meantime those opposed to him had founded the Trotskyist Faction, which produced a principled platform that stood on key programmatic documents that made up the core politics of SF, including GD's material on the Russian Question and deformed workers states, ID's material criticising the sectarian deviations of the Spartacist tradition in dealing with mass working class-based reformist parties that are involved in Popular Fronts; and ID's material on Zionism and the Jewish Question, as well as a whole set of other points making up a concrete Trotskyist platform.

The Trotskyist Faction has a non-white majority and also comprises the majority of non-white comrades in SF. GD's undeclared faction is all-white. But this has not stopped an orgy of 'racist' baiting and at times thinly-veiled racist abuse from GD and his faction accusing our non-white, majority Asian/Middle Eastern faction of being sympathetic to fascism and white supremacy. That peculiarity also should alert experienced people as to the pro-Zionist nature of GD's faction, as race-baiting, including of non-white leftists is a characteristic Zionist behaviour based on belittling the oppression of non-Jewish oppressed groups.

Gareth Martin, a white South African sympathiser of GD's faction that he tried to inveigle into the organisation without a vote, accused an SF comrade of Turkish/Muslim background who lives in London of supporting the murder of Jews in synagogues in London. But there have been no such events in London. The smear was extremely sinister and Islamophobic, and appears to reflect a pro-Zionist colonial outlook, as befits someone from a white-dominated racist state that collaborated with Israel over nuclear weapons on the basis of a shared antipathy to non-whites.

Equally disturbing was the smear from one Rob Lyons, a North American sympathiser of GD on this issue at least, who in the course of a Facebook discussion with our Turkish comrade, referred to Turkish men beating their wives and became personally abusive when it was pointed out that the person he was arguing with was Turkish. Islamophobic stereotypes and slurs have been a key activity of GD's pro-Zionist supporters in this factional dispute.

And if one is speaking of bigotry, there is GD's reproduction of a leaflet by the Spartacist League from 1999 that branded ID a 'dangerous lunatic' and suggested that ID was likely to physically attack people. This on the basis of ID having once suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of abusive behaviour experienced at the hands of leading figures in the Spartacist League over 30 years ago, which provoked a physical altercation 21 years ago. The leaflet GD dragged out was condemned by a workers enquiry 21 years ago as an 'unforgiveable crime' by the Spartacists, of persecuting their former members in order to provoke violence and further victimise them. GD's dragging out of this leaflet in this context amounts to attacking ID for once having suffered a disability. Which is an atrocious thing for a supposed socialist to do.

This was matched by the most pathetic bureaucratic chicanery. As is our constitutional right in SF, the Trotskyist Faction published two statements on the political situation in SF. One gave a detailed analysis and condemnation of GD's corrupt practices against us and his organisational abuses. The other was a detailed political reply to the previous political attacks on us. When we published this material on the website, as is our right, GD used his ownership of the website to remove our statements. He then deleted ID's user login from the website, and proceeded to remove our comrades' posting rights on a range of SF forums on Facebook, before he overreached himself and removed us from an international list that he does not have control of. The international comrades objected and reinstated us. So instead, using the stolen SF website, he announced our 'expulsion' from SF, and then finally even blocked our comrades on Facebook, the final admission that he could not handle what we had to say politically at all.

All this tawdry behaviour, racial abuse, abuse of comrades for having once had disabilities, and blatant anti-democratic behaviour, is a sign of what happens when a trend capitulates to racism and right-wing politics. Basic socialist consciousness goes out of the window and supposed socialists behave increasingly like gutter reactionaries. It is a sad tale of degeneration and corruption.

Downing Baits the Left with 'Philosophical' Gibberish and Nazi Smears

The real thrust of GD's factional activity is a desire to ingratiate and exculpate himself with capitulators to Zionism on the

wider left who had previously accused him of anti-Semitism. And thus hostility to, and repudiation of, the previous *SF* position on Zionism, and in particularly ID's *2014 Draft Theses on the Jews and Modern Imperialism*.⁷

GD came out with a fusillade of hostility to ourselves, and even to the most advanced elements of the Jewish left who share some elements of our analysis of Zionism and its role in promoting genocidal anti-Palestinian policies by Western imperialist countries, including the United States, who were it not for the activities of the Jewish-Zionist bourgeois factions and lobbies, would have no more reason to endorse specifically genocidal policies against Palestinians than against any other national group on this planet.

Thus he not only accused Tony Greenstein of pro-fascism over Hannah Arendt, in internal discussions he also accused Phil Weiss, the blogger who publishes *Mondoweiss*, probably the most widely respected Jewish left blog in the United States, of being a 'Jewish conspiracy' theorist for articles written by him suggesting that the Zionist lobby played a major role in ensuring that Jimmy Carter, and the elder George Bush, each only served one term as US President, because of acts of disobedience to Zionist demands for hard-line anti-Palestinian policies over settlements, and also dealings with the PLO. And he widened his fascist-baiting attack to even others on the left, publishing on Facebook a bilious attack on Sebastian Budgen, the editor of *Historical Materialism*, for suggesting in an academic context the need for a dispassionate discussion of the influence of the philosopher Nietzsche on 19th Century history and politics. GD posted an attack on Budgen that suggested he shared fascist 'social values'. When comrades protested that this was demented, and discredited *SF*, we were accused, insanely, not of being supporters even of Sebastian Budgen, but rather of being fans of Nietzsche himself!

The issue of the philosophical views of various allegedly pro-fascist philosophers was not a major issue in the dispute, but GD tried to make it so, as a smokescreen to cover up his growing antipathy to consistent anti-Zionism and ID's *Draft Theses*. He also used this issue of philosophy to drag in various Zionist figures such as Alan Dershowitz, Ron Rosenbaum, and Dave Rich into the polemic, to accustom his followers to regarding such genocidal anti-Arab racists as authorities on who is a racist or fascist, or who is not. Toward the end of the dispute, GD took to allowing an obvious pseudonymous Zionist troll, one 'Sven Göllly', who we suspect is a veteran of many anti-left smear campaigns including those against Corbynities, to post attacks on the Trotskyist Faction on the stolen *SF* website, just to underline what a good little servant GD now is of the Zionist lobby.

In seeking to defend his original outrageous attack on Tony Greenstein over Hannah Arendt, GD quoted one Ron Rosen-

baum, who attacked Arendt for her lack of ethnic, communal sentiment thus:

"One can still hear this Arendtian shame about ethnicity these days. So parochial! One can hear the echo of Arendt's fear of being judged as 'merely Jewish' in some, not all, of those Jews so eager to dissociate themselves from the parochial concerns of other Jews for Israel. The desire for universalist approval makes them so disdainful of any 'ethnic' fellow feeling. After all, to such unfettered spirits, it's so banal."⁸

It was pointed out in the course of the discussion what Rosenbaum's politics and "'ethnic' feeling" actually were, and that he had deeply racist 'ethnic' feelings about Palestinians, projecting his own genocidal 'feelings' onto Palestinians in a way that is classic. For instance this quote was rather relevant. According to Wikipedia, his view is:

"'The Palestinians want a Hitlerite Judenrein state, however much violence it takes to accomplish it. Not separation, elimination.' The Palestinians are, he asserts, engaged in incessant state and religious incitement to murder Jews. The 'stabbing intifada' is not an insurgency, but a matter of 'the ritual murder of Jews'. Whereas Hitler tried to hide his crimes, the Palestinians celebrate killing Jews."⁹

The response to this became a repeated refrain from GD, that to attack the racism of these Zionists was an *ad-hominem* attack; that you had to refute their 'arguments' which were 'truthful'. This is a grossly hypocritical argument from GD, and completely at odds with the argument that he made against anti-Zionists, that such-and-such a person may have dodgy views (allegedly) about Jews, and therefore to agree with anything they say about anything makes the person who cites them complicit in their (alleged) racism themselves. To agree



with Gilad Atzmon, who is Jewish, about anything, makes you (allegedly) an 'anti-Semite'. But to agree with Ron Rosenbaum, who says that every Palestinian is worse than Hitler, is just fine! That is classic Zionist racism and double standards from GD. To him, now he has made his peace with Zionism, Jews truly are more important than Arabs!

All this racist hypocrisy was instrumental, the real purpose of the polemic was to atone for his previous adherence to genuine anti-Zionism (now dubbed 'anti-Semitism') and to hopefully discredit and bury the previous position on Zionism of *Socialist Fight*. Alan Dershowitz was Trump's lawyer in his impeachment trial and America's most prominent *Nakba* denier, who was torn apart by Norman Finkelstein in his work *Beyond Chutzpah*. According to GD, to agree with someone like Atzmon who appears to harbour doubts about some aspects of the Nazi holocaust, is to be tainted with supposed racism.

But to cite an outright *Nakba* denier, one of the most prominent, to attack Gilad Atzmon as a racist and a white supremacist (allegedly), is just fine. Just another manifestation of that double standard that considers today's oppressors (Jewish-Zionists) as more important and morally superior to their Arab victims, and their supporters, even Jewish ones. Or one might suspect, given GD's indulgence of pro-Zionist family friends of his, while engaging in bilious attacks on a number of prominent anti-Zionist Jews, especially Jewish ones are the target.

"My Enemy's Enemy is my Friend"

It is well-known that in the Middle East, where the genocidal oppressors and ethnic cleansers of the Palestinians over the last century or more of Zionist settlement and then the imposition of the state of Israel on the Arab people through dispossession and seemingly endless wars, are Zionist Jews and the 'democratic' imperialists, there is an understandable softness and nostalgia for those imperialists' defeated rivals in the Second World War.

This is a normal response of oppressed peoples everywhere to their oppression, and it worked both ways in imperialist wars and even in the Cold War, with those oppressed by one imperialist camp seeking help from their oppressors' rivals, with those oppressed by Stalinism seeking help from the imperialists at times, and with those oppressed by imperialism seeking help from the Soviet bloc. There were pro-Axis nationalists at work in WW2 under British colonial rule in India, in Ireland, and in the Middle East. This is no surprise to Marxists, though it may outrage pro-imperialist jingoists.

The oppression of Arabs by the Zionist state has persisted much longer, three-quarters of a century, than the Third Reich, which lasted only 12 years. Thus it is hardly a surprise that this kind of "my enemy's enemy is my friend" sentiment has deep roots among the Arab masses, and this finds reflection in the actions of political leaders.

So there have been speeches denying the truth of the Nazi holocaust by some of the most celebrated leaders of the Arab masses and their allies, including Gamal Abdul Nasser, who spoke of "the lie of the 6 million" back in 1964, from Mahmoud Abbas, who is now the stooge leader of the Palestinian authority, but who once wrote a holocaust denial thesis,

to the Assad regime, which as is well-known has distributed pro-Nazi material denying the Nazi holocaust for decades, to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the former Iranian president, who organised international conferences to debate the historicity



Gamal Abdul Nasser

of the Shoah, to Hamas, whose original, authoritative charter endorsed the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

This also has a degree of influence on the most alienated elements of the oppressor people, those such as Atzmon (he is only the best known of a whole milieu of Jewish 'traitors') who have abandoned the people of their birth completely and identify with the oppressed. This should hardly be a great surprise either, to Marxists and anti-imperialists. It is not something that we endorse at all, as opponents of imperialism in general, but we do comprehend what drives those oppressed by 'our' imperialism, and to a degree many who sympathise with them, to look to 'their' oppressors' enemies for help, or at least some vicarious relief.

So you have to be pretty credulous, and infected with incipient pro-Zionist and Western chauvinism, to cite a racist sociopath like Dershowitz to give testimony as to how Atzmon and Israel Shamir, to name but two, are Nazis and how Atzmon supports the programme of white supremacy. But that is what GD did in the discussion. He managed to drag out the fact that Atzmon, informed that David Duke, the former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan from the 1960s and 1970s, liked some of his writings about Jewish identity and had similar views about Jewish exclusivism himself (while of course being very much in favour of white exclusivism), paid him a compliment back.

Duke abandoned open fascism and sought 'respectability' in both the major American bourgeois parties at various times since the 1980s. Atzmon compared Duke with Avigdor Lieberman, an ultra-right minister in Israel's government who favours the wholesale expulsion of the Arab population, and said that compared to Lieberman Duke was a 'humanist' as he 'only' was in favour of separation and not outright genocide. A foolish and naïve remark characteristic of that trend in

the Middle East that sees the avowed enemy of one's enemy as a potential friend, but in no way indicative of any endorsement of the oppression perpetrated by the likes of Duke.

It is worth noting that in citing Dershowitz, the *Nakba* denier and defender of massacres, to attack Atzmon, GD praised the Zionist thug as a 'noted civil libertarian', a preposterous accolade that really is just as foolish as calling David Duke a 'humanist'.

Downing/Rich's 'Fascist' Smear Against Atzmon and TF

Then there is his reproduction of the article "Is Gilad Atzmon a fascist?"¹⁰ by Dave Rich of the Community Security Trust, an organisation that as Tony Greenstein says, "has a hidden agenda which is the political use of 'anti-Semitism' as a means of demonising the opponents of Zionism, including Jewish opponents." This appears to be the political agenda of GD also, now he has capitulated wholesale to Zionism. GD regurgitates Rich's incomplete quotes from Atzmon where he says in his work *Being and Time* that:

"Fascism, I believe, more than any other ideology, deserves our attention, as it was an attempt to integrate left and right[, ...]"¹¹

Unfortunately it does not even quote the complete paragraph, as Atzmon continues:

"... the 'dream' and the 'concrete' into a unified political system. Fascism was an incredible economic success, but it failed to sustain itself. Why?"¹²

Of course, when you omit the end of the paragraph, you miss out the bit where he says it failed, which makes it rather less than the 'endorsement' that Rich says it is. Atzmon answers his own question later in the same section where he writes:

"The answer is that fascism's appeal were the causes of its failure. Fascism merged the left egalitarian utopia with Right rootedness, mass production and private ownership. In theory this should form a perfect bond, yet it may be possible that the 'dream' and the 'concrete' cannot be integrated into a single political system. It is the desire that connects being and becoming, yet the desire is, in itself, within the realm of the void. It is mysterious and it cannot be materialised into a system. Fascism's attempt to touch the Real – its attempt to merge the fantasy and the factual murdered the desire: it was an attempt to make people into deities, and so promised the impossible."¹³

This is of course idealistic nonsense, but it is clear that despite the tortured reasoning derived from over-indulgence in idealistic philosophy, Atzmon concludes that it is not possible to 'integrate' left and right into a 'single political system'. He

could have deduced that by studying some basic historical materialist investigations of capitalism, such as Marx's *Wages, Price and Profit* instead of wasting a chunk of his life studying idealistic philosophy in mainstream academia, but this method of investigation of the world obviously did not make him a 'fascist'. His conclusion that fascism fails because it cannot make people into gods, is a condemnation not only of fascism but also of Nietzsche, whose concept of the god-like 'supermen' some consider may have provided ideological inspiration for fascism. So it is clear that, contrary to the smear from Dave Rich, that Atzmon does not think it possible to integrate right and left into a 'single political system' and therefore the implication in the title of Dave Rich's article is just another Zionist smear.

Atzmon's strength is when he analyses Jewish identity, a subject he is intimately familiar with, in *The Wandering Who*, which is an important and somewhat ground-breaking book. His great weakness is when he tries to extend the idealistic methods he has learned in academia and which did not particularly disrupt his analysis in *The Wandering Who*, to other, non-Jewish spheres of politics. There he really does not understand what he is dealing with, and his attempt to apply idealistic analysis to non-Jewish movements and ideologies produces a strange impression of him floating on the surface of reality.

Ironically the schema he comes up with, that of generalising Orwell's *The Lion and the Unicorn* to create a world of autonomous nationally-based but non-exclusionary, cooperating egalitarian socialist states, owes much to utopian socialism. It rejects Marxism's materialist understanding that such things are impossible because the productive forces have long since outgrown national boundaries and hence rational economic planning can only take place on an international scale.

Atzmon rejects that because he considers that 'cosmopolitanism', i.e. internationalism, is a cover for Jewish chauvinism and a means for Jews to dominate other peoples. This is simply an erroneous extrapolation from Israeli experience and another indication of the failure of his idealistic view to understand the world. It is also Judeo-centric; Atzmon puts Jews at the centre of absolutely everything, but while the Jewish Question is indeed strategic as pointed out earlier, it is material reality, not 'Jewish ideology' that is the determining factor in the world.

But it is legitimate to ask, in the light of GD's regurgitation of Dave Rich's smear against Atzmon, the question: "Is Dave Rich a fascist?". You can search the entire corpus of Atzmon's writings and you will not find support for the oppression of any national or ethnic group. This however is not true of Dave Rich. In his work *The Left's Jewish Problem*, he baldly states the following:

“Comparing the plight of the Palestinians with the Holocaust performs several functions. Its political goal is to undermine the idea that the Holocaust provided a moral justification and a practical need for the creation of a Jewish state.”¹⁴

Cut out the cant and the double standards and this says that the Nakba, the ethnic cleansing, the massacres such as Deir Yassin, and the 70+ years of oppression and terror against the Palestinian people have “moral justification”. The argument is clearly racist; it says that the past suffering of one people, the European Jews, at the hands of Hitler, provides “moral justification” for massacres and ethnic cleansing of another people, the Palestinian Arabs. How is this different in principle from someone who justifies the death camps, the gas chambers, the starvation and wilful malign neglect in the camps whose purpose was that disease would get the inmates if the gas chambers did not?

From the point of view of Marxism, of anti-racist universalism, and the interests of the working class, there is no difference. There is no moral difference between someone who supports gassing Jews and someone who supports the massacre and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. But for GD, in his pro-Zionist, i.e. racist degeneration, ethnic cleansers, pogromists and the



Norman Finkelstein

like who defend the murder of Arabs, are just fine, and it is perfectly permissible to promote their lying propaganda to smear anti-Zionists.

Downing's Real Target

But all this is just a means to an end for GD. The real target of all this rancid pro-Zionist hate propaganda was the *Draft Theses on the Jews and Modern Imperialism*. In conversation with Atzmon in 2018, GD rejected criticisms of its supposed ‘anti-Semitism’ as ‘Zionism’. But now as the concluding point of his renegade, pro-Zionist faction he writes:

“We now repudiate the use of the term ‘the world Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie’ and the whole notion of a Jewish-Zionist imperialist vanguard as antisemitic tropes. We will in future use the term ‘Zionism’

alone in describing the political tendency within the Jewish ethnicity that commits such dreadful crimes under international law against the Palestinian citizens of Israel and those expelled Palestinians primarily in 1948, ‘67 and ‘73, all of whom have the right of return.”¹⁵

In his own terms, as expounded to Atzmon in his 2018 interview, GD is now advocating ‘Zionist’ politics in denouncing the notion of the Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie as ‘anti-Semitic’. But this passage is laughably contradictory and anti-Marxist.

First of all it mendaciously appends ‘the world’ to the term ‘the Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie’. That is not there in the original *Draft Theses*, which talks about the Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie as being ‘pan-imperialist’ and even ‘pan-national’ but in a context that makes it clear it is confined to the main Western imperialist countries (which obviously excludes Japan). There is no suggestion of a ‘world’ Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie in the original theses, so GD is attacking something completely fictional in the manner of Zionist liars like Dave Rich and Alan Dershowitz that he now admires. It’s clear that in appending ‘the world’, GD is using Goebbels’ technique of the Big Lie.

The passage notes that “Zionism” is a “political tendency” that exists “within the Jewish ethnicity” but promises to use only the term “Zionism” to describe it. Presumably then, pointing out that Zionism is Jewish will be *verboten*. But this definition itself says that “Zionism” exists “within the Jewish ethnicity”, i.e. that Zionism is Jewish. But to say that Zionism is Jewish, or is a “political tendency within the Jewish ethnicity” is ‘anti-Semitic’. So by his own logic, GD’s own new ‘definition’ is itself anti-Semitic.

Or perhaps it is saying that to posit Zionism as an ideology of the bourgeoisie “within the Jewish ethnicity” is anti-Semitic? Really? So GD is saying that class analysis of the nature of Zionism is anti-Semitic, and thereby *verboten* also? It seems like it. It thus seems that he agrees therefore with Dave Rich that Marxism itself is anti-Semitic. For GD, even though Zionism is a bourgeois ideology (it certainly does not represent the historic interests of the proletariat!) and is located “within the Jewish ethnicity” it is apparently ‘anti-Semitic’ to say that that Zionism is the ideology of the Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie. Even though it is obviously true.

Then there is the concept of the Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie being a ‘vanguard’. Norman Finkelstein had something to say about that. In his essay ‘Corbyn Mania’¹⁶ from 2018, he noted that in the United States the non-Jewish bourgeoisie now see the Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie as a step up in social status from themselves, and thus non-Jewish bourgeois families such as the Clintons and Trumps see their offspring marrying into Jewish families as amounting to ‘marrying up’ the social

scale. This corroborates the point in the *Draft Theses on the Jews and Modern Imperialism* that the wider bourgeoisie see the Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie as a particularly class-conscious layer of their own class (a 'vanguard') and hence themselves award it a higher social status. This is simply empirical observation of the behaviour of the different sections of the bourgeoisie towards each other.

But according to GD, such an observation is an "anti-Semitic trope". Therefore, logically, GD must also denounce Norman Finkelstein's 2018 essay as anti-Semitic. This fits in with the reference to Finkelstein in his recent bizarre letter to the *Weekly Worker*¹⁷ where he appears to endorse Toby Abse's 1999 Nazi-baiting attack on the CPGB for defending Finkelstein's *The Holocaust Industry* against reactionary, pro-Zionist criticism from the SWP's Alex Callinicos. The same Alex Callinicos who today has his goons strong-arm Palestinian activists who object to the SWP including Zionist racists in its 'Stand up to Racism' events.

In the context of this grovelling to Zionism, GD's claim to still stand for the Palestinian 'right to return' is about as meaningful as Rebecca Long-Bailey's claim to stand for Palestinian rights after she has signed up to the Tory-Zionist Board of Deputies' '10 commandments', one of which is to give Zionist outfits such as the Jewish Labour Movement control of excluding pro-Palestinian activists from the Labour Party on the grounds of supposedly combatting 'anti-Semitism'. GD's residual 'anti-Zionism' is flagrantly contradicted by his smearing of his own comrades and other anti-Zionist militants, including many Jewish ones, using Zionist material as a weapon. He smears not just Atzmon, but Finkelstein, Greenstein, Weiss and more, as anti-Semitic and/or soft on Nazism. His 'anti-Zionism' is meaningless in the light of that.

We Go Forward!

Based on his theft of the Socialist Fight website, which was paid for by the subs of the active members over a period of several years, GD has now announced the 'expulsion' of the Trotskyist Faction from *Socialist Fight*. But that is meaningless. He does not have the votes to expel us. He would need a majority of full members to convene and vote for expulsion to do that. When his political position itself was put to the full members in London and nationally, he failed to win a majority.

What has actually happened is that he has stolen our website and filled it with semi-Zionist, personalist, abusive nonsense. We, the Trotskyist Faction, consider ourselves to be the real core of *Socialist Fight* as a revolutionary Marxist organisation. We continue to be affiliated to the Liaison Committee of the Fourth International and note that we have never been legitimately expelled from anything. As the real continuity of *Socialist Fight* we have registered a new website with the domain <http://socialistfight.org>, or alternatively [\[trotskyistfaction.org\]\(http://trotskyistfaction.org\), to emphasise that we are a principled faction that is determined to carry on with the politics and programme that GD and his renegade clique has betrayed. We also intend to publish a new journal to carry on with the Trotskyist politics of the old *Socialist Fight*. We will go forward, let our enemies beware!](http://</p>
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Notes

1. <https://socialistfight.com/2015/07/20/gilad-atzmon-on-the-jewish-solidarity-spin/>
2. <https://socialistfight.com/2017/12/21/tony-greenstein-and-gilad-atzmon/>
3. Quotes from "Witch-hunters United", Socialist Fight #27, May-June 2018
4. See <https://socialistfight.com/2019/09/21/what-is-anti-semitism-can-jewish-people-whether-zionist-or-anti-zionist-be-anti-semitic/>
<https://socialistfight.com/2019/09/23/jewish-bolshevism-is-an-anti-communist-and-antisemitic-canard/>
<https://socialistfight.com/2019/09/26/stalin-anti-semitism-and-the-nagba-reply-to-a-comrade/>
<https://socialistfight.com/2019/09/28/on-the-anti-communism-and-anti-semitism-of-devon-nola-and-gilad-atzmon/>
<https://socialistfight.com/2019/09/30/once-again-on-anti-semitism-and-all-that-jazz/>
5. Morning Star, <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/f/things-can-only-get-little-bit-better>
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jun/09/mike-pompeo-leaked-recording-corbyn-labour-jewish-leaders>
7. <https://socialistfight.com/2016/01/07/draft-theses-on-the-jews-and-modern-imperialism-by-ian-donovan-6-9-2014/>
8. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2009/10/ron-rosenbaum-vs-hannah-arendt/29379/>
9. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ron_Rosenbaum
10. <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2017/11/08/is-gilad-atzmon-a-fascist>
11. Being and Time, Skyscraper 2017, p26
12. *Ibid*
13. *ibid*, p33
14. Kindle edition, loc 2875
15. <https://socialistfight.com/2020/02/20/socialist-fight-has-expelled-ian-donovan/>
16. <http://normanfinkelstein.com/2018/08/25/finkelstein-on-corbyn-mania/>
17. <https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1287/letters/>



Trotskyist Faction takes on the mantle of Socialist Fight.



Gerry Downing defends Marxism against Zionism on BBC Daily Politics, March 2016

In this period of extreme weakness of the revolutionary Marxist left, political programmes and traditions have become represented by individuals and small groups to a greater extent than was true in periods where the left was stronger. This is obvious when you look at the state of left-wing politics today. This is a temporary phase of course, reminiscent in some ways of the days of Marx and Engels, but it is where we are at today.

Look at the large sects: the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and its splinters such as *Counterfire*; or the Socialist Party (SP) and its splinters such as *Socialist Alternative* and *Socialist Appeal*. These are largely ineffectual but still have a sizeable number of members. As organisations, they have nothing much to offer because they are variants of left reformism or at best right-centrism, and not really that different to the Labour Left. Yet their purely organisational sectarianism, and their size, meant that they were outside the Corbyn movement and unable to act as a polarising force within it. On some questions, their political impulses and records were in fact worse than the instincts of the best rank-and-file Corbyn supporters.

For instance the Socialist Party/Militant has had over the decades a dreadful record over imperialism. From its tacit approval of British rule in Ireland during the decades of war between the British state and Irish republicans, its softness to the point of indulgence on the sectarianism of the Ulster Loyalist working class, to its more or less open support of British 'democracy' in the 1982 Malvinas War and its insistence on the supposed 'rights' of the British colonial 'Falkland' popula-

tion, it hardly has a record superior to that of the Labour left. This is of a piece with its softness on Zionism, its insistence on 'two states' and the supposed 'right to self-determination' of the Israeli Jewish population on the land that was taken by force from the Palestinian Arabs in the first place. This of course has been a major issue in Labour, and this tradition has been found wanting.

The various splinter groups of Militant/Socialist Party do not so far appear fundamentally different. *Socialist Alternative* broke with the SP and its leader Peter Taaffe out of disgust with his clique's bureaucratism, which is almost a caricature of a bureaucratised organisation, but there does not so far appear to be anything in the way of a profound political differentiation with Taaffe involved, being mainly about the details of tactics in the trade unions and different, but hardly revolutionary, attitudes to elements in the bureaucracy in some unions. *Socialist Appeal*, based on the core of the original *Militant* group around the late Ted Grant and Alan Woods, is deeply Labourite in its practice though it does have some interesting theoretical positions on aspects of Stalinism and a slightly higher political level derived from Grant's earlier history as one of the pioneering Trotskyists in Britain.

Then there is the hidebound remaining SWP, after the ruinous splits of the past decade, whose products have proved ephemeral but which left the SWP a bankrupt, rightist rump: For instance over its refusal to defend Julian Assange through the whole period of the years-long smear campaign against him over the Swedish 'honey trap', which laid the basis for the current extradition show trial. The SWP's tradition, from their founder Tony Cliff onwards, was the refusal to defend the Soviet bloc deformed/degenerated workers states against imperialist attack, branding it instead 'State Capitalism' and just as much 'imperialist' as the West, under the slogan "Neither Washington nor Moscow but International Socialism".

Now under Alex Callinicos the SWP have overcome their more left-wing period under the leadership of John Rees and Lindsey German during the Iraq War period, where they blocked with

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