A Fine Step Forward: The Scottish Socialist Youth's First Conference

Jennifer Debs reports for Heckle.scot on the first conference of Scottish Socialist Youth.

The morning of Sunday 28th January saw a number of us gathered in Glasgow's Civic House, thankful to have the walls of the old printworks between us and the dreadful weather. Members, for the most part, of the Scottish Socialist Youth (SSY), we were there for the organisation's 2024 national conference – the first such that the SSY has ever had.

As the SSY is a fairly new organisation, I will give a sketch of the group's development before discussing the conference. Born in 2021 of the familiar process by which the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) disappoints, frustrates, exhausts and then emits eager young members, the SSY stems from a disaffected student branch of the SSP which decided to go it alone. Stirling University was ground-zero, and it still remains the SSY's main centre, boasting the majority of members.

In the last year however, the SSY has been striking out in new directions and expanding, with the greatest success in Glasgow so far. There are growing links with comrades in Dundee and Edinburgh, and working groups in Falkirk, Fife and East Lothian, which look promising for the year ahead.

This growth is a result of the SSY's campaigning work in the course of 2023, on issues like drug deaths, public transport, republicanism, Palestine solidarity and Scottish independence. This has brought the SSY beyond Stirling more and more, and has been winning it supporters and new members from across Scotland. I am one of them, and I am not alone in being

attracted to the SSY by the fact that it is an autonomous youth organisation with a broad variety of ideas and perspectives, not beholden to any political party or sect, nor to the leaden decree of some wizened leading comrade who has been in control for roughly thirty years. What a fresh breeze in comparison to the usual sort of lefty youth wing!

This increasing national scope is what spurred the conference in January. The key theme of the day's political content was that of campaigning beyond parliamentary activity. We are soon headed for a general election of course, but with the outlook so grim and the left being as puny and irrelevant as it is, the prospects for a meaningful intervention are pretty much nil. So, it's crucial that a group like the SSY directs its limited resources in directions that will actually make a difference, and which will help to cohere a stronger and more vibrant socialist movement at a national level.

In that spirit, there were contributions by guest speakers from Living Rent, This is Rigged, and Palestine Action, who each in their own way elabourated on the role of youth in organisational activity and direct action, whether in challenging the encroaching creep of bureaucracy that plagues every union, in building community solidarity amid climate chaos and austerity, or in breaking up the war-machines of imperialism.

To see these groups brought together on a single platform was an encouraging sight, and it is hoped that the SSY will not only continue to connect militants from such varied ends of the movement, but also that it will lend an active and useful hand to their struggles. Tenants' unionism, environmentalism, anti-imperialism, and more – the SSY must aim to be the kind of socialist group that can integrate these perspectives and organisational "spheres" and give a unified expression to all of them.

But this cannot be done in a dogmatic or opportunistic way, by entryism and ultimatums, by take-overs and smash-and-grab recruitment tactics. Instead, the SSY needs to be honest and helpful in its relations with other campaigns, rendering concrete, disinterested assistance to them, and, by being a genuine friend to the cause, demonstrating the utility of our socialist analysis, politics and practice. This will do a great deal more good than turning up with newspapers, wagging an all-knowing Marxist finger, and wishing other campaigns could just see that capitalism is the main problem already, simply because we say so.

This puts me in mind of the role that a good socialist group *should*, and indeed must, play as a co-ordinating centre for all the struggles, democratic and economic, domestic and global, in which the working class has an interest. A place where the working class in all its variety of identity can find a political home, because the group stands tall as an authentic tribune of the people, capable of championing everything from the fight for increased wages to the civil rights of transgender people.

There is an old conception that the memory of the working class is its party – that is to say, that a revolutionary organisation can serve as the "historical memory" of the proletariat, a living store-house of lessons and knowledge taken from the experience of the class struggle in its widest sense, and therefore a guide that can prepare and organise the

working class for future battles. The task of becoming a group like this is one that confronts every socialist organisation, whether it is conscious of it or not, whether it calls itself vanguardist or anarchist, whether it tries and fails or just reneges on the responsibility immediately.

To build a truly revolutionary organisation, to achieve and maintain principled unity, to carry forward and generalise all the struggles of the people – all of this is certainly a very difficult task, and there is absolutely no guarantee the SSY will succeed where most have failed. But we're still new and fresh, and up for trying. At the very least, by bringing together different social movements to discuss and share ideas as it did at the conference, the SSY is off to a good start.

As to the democratic content of the conference, this consisted in votes on a battery of motions for SSY policy, and in the presentation of candidates for the national committee elections. The motions spanned a variety of causes, including policy on the de-commercialisation of housing, advocating for rural and island areas of Scotland, universalist urban planning, diversity and inclusion within the SSY, and the preservation of small music venues. These motions give a good view into the diverse interests that animate the SSY's membership, and it is exciting to see that there is a sense within the organisation that it has a lot of potential to tackle many different social issues.

Unfortunately, one area where the conference could be criticised is around the national committee elections. Of all the positions, only the national chairperson was contested, the rest just seeing an incumbent up for re-election. This is never an ideal situation to be in, but for the moment it is also an understandable one, given the SSY is only really beginning to grow and establish new branches. However, for the good of the democratic health of the organisation, it is very important that the SSY encourages more members to stand for positions in the future. From what I have seen so far, I am

hopeful that this will be done.

All these matters finished and the conference concluded, we repaired to the pub for the obligatory post-event pints, and there's not much that you need to know about that. In any case, I drank a toast to the SSY, and so should you!

Look out for us in 2024!

Photos courtesy of the Scottish Socialist Youth.

For the right to self-determination of Palestinians, for the withdrawal of imperialist forces from the Middle East

The war in Gaza continues, with its procession of horrors, but also with significant solidarity mobilizations and significant resistance in Palestine. In an interview published by International Viewpoint, Gilbert Achcar addresses this situation and the avenues for building resistance against Israel and its accomplices, the far right and imperialism.

Interview with Gilbert Achcar by Antoine Larrache, Inprecor.

What phase of the Israeli intervention are we in now?

Things are relatively clear in light of the military reports of the occupying forces. The most intensive bombing phase has been completed for the north and is being completed for the

southern part. In the northern half and centre, the occupying forces have moved to the next phase, that of a so-called low-intensity war. In reality they are organizing a complete grid of the areas they have occupied in order to destroy the network of tunnels and search for fighters from Hamas and other organizations who are always in ambush and can emerge at any time, as long as the tunnels exist.

Israeli forces are increasingly under international pressure, particularly American, to move to this so-called low-intensity phase of combat. But this name is misleading because in reality low intensity is limited to bombing. The number of missiles and bombings by planes and drones will decrease since there is not much left to destroy in Gaza. They will move on to one-off interventions against groups of fighters who emerge here and there.

What followed on from 7 October was an absolutely devastating bombing campaign that took on genocidal proportions: the wholesale destruction of a vast urban area inevitably resulted in the extermination of an incredible number of civilians. More than one per centof Gaza’s population was killed. For France, this would correspond to the frightening figure of 680,000 deaths!

Added to this is the expulsion of 90 per cent of the population from their places of residence. A good part of the Israeli right – which is an extreme right in a country where the Zionist left has been crushed – would like to expel them from the territory of Gaza to Egypt or elsewhere. Israel wants to ensure total military control of the territory, but that is an illusion: they will never succeed unless they kick everyone out. As long as there is a population in Gaza, there will be resistance to the occupation.

The drop in intensity of bombings on Gaza also allows Israel to raise its tone against Lebanon and Hezbollah. Zionist leaders are banking on the fact that part of Lebanon can be

detached from Hezbollah for sectarian and political reasons. The threats are increasing day by day, with strong pressure for Hezbollah to withdraw to the north, to a distance from the border that Israel would deem acceptable. Otherwise, Israel threatens to inflict the fate of Gaza on part of Lebanon, in other words to raze the regions where Hezbollah is in a position of strength in the southern suburbs of the capital, in the south of the country, and also in the east, in the Bekaa.

What is the state of military resistance in Palestine?

In Gaza, resistance can continue in devastated areas as long as there are tunnels. A sort of underground city was built for the fighters. It's like a metro network, but the Gazan population cannot take refuge there, unlike what we saw in Europe during the Second World War or as we see today in Kiev, Ukraine. The tunnels dug by Hamas are for the exclusive use of fighters.

Rockets continue to be launched from Gaza into Israeli towns, with Hamas and other groups trying to show that they are still active. Eradicating Hamas and all forms of resistance in Gaza is an impossible goal.

This is what leads the Israeli far right to say that we must empty the territory of its population, annex it, create Greater Israel from the Jordan to the sea and empty all this territory of Palestinians. The Israeli far right, including Likud, aspires to this. Netanyahu displays a more ambiguous official position due to his position as prime minister, but he keeps winking at this extremist perspective.
In the West Bank, the difference with Gaza is that the Palestinian Authority – which is in charge of the Palestinian populated areas in the West Bank – is exactly in the position of Vichy in relation to the German occupation. Mahmoud Abbas is the Petain of the Palestinians. There are organizations in the West Bank advocating armed struggle, such as Hamas and

others, but what has attracted the most attention over the past year is the emergence of new groups of young people who are not affiliated – neither with Fatah, nor with Hamas, nor with any of the traditional organizations. In some refugee camps or towns, such as Jenin and Nablus, they have formed armed groups and carried out occasional operations against the occupying troops, which has led to massive reprisals.

Since 7 October, the occupying troops have been engaged in a mop-up campaign in the West Bank, a remake of the "Battle of Algiers", with the added use of aviation for the first time since 2001. Added to this is the action of Zionist settlers who harass and kill. As we speak, there have been around 300 deaths in the West Bank. This is not comparable to the absolutely terrible massacre perpetrated in Gaza, but the Israeli far right wants to repeat it in the West Bank at the first opportunity. That said, contrary to what Hamas hoped, there was no widespread conflagration with an uprising of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and inside the State of Israel in response to the Islamic movement's call. The reason is that the population of the West Bank is very aware of the disproportionate balance of military power. Unlike the Hamas soldiers in Gaza, where there has been no direct occupation force since 2005, the population of the West Bank comes into contact with the occupation forces on a daily basis and is directly confronted with the far right and the settlers. It knows that they are just waiting for an opportunity to repeat what was done in 1948, that is to say, to terrorize people and force them to flee from the territory. This explains why the West Bank has only moderately demonstrated its solidarity with Gaza.

What is the state of mobilizations in Israel?

The 7 October attack was a very strong shock, as was 11 September 2001 in the United States. Then there was its repeated use in the media. This shock continues to be exploited, with an endless series of testimonies in order to

maintain a vengeful mobilization of the population. It was this type of campaign in the United States that allowed the Bush team to launch into the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. For now in Israel, this is also working, and the vast majority of Jewish-Israeli opinion supports the war.

A small anti-war minority denounces the genocide. We must salute its courage, because it faces complete rejection by its social environment. But what is striking is the virtual absence of mobilization by the Palestinian citizens of Israel, unlike in 2021, when there was a strong mobilization in solidarity with the start of the Intifada in the West Bank. This led to violent reactions from the Zionist far right in the country. In view of the hatred which has seized the Jewish-Israeli population after 7 October, if Palestinian citizens had tried to reproduce such a mobilization, the consequences would have been terrible.

This population suffers a very intimidating climate, with bullying, repression and censorship, which falls on them, worsening their status as second-class citizens. They are now pariahs in the eyes of much of Israeli society.

Why do you think there is not more action in Arab countries?

I belong to a generation that experienced the defeat of 1967 and its aftermath, then the 1970s which experienced very strong mobilizations. This time there were some big demonstrations in Arab countries, but no more than in Indonesia or Pakistan for example. In Jordan and Morocco, there were big demonstrations, but these countries did not even end their diplomatic relations with the State of Israel.

The relative weakness of the mobilizations can only be explained by the weight of the accumulated defeats. The Palestinian cause was weakened, in particular due to the divisions and the action of the Vichy-style Palestinian Authority, which allowed a certain number of Arab states to

establish diplomatic relations with Israel.

But there are also the defeats of the two revolutionary shock waves that the region has experienced so far, in 2011 and 2019. When we observe the region today, the conclusion is sad: there is almost nothing left of the conquests of these two waves.

The last two countries where there were still gains from the popular movement are Tunisia and Sudan. Tunisia went from the dictatorship of Ben Ali to that of Kaïs Saïed, with perhaps an aspect of "farce" coming after the tragedy. In Sudan, the resistance committees had some success until last year, when the two factions of the old regime began a ruthless civil war in April. The international media does not talk much about it, especially in the West, despite the tens of thousands of deaths and the millions of displaced people, the sexual violence and everything else: the darker people's skin colour, the less they talk about it. It is an immense tragedy, for which the resistance committees were not prepared. They do not have armed wings that would allow them to play a role in a situation of this type.

We can concretely see the impact of the defeats since the "Arab Spring": Syria, Yemen, Libya, and now Sudan, are in situations of civil war; in Egypt, Sissi established a dictatorship more brutal than that of Mubarak which the population had got rid of in 2011, and in Algeria the military restored order by seizing the opportunity offered by Covid, then it was Tunisia's turn…

All of this does not create a climate conducive to broad mobilizations which, in Cairo or other capitals, would attack Israel's diplomatic representations and force governments to break their ties with the Zionist state.

Is it relevant to conclude that if the Zionist extreme right's project is realized, Israel's influence will increase in the

region?

The Israeli far right knows that the governments of the region pay very little attention to the Palestinian question, that a large part of them have already established official relations with Israel, and that they get along well between reactionary governments. Israel therefore does not feel the need to make concessions on this front. They know that the Saudi government is hypocritical, that it is on the path to establishing relations with them as the Emirates did. There is security and military cooperation between them against their common enemy, Iran.

The Israeli fare right attracted into its fold, with the effect of October 7, a part of what was considered as centre-right. Today it is banking on the fact that the American administration, which made the mistake of providing unconditional support to Israel for its enterprise against Gaza, has put itself in a position from which it can no longer retreat. Indeed, the United States has entered an electoral period, the Democrats are therefore in competition with the Republicans, and Trump will not fail to seize on the slightest disagreement that could arise between Israel and Washington to attack the Biden administration. The latter is in a weak position, it has put itself in a position from which it is no longer able to exert strong pressure on Israel’s genocidal enterprise. There is a lot of hypocrisy in Blinken’s speeches urging Israel to show greater “humanitarian” concern: he is taking people for idiots, in the full knowledge that the genocidal destruction and massacres in Gaza were only possible thanks to American support.

This war is the first joint Israeli-American war, the first war where the United States has been fully, from the beginning, a party to the operation, its stated goals, its weaponry and its financing.
In addition, the Israeli far right and Netanyahu are banking on a return of Trump to the American presidency, which would

greatly facilitate their realization of a greater Israel.

This is why they constantly announce that the war will continue throughout the year 2024. This is inseparable from the fact that this year 2024 is an election year in the United States. They will exploit this opportunity to continue their military momentum. The threat is therefore very serious for Lebanon and the West Bank, the two potential targets of a future large-scale Zionist military campaign. The ongoing "low-intensity" "counter-insurgency" war in the West Bank may intensify and, in Lebanon, the limited exchange of bombings on both sides of the border risks turning into a large-scale operation .

In light of the experience of historical mobilizations on war, whether Vietnam, Iraq or the first Intifada, what are the most effective slogans to counter the Israeli offensive? Many people are wondering how to act, since we seem to be facing an indestructible enemy.

The 7 October effect was exploited to the fullest by relying on what I called, after 11 September, "narcissistic compassion", this compassion which is only exercised towards those who resemble you. In France, the parallel was immediately drawn between the rave party of October 7 and the Bataclan, so that people would identify with Israelis and put Hamas in the same category as the Islamic State.

Despite this, we have seen in Western countries a rise in the mobilization in solidarity with Gaza, which is however largely that of communities of immigrant origin from the Arab region or regions in sympathy with the Palestinian cause. Despite the absolute disproportion in the presentation of events in the media – for which a Palestinian death is much less important than an Israeli death – people realize the scale of the genocide underway. But, with the October 7 effect, the indignation is of a lesser magnitude than it should be in the face of a genocidal war of this type, which is taking place

before the eyes of the whole world.

However, indignation is gaining ground and has begun to reverse the wave of October 7 in which voices of solidarity with Palestine were stifled by a campaign labeling the slightest expression of this solidarity as anti-Semitism, Nazism, etc.. We must now build for the long term, building on indignation at the genocide. What is happening in Gaza shows the reality of the State of Israel, governed by the far right for many years, an increasingly radical far right which took action by seizing the opportunity, using 7 October as the administration of George W. Bush had seized the opportunity of using 11 September to carry out actions that its members had been planning for a long time.

In terms of type of action, the BDS campaign is proven and effective. It must be continued and amplified. On the political level, we must emphasize the complicity of Western governments – to varying degrees. We can understand the historical reasons for the attitude of the German ruling class, but the lessons they learned from the catastrophe of Nazism are very bad if they lead them to support a state which, although claiming to be Jewish, behaves more and more like the Nazis.
In France, Macron must have felt he had gone too far when he offered to participate in Israel's war on Gaza, and France has now distinguished itself from other European governments by supporting the call for a ceasefire. The procedure initiated by South Africa before the International Court of Justice on the question of genocide is also a point of support for pressure on governments.

We must also oppose arms deliveries to Israel, particularly in the United States, and highlight the hypocrisy and "double standards" of Western governments on the issue of Ukraine and that of Palestine. Their humanitarian and legal discourse on Ukraine collapsed like a pack of cards, especially when viewed from the Global South. Certainly, few people had any

illusions, but now the double talk is quite blatant. This includes the qualification of genocide: it was quickly used for Ukraine even though what Russia has done there so far is of much less destructive and murderous intensity than what Israel has done in Gaza in three months.

A range of political themes makes it possible today to rebuild a truly consistent internationalist and anti-imperialist consciousness. The twinning of Ukraine and Gaza allows us to show that we are against any invasion, whether Russian, Israeli or American, and that as internationalists we are consistent in defending universal values such as peace, the rights of peoples, self-determination, etc.

Today there is room for numerous political education battles, confronted with the media, the reigning hypocrisy, and all the supporters of Israel or Moscow. This war of narratives is facilitated by the evidence of far-right sympathy for Netanyahu and Putin. This also helps to show how anti-Semitism and Zionism complement each other. We must reverse the accusation equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism by showing that, although it is true that certain anti-Semitic speeches disguise themselves as anti-Zionism, this is far from establishing permanent equality between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. However, it is necessary to emphasize the convergence between anti-Semitism and Zionism: the anti-Semitic extreme right of Europe and the United States, which wishes to get rid of the Jews, supports Zionism because it also advocates the fact that Jews must go to Israel rather than live in Europe or North America.

Regarding the slogans for solidarity with Gaza, today we must articulate the various questions that we have raised and which are first of all of a defensive nature: that is to say the need to stop the massacre, which is the top priority, therefore the call for an immediate ceasefire. But this is not enough, because stopping the fighting in the face of armed occupation of the entire territory obviously poses a problem.

We must therefore also demand the immediate, and above all unconditional, withdrawal of the occupying troops. We must also demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from all territories occupied since 1967.

It is a slogan which conforms to an optic that the vast majority of people can understand since international law considers these territories as occupied and therefore requires the end of their occupation and of any colonization put in place by the occupier. Likewise, international law recognizes to Palestinian refugees a right of return or compensation.

From there on, it is up to the Palestinians to decide what they want: the debate within the solidarity movement on one state or two states is often inappropriate in my opinion, because it is not in Paris, in London or New York that must be decided what is needed for the Palestinians . The solidarity movement must fight for the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people in all its components. It is up to the Palestinians to decide what they want. For the moment, there is a Palestinian consensus on the demands for Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, for the dismantling of settlements in the West Bank, for the destruction of the separation wall, for the right of return of refugees and for real equality for the Palestinian citizens of Israel. These are all democratic demands, which are understandable to everyone, and must be at the centre of the solidarity campaign with the Palestinian people.

Beyond that, in the realm of utopia, there is food for thought and debate, of course, but that is not what mass campaigns are built on, particularly in the emergency of a genocide. in progress.

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Gilbert Achcar will be the keynote speaker at: **Building Internationalism from Below in a Multi-Polar World**. A day conference organised by the Republican Socialist Platform on 11am to 4pm, Saturday 23rd March 2024, Renfield Centre, 260 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4JP

*Gilbert Achcar grew up in Lebanon. He is currently Professor of Development Studies and International Relations at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. A regular and historical contributor to the press of the Fourth International, his books include The Clash of Barbarisms. The Making of the New World Disorder (2006), The Arabs and the Shoah. The Arab-Israeli War of Narrations (2012), The People Wants. A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising (2022). His most recent book – The New Cold War. United States, Russia and China, from Kosovo to Ukraine was published in 2023. He is a member of Anti*Capitalist Resistance in England & Cymru-Wales.*

Main Photo: Protesters for a ceasefire in Gaza fill Glasgow's Buchanan Street while the statue of former Scottish Labour

leader Donald Dewar looks on (Mike Picken for ecosocialist.scot)

Ukrainians Haven't Been Forgotten

Connor Beaton writes for Heckle.scot, publication of the Republican Socialist Platform, on the recent day school in February 2024 organised by Ukraine Solidarity Campaign Scotland.

A landmark seminar organised by the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign Scotland (USCS) began on Saturday *[3rd February 2024]* before last with the uplifting news that public service union UNISON's Scottish council had just voted unanimously to affiliate to the relatively young organisation. With the war featuring less and less prominently in the media, this was welcomed as an encouraging signal that Scottish trade unionists have not forgotten about their Ukrainian counterparts as the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine looms.

Taking place under the title 'Ukraine's fight is our fight',

the four-hour-long event in Edinburgh's Augustine United Church – which was live-streamed in its entirety – boasted an impressive range of speakers, many of whom were Ukrainian socialists, trade unionists and environmentalists. This made the event a refreshing departure from many other left-wing forums in Scotland and the rest of these islands in which the war has tended to be discussed with very little, if any, input from or reference to the views of Ukrainians.

USCS was established in the immediate aftermath of the all-out invasion in February 2022, initially as an outgrowth of the longer-running London-based Ukraine Solidarity Campaign (USC) but increasingly functioning as an independent organisation in its own right.

It rejects the argument advanced by some sections of the left, particularly those in and around the Stop the War Campaign, that the war in Ukraine should be understood principally as a conflict between Russia and NATO in which socialists should be neutral; instead, taking its cue from left-wing Ukrainians, it recognises that Ukraine is fighting a defensive war against Russian imperialism in which it deserves support from those who uphold the right of nations to self-determination.

This event, by far the most substantial and successful event organised by USCS in its short existence, served two purposes: firstly, to aid socialists in Scotland in better understanding the current situation in Ukraine and the impact of the war on Ukrainian workers, the economy and the environment; and secondly, to focus minds on how we can organise the most effective and practical solidarity from Scotland to Ukraine.

Pictured: Dr Taras Fedirko speaking at the USCS seminar in Edinburgh.

Radical perspectives

The day suitably began with a harrowing report from Olesia Briazgunova, international secretary of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KPVU), who joined the event remotely from Kyiv. She set out a now-familiar description of the dual role of Ukrainian trade unions in supporting their members on the frontlines while also defending their interests against employers and the state, all against the backdrop of martial law which has made strikes and union rallies illegal. The KPVU has called on western governments to continue to provide economic, humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine (not an uncontroversial demand in trade unions here), to impose stronger sanctions on Russia and to use frozen Russian assets towards a "just reconstruction".

Solidarity greetings were subsequently heard from Labour MSP Katy Clark, SNP MP Tommy Sheppard, Green MSP Ross Greer and PCS assistant general secretary John Moloney – a reflection of the broad nature of USCS, whose members consciously decided not to have a narrow focus on the trade union movement but to instead build support for Ukraine across Scotland's trade unions, political parties and social movements.

An exceptionally good, if sobering, presentation was given by

Dr Taras Fedirko, a political and economic anthropologist at the University of Glasgow. He explained in clear terms the extent to which the Ukrainian economy is now overwhelmingly dependent on western aid. Ukraine's defence spending alone was greater in 2022 than the entire state budget in 2021; the country's annual tax revenue just about covers military salaries.

Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF), alarmed by this unsustainable reliance on other countries, has encouraged the previously libertarian Zelenskyy government to pursue progressive taxation (an irony observed by LSE's Luke Cooper in a recent article which Fedirko mentioned and endorsed).

Fedirko's presentation left an impression of two distinct paths open to Ukraine: one in which the massive labour shortages created by the war, combined with the expansion of the state and a turn towards progressive taxation, provides enough leverage to organised labour to push for a social-democratic reconstruction; or one in which Ukraine becomes an "Eastern European Israel" with a powerful military-industrial complex orienting the entire economy and society around confrontation with Russia. With well-paid British consultants among western experts deployed to Ukraine to shape economic strategy, there is an acute danger of the British and European left leaving the question of Ukraine's economic future uncontested and allowing the right to exclusively shape it.

Pictured: Iryna Zamuruieva speaking at the USCS seminar in Edinburgh.

Environmental crisis

A similarly thorough presentation by Iryna Zamururieva, an ecological activist based in Edinburgh, highlighted the scale of the environmental damage caused by the war, much of which will have a cross-generational impact. For example, up to 40% of Ukrainian land is now mined.

While the full extent of the damage can understandably not be determined until areas which are either occupied or the site of active conflict become safe for researchers to access, it has already been established that hundreds of species of animals and plants are at risk of extinction (alarming not least because biodiversity is recognised as a bulwark against climate change) while fresh water, already in short supply in Ukraine as a result of climate change, has been widely contaminated by destructive actions such as the flooding of coal mines.

The destruction of the Kakhovka dam last June, leading to devastating flooding in the Kherson region, is perhaps the best known environmental disaster arising from the war in Ukraine. Zamuruieva pointed out, however, that the construction of the dam in the 1950s was also an environmental disaster, motivated in large part by the need for fresh water in Crimea during the deportation of the Tatars – a Russian colonial crime. She also highlighted other environmental disasters; in one case which received remarkably little publicity, more than four million chickens died at Europe's largest poultry farm after the occupation made it impossible to feed them.

With fossil fuels playing a significant role both in driving and funding the war, the Scottish climate movement forms a critical part of global anti-imperialist struggle, Zamuruieva

put across. She encouraged USCS supporters to attend Climate Camp Scotland this summer, as well as to pressure the Scottish Parliament to take more action; opportunities include Labour MSP Monica Lennon's proposed bill on ecocide, and the Scottish Government's ongoing consultation on a national adaptation plan that also encompasses international action.

A more technical presentation on Ukraine's major environmental challenges was separately given by Ecoaction, a Ukrainian NGO which is to receive a £400 donation from USCS – the group's first international donation.

A divided left

Very little of the day was dedicated to discussing the way in which the war has divided the left internationally, but where these came to the fore most clearly was in a session on self-determination led by Irish writer Conor Kostick, who has previously written and delivered talks about Ukraine and the politics of James Connolly.

Though at times veering too close to a speculative exercise along the lines of 'what would Connolly say if he were here today?', Kostick correctly pointed out that Connolly was prepared to accept arms from a rival imperialist power, i.e. the German Empire, in order to wage a struggle for national liberation against the British Empire. Condemning Ukrainians for soliciting and accepting arms from NATO countries may be a legitimate political position, he said, but those advocating for it can't claim they've derived their analysis from Connolly.

Neither can they claim to stand in the tradition of Lenin, added Mike Picken of Ecosocialist.scot, highlighting the Bolshevik revolutionary's writing on self-determination and in particular his opposition to annexations ("because annexation violates the self-determination of nations, or, in other words, is a form of national oppression"). This did not appear

to convince Graham Campbell, now an SNP councillor, who said he had been a Leninist for almost all of his life but had since come to believe that the Soviet project was imperialist from the very beginning, owing to its suppression of Ukrainian self-determination and the subsequent Holodomor.

Leslie Cunningham, national organiser for Scotland in rs21, put across their position that Ukraine has a right to obtain weapons from whoever is willing to supply them, but also that the UK should not provide them. Everyone in the room, including the rs21 comrades, seemed to accept this was a bit of a fudge.

Most socialist opponents of western arms supplies to Ukraine rely on the specious argument that these supplies are prolonging the war, and that ending these supplies would quickly result in peace. USCS's persuasive counter-argument, which could have been more clearly articulated from the platform on the day, is that it is up to Ukrainians to decide the extent to which they resist the Russian invasion and occupation, and when to pursue peace and on what terms. This argument was recently and very coherently made by Colin Turbett in the *Scottish Left Review*.

Allan Armstrong, a member of the Republican Socialist Platform who has incidentally written extensively about Connolly and his politics, said a withdrawal of western support for Ukraine would inevitably lead to something resembling the Munich Agreement. Ukrainian independence is vastly preferable to the alternative seen in Donetsk, Luhansk or Chechnya, he said – fascism of a far more aggressive kind than is seen in the core of Russia.

Pictured: Ukrainian students and refugees carry a flag through Dundee city centre to mark the first anniversary of the Russian invasion in February 2023.

Building the movement

The biggest takeaway from this event is that USCS is capable of organising discussions of a remarkably high calibre, a great achievement particularly in the context of wider post-pandemic organisational challenges being faced by virtually all of the left in Scotland. There was a welcome sense of comfort with USCS's political breadth and good-natured debate flowed easily from this. It was great that printed materials from Ukrainian writers, including English editions of the Ukrainian left journal *Commons/Spilne*, were on offer.

The second anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, landing on Saturday 24th February, will overlap with Palestine solidarity demonstrations in towns and cities across Scotland. There is a valuable opportunity here to connect the Ukrainian and Palestinian peoples' struggles through a self-determination framework, which USCS is uniquely positioned to do. USCS has already rightly supported Palestine solidarity

demonstrations in Scotland and distributed copies of the Ukrainian letter of solidarity with Palestinian people. Efforts to place Ukrainian and Palestinian solidarity in competition with each other should be fiercely resisted. Demonstrations organised by Ukrainian communities in Scotland should be given whole-hearted support.

Looking further ahead, the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) and various trade union conferences will provide more opportunities for USCS to win affiliations from trade unions, which – while representing only one aspect of its work – will boost its capacity to organise political and practical support for Ukrainians.

There is a positive sense of momentum building in USCS. It is virtually alone on the Scottish left in answering the call for internationalist solidarity with Ukraine. Its success or failure will reverberate for a long time to come.

CONTRIBUTOR
Connor Beaton is a republican socialist based in Dundee, where he works as a journalist. He was one of tens of thousands of young people drawn into politics by the 2014 independence referendum campaign. He is now the secretary of the Republican Socialist Platform and a local organiser for the Radical Independence Campaign.

Republished from: *https://heckle.scot/2024/02/ukrainians-havent-been-forgotten/*

Main photo: USCS activists supporting Ukrainians in Glasgow's George Square on the 2nd anniversary of the Russian invasion 24 Feb 2024 (Mike Picken for ecosocialist.scot)

Other photos: Connor Beaton for Heckle.scot

Agriculture is killing the planet

Alan Thornett writes on his Ecosocialist Discussion blog https://www.ecosocialistdiscussion.com/ .

This is a revised version of chapter 16 of my book Facing the Apocalypse—Arguments for Ecosocialism, published in 2019, which might be useful today in the current debates on the role of agriculture.

In 2007 and 2008, dramatic increases in world food prices created economic instability and social unrest, in the poorest regions of the world. Those 'normally' subjected to famine and starvation were joined by seventy-five million more.

It was this that triggered the Tunisian revolution in January 2011, which led to the Arab Spring.

A young Tunisian vegetable seller, the lone breadwinner of a family of seven, set himself on fire in front of a government building after police confiscated his unauthorised cartload of vegetables. It was followed by protests over food prices as well as corruption, social inequalities, unemployment and political repression.

In the Global South today, over 800 million people are malnourished and 40 million die every year from hunger or diseases caused by hunger. Another 2 billion people have no regular access to clean drinking water, and 25 million die every year as a result. Sixty-six million primary children go to school hungry across the developing world—23 millions of them in Africa.

The plight of these countries is compounded by the domination

of the WTO the IMF and the World Bank. These are the neoliberal gatekeepers that have saddled them with massive debt and forced them to produce monoculture crops for the multi-national companies whilst their own farmers are bankrupt by subsidised competition from the Global North.

This destroys the economic and social conditions of these countries and distorts the markets in which they operate, and leaves them powerless to comate the gathering climate catastrophe.

Meanwhile, desertification, salinification and floods are making large areas of the planet unsuitable for growing food. Climate chaos is creating extreme weather events, in which loss of life and destruction of dwellings and infrastructure have inflicted death, disease and further poverty on millions.

The big question

The salient question, therefore, is not just whether enough food can be produced, and distributed, to feed the existing human population of 7 billion (now 8bn-AT), or indeed the 9 or 10 billion people projected by mid-century without destroying the biosphere of the planet in the process. In other words without a massive extension of industrialised/intensified agriculture and by the ever-increasing use of artificial fertilisers, pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, and mono-cropping techniques?

Already, 60 per cent of current global biodiversity loss—i.e. the sixth great extinction of species that we are witnessing—is directly due to food production including the catastrophic destruction taking place the Amazonian rain forest, the most environmentally rich and diverse habitat on the planet.

At the same time agriculture is a massive contributor to GHG emissions, including methane from livestock, nitrous oxide

from the soil, CO_2 from machinery. Perhaps the most remarkable statistic concerning food production is that the GHG emissions generated by meat production for human consumption are at 17 percent is almost equal to the 20 per cent generated by the entire world-wide transportation system combined: cars, trucks, trains, ships and aircraft! Yes, cars, trucks, trains, ships and aircraft!

Industrialised/intensive farming

Today, 70 billion land animals (*i.e.* excluding fish) are slaughtered every year for human consumption. This has doubled in the last 50 years, and is set to double again by 2050.

Two-thirds of these are reared by industrialised/intensive methods—or Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs)—as they are known in the trade. This requires vast quantities of corn, maize, and soy that could be eaten directly, and far more effectively, by the human population itself. There are now more than 50,000 facilities classified as CAFOs in the US, with another quarter of a million industrial-scale facilities just below that threshold.

In his 2017 book *Dead Zone-where the wild things were,* Philip Lymbery— who is also author of *FARMAGEDDON-the true cost of cheap meat,* published in 2014—points to a study by the University of Minnesota found that for every 100 grams of grain fed to animals only a fraction convert into human food: i.e. 43 un the case of milk, 35 with eggs, 40 with chicken, 10 with pork, and just 5 in the case of beef. My contemporaneous review of *Dead Zone* can be found here.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation 2006 Report *Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options*, concluded that global meat production will more than double to 465 million tonnes by 2050; and that milk production will grow from 580 million tonnes to 1,043 million tonnes in the same period. The environmental impact of livestock

production will have to be cut in half, it says, just it concluded just to keep the damage at the present level.

Beef consumption

The average American consumes 120 kg of meat a year, and the average Britain 80 kg. Whilst these levels are stable at the moment, meat consumption in the developing countries is rising rapidly. The global livestock sector currently produces 285 million tonnes of meat altogether—or about 36 kg (80 lb) per person, if divided evenly.

This involves the use of huge quantities of mineral fertiliser and pesticides as well as antibiotics to control the infections that result from confining them in too small a space and of hormones to fatten them faster.

The methane produced by cattle is also huge, putting the equivalent of 2.8 billion tonnes of CO_2 into the atmosphere. Globally cattle produce 150 billion gallons of methane every day from their digestive processes—and methane is 86 times more potent as a GHG than CO_2.

In their 2016 film *Cowspiracy* Kip Anderson and Keegan Kuhn concluded that livestock along with their feed, their waste, and their flatulence account for up to 32 billion tonnes of CO_2 per year, or 51 per cent of all worldwide CO_2 equivalents. Livestock also generate 53 per cent of all emissions of nitrous oxide (mostly from manure) which is a greenhouse gas with 298 times the warming potential of CO_2.

Soy beans and palm oil

Between 1960 and 2009, *global soy production* increased by nearly ten-fold, and it has doubled again since then. The USA used to be the major producer of produce of soy, but there has since been explosive growth in Latin America, particularly in Brazil. Today, China, at 55 million tonnes, is by far the

biggest importer of soybeans and is expected to increase its imports by 5 per cent a year. Soy bean imports to Asia are also expected to grow from approximately 75 million tonnes in 2009 to 130 million tonnes in 2019.

The global palm oil trade is worth $40 billion a year, accounting for over 30 per cent of the world's vegetable oil production. Malaysia and Indonesia are now the two biggest palm oil producing countries and are rapidly replacing their abundant rainforests with oil palm plantations. They account for 84 per cent of the worlds palm oil production. In South America palm oil production has recently increased in Colombia, Ecuador and Guatemala. The second largest global vegetable oil, soya, takes up 120 million hectares, producing 48 million tonnes of soya oil.

Chickenisation

If red meat is the most damaging to the planet, that does not mean that mass produced chicken is a benign product. Lymbery calls this chickenisation, and points out that around 60 billion chickens a year are currently produced for meat. It comes, he says, at a terrible cost to the birds as well as massive pollution of the environment.

He points out that:

Poultry meat and eggs are a major source of infection from another serious food-poisoning bug: salmonella. Keeping chickens in large flocks or in cages can dramatically boost the risk: studies have shown that caged hens are up to ten times more at risk of salmonella than birds kept free-range… Farmers routinely attempt to safeguard their birds against such bugs by dosing them with antibiotics… Indeed, half of all the antibiotics produced in the world are fed to chickens, cows, pigs and other farmed animals.

There are serious implications in this for human health in terms of antibiotic immunity.

Oceanic Dead zones

Philip Lymbery—as the tile of his book suggests—also points in some detail to the development of oceanic dead zones, or hypoxia as they are scientifically known, in what is possibly the most terrifying upshot of meat production. They are caused by agricultural run-off which often reach the sea via the river systems. They are not new but they are now multiplying rapidly.

He focuses on a dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico that forms every year from February to October, and is the second biggest in the world. Dead zones are generated by a lack of oxygen, creating a lifeless bottom layer of water which most creatures are unable to tolerate. Bottom-dwelling animals with no escape – crustaceans for example – are wiped out.

Lymbery points out that the number of dead zones around the world doubles every decade. There are now more than 400 dead zones covering some 95,000 square miles. Most are found in temperate waters off the coast of the USA and Europe. Some are also brewing in the waters off China, Japan, Brazil, Australia and New Zealand. The biggest in the world is in the Baltic. The Gulf of Mexico dead zone stretches from the shores of Louisiana to the upper Texan coast, covering an area the size of Wales.

The responsibility for dead zones, Lymbery says, is clear. It is the fertilizer used to produces the vast grain crops of the American Mid-West—an area of intensive corn and soya production where large amounts of nitrogen are applied to the soil every year to produce grain mainly for meat production. Whilst 160 million tons of nitrogen is produced every year for agricultural purposes, only a fraction of that which is spread on the fields ends up being absorbed by the crops: the rest ends up as run-off.

The run-off that feeds the Gulf of Mexico dead zone originates

in the American Mid-West and arrives via the Mississippi River. The Mississippi drains from land in more than 30 states, making it by far the biggest drainage system in North America. Nitrogen applied to the vast cornfields of the Mid-West to increase the crop yield makes its way through the tributaries upstream into the Mississippi itself, and on into the Gulf of Mexico to fuel the dead zone. The more nitrogen is applied to the crops, the bigger the resulting dead zone.

Fresh water consumption

Another massive impact that agriculture on the planet has been it relentless consumption of fresh water.

Fred Pearce, in *When the Rivers Run Dry* points out, for example, contends that it takes between 2,000 and 5,000 litres of water to grow one kilo of rice. That is more water than most households use in a week. It takes 1,000 litres to grow a kilo of wheat and 500 for a kilo of potatoes. And when it comes to feeding grain to livestock to produce meat and milk, the numbers become even more startling.

It takes 24,000 litres to grow the feed to produce a kilo of beef, and between 2,000 and 4,000 litres for a cow to produce a litre of milk. It takes 5,000 litres to produce a kilo of cheese and 3,000 litres to produce a kilo of sugar. It takes around 2,000 litres to produce a kilo jar of coffee, around 250 litres to produce a glass of wine or a pint of beer, and a staggering 2,000 litres to produce a glass of brandy.

He argued that:

The water footprint of Western countries on the rest of the world deserves to become a serious issue. Whenever you buy a T-shirt made of Pakistani cotton, eat Thai rice, or drink coffee from Central America, you are influencing the hydrology of those region—taking a share of the River Indus, the Mekong or the Costa Rican rains. You may also be helping the rivers run dry.

He introduces the concept of ‘virtual water’—the water used in the production or manufacture of a product. Those countries exporting such products, he argues, are in fact exporting ‘virtual water’. The USA, he says, is rapidly depleting crucial underground water reserves in order to export a staggering 100 cubic kilometres of virtual water in beef production alone. Other major exporters of virtual water include Canada (grain), Australia (cotton), Argentina (beef) and Thailand (rice).

The agricultural transition

During the twentieth century, agriculture underwent what is known as the agricultural transition—ushering in not just fertilisers and pesticides but mechanisation—bringing about the greatest change since agriculture was first developed by human beings some 13,000 years ago.

Today fewer and fewer people are farmers, agriculture employs 1.3 billion men and women: 40 per cent of the working population. Peasants are still the majority of working people in Africa and Asia.

Over the past two decades, in Asia, Africa and Latin America, peasants have faced ‘conservative modernisation’ policies, posing deep challenges to peasant societies in the attempt to adapt them to capitalist globalisation. Land grabs are now global phenomenon, undertaken by local, national and transnational elites as well as investors and speculators, with the complicity of government and or local authorities.

Land grabbing goes hand in hand with increasing control by big business over agriculture and food, through greater control over land, water, seeds and other natural resources. In this race for profit, the private sector has strengthened its control over food production systems, monopolising resources and gaining a dominant position in the decision-making processes.

The countries of the global South are often under the pressure of debt payments that have increased sharply in recent years.

Crucial tipping-points

Philip Lymbery argues that although the planet is remarkably resilient, we are now reaching a tipping point in its ability to take any more punishment; and that agriculture is playing a major role in this, feeding a global population that is now over 7 billion (now 8 billion AT), but swallowing up nearly a half of the planet's useable land and two-thirds of its fresh water, and inflicting damage on the soil that is vital for the food we eat. As the human population rises, Lymbery argues, 'so the quest intensifies for more land to cultivate'. Right now, we are in no danger of running out of food (distribution problems not withstanding), but the environmental damage attached to the way we are choosing to produce it may be irreversible.

An area of cereal cropland the size of France and Italy combined will be needed by 2050 to keep pace with the demand for food. Up to a fifth of the world's remaining forests, he argues, will be gone in the next three decades – much of it to grow crops for feeding animals for the meat trade:

Great swathes of extra cropland look set to join the chemical-soaked arable monocultures of East Anglia in England. The seas of swaying corn in the Midwest of America and soya in Brazil are set fair to extend still further. There'll be more fields of maize like the ones I saw in rural Asia… The encroachment of agriculture into the remaining wildlands, together with the onward march of industrial farming, will almost certainly cause irreversible damage to biodiversity, forests soil and water.

He is cautious about giving an opinion on the rising human population of the planet, but he is clearly concerned. 'To me', he says, 'the link is obvious. An extra billion people

come with 10 billion extra farm animals, together with what that means in terms of land water and soil.'

Throughout human history, he goes on:

for better or for worse, *Homo sapiens* have outdone all comers, from the magnificent mammals like the bison that roamed the American plains in vast numbers, to birds like the passenger pigeons that once flocked in great grey rivers through the sky, and to species of fellow humans like the Neanderthals. Whatever has stood in our way, and more often just in our reach, we have erased it. Now we have met our match. The great irony is that our most fearsome competitor for food – livestock – has been put there by us.

The conclusion to all this is clear. Although food continues to be produced (globally) by small and medium sized producers, industrialised agriculture is the predominant producer and is now irreplaceable without major changes both in food production and consumption, particularly in regard to the increasing demand for meat.

Food sovereignty

The problem is clear. Big business dominates our global food system. A small handful of large corporations control much of the production, processing, distribution, marketing and retailing of food. This concentration of power enables big businesses to wipe out competition and dictate tough terms to their suppliers. It forces both farmers and consumers into poverty. Under this system, around a billion people are hungry and around 2 billion are obese or overweight.

Peasant and farmer movement across the world are therefore fighting for 'food sovereignty'—a term coined in 1996 by *La Via Campesina*.

Food sovereignty, they argue, allows communities to maintain control over the way food is produced, traded and consumed. It

seeks to create a food system that is designed to help people and the environment, rather than make profits for multinational corporations.

The food sovereignty movement is a global alliance of farmers, growers, consumers and activists. It is counterposed to the demands of governments around the world for ‘food security’ a concept that instead aims to ensure that the global demand for food is met by free market methods and ever more industrialised faming systems.

La Via Campesina is one of the biggest social movements in the world, bringing together more than 200 million small and medium-scale farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous peoples, migrants and agricultural workers from 70 countries. The Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST), with 1.5 million members, is one of the biggest components of *Via Campesina*. It campaigns for access to land by the poor and for land redistribution. It has led land occupations by the rural poor, forcing the Brazilian government to resettle hundreds of thousands of families.

Small farmers lack access to natural resources—in particular land, water and seeds—since most of the best land is in the hands of the big transnational companies, which impose a model of agricultural production designed for export rather than for local consumption. They impose a commercialised, intensive agriculture, that puts economic interests before the needs of people.

Food sovereignty, on the other hand, puts the local agricultural producers at the centre of the system, supporting the right of the people to produce their own food independent of the conditions established by the market. It is about prioritising local and national markets, and reinforcing agriculture by promoting food production, distribution and consumption on the basis of social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The industrial/intensive agriculture model threatens the existence of traditional farming and fishing and small-scale food production. Women have a central role to play: in the Global South they produce 80 per cent of food. At the same time women and children world-wide are the most affected by hunger and famine. In many parts of the Global South, the law denies women the right to own land, and even where they can legally own it, they are denied that right. As a result of this, many individual and groups of women are joining the farmers' movements to seek protection.

In Latin America those struggling for the rights of indigenous communities and the right to the land often face murderous repression, as in Brazil and Honduras. In Asia, in Africa—for example, in Mali—on all continents, peasant movements lead the mobilisations against land monopolisation.

Peasant women and men, landless people and indigenous peoples, and especially women and youths and precarious farm workers, are dispossessed of their means of subsistence by practices which also destroy the environment. Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities are excluded from their lands, often by force, making their lives more precarious and in certain cases examples of modern slavery. Although the concept of food sovereignty relates most strongly to the countries of the impoverished Global South, it also exists in the Global North. In fact the first European forum on food sovereignty was held in Krems in Austria in 2011.

La Via Campesina's seven principles of food sovereignty are as follows:

Food as a basic human right. Everyone must have access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity and quality to sustain a healthy life with full human dignity. Each nation should declare that access to food is a constitutional right and guarantee the development of the primary sector to ensure the concrete realisation of this

fundamental right.

Agrarian reform. A genuine agrarian reform is necessary which gives landless and farming people – especially women – ownership and control of the land they work and returns territories to indigenous peoples. The right to land must be free of discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, race, social class or ideology; the land belongs to those who work it.

Protecting natural resources. Food Sovereignty entails the sustainable care and use of natural resources, especially land, water, and seeds and livestock breeds. The people who work the land must have the right to practice sustainable management of natural resources, and to conserve biodiversity free of restrictive intellectual property rights. This can only be done from a sound economic basis with security of tenure, healthy soils and reduced use of agrochemicals.

Reorganising the trade in food. Food is first and foremost a source of nutrition and only secondarily an item of trade. National agricultural policies must prioritize production for domestic consumption and food self-sufficiency. Food imports must not displace local production nor depress prices.

Ending the globalisation of hunger. Food sovereignty is undermined by multilateral institutions and by speculative capital. The growing control of multinational corporations over agricultural policies has been facilitated by the economic policies of multilateral organisations such as the WTO, World Bank and IMF. Regulation and taxation of speculative capital, and a strictly enforced Code of Conduct for TNCs, is therefore needed.

Social peace. Everyone has the right to be free from violence. Food must not be used as a weapon. Increasing levels of poverty and marginalisation in the countryside, along with the growing oppression of ethnic minorities and indigenous

populations, aggravate situations of injustice and hopelessness. The ongoing displacement, forced urbanisation, repression and increasing incidence of racism against smallholder farmers, cannot be tolerated.

Democratic control. Smallholder farmers must have direct input into formulating agricultural policy at all levels. The UN and its related organisations will have to become more open and democratic for this to become a reality. These principles form the basis of good governance, accountability and equal participation in economic, political and social life, free from all forms of discrimination. Rural women, in particular, must be granted direct and active decision making on food and rural issues.

This article was first published in my book Facing the Apocalypse—arguments for ecosocialism published on December 2019.

George Monbiot

As additional reading on this would strongly recommend George Monbiot published an excellent book last year (2023) entitled: Regenesis—*feeding the World Without Devouring the Planet*, which picks up some of the themes that I have raised in the above article.

Agriculture, he tells us is: “the most destructive human activity ever to have blighted the Earth”. That “We are farming the planet to death”, and that “agriculture is the greatest single cause of both climate change and species extinction. “This, he says, is the ‘grand dilemma’ we face.” It is a dilemma he confronts fearlessly, and with little regard to who’s toes, or indeed vested interests, he might be trampling on. His alternative vision is the resurgence of nature – and he makes a very strong case for it.

My review of his book can be found here.

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Alan Thornett *is a retired trade union activist and ecosocialist writer. His books* ***'Facing the Apocalypse – Arguments for Ecosocialism'*** *and* ***'Militant Years: Car workers' struggles in the 60s and 70s'*** *are available from* ***Resistance Books***

Launching a Major International Front Against the Extreme Right

Eric Toussaint of the the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debts (CADTM) is interviewed at February's World Social Forum in Nepal on future plans for an international movement against the extreme right.

Éric Toussaint interviewed by Sergio Ferrari on he World Social Forum in Kathmandu, Nepal, 15-19 February 2024.

At the end of another edition of the World Social Forum (WSF) held in Kathmandu, Nepal, from February 15 to 19, it's time to take stock. "It was a very positive event for the region. But we need to move forward and promote concrete initiatives in a complex international context marked by the far-right offensive," says Belgian historian and economist Eric Toussaint. Founder and spokesman for the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debts (CADTM), Toussaint took part in the WSF, where his organisation promoted seven events that were well attended.

***Sergio Ferrari**: What is your assessment of this latest edition of the World Social Forum?*

Positive, but…

Éric Toussaint (ÉT): It was very positive, mainly due to the participation of very diverse popular sectors and some of those most oppressed. I'm referring in particular to the Dalits, the untouchable caste, the native and indigenous peoples, historically marginalised but highly organised, the trade union forces and many feminists from the working classes. The majority came from Nepal and India. The organisers counted more than 18,000 registrations (from over 90 countries), and at the opening march on Thursday, February 15, between 12 and 15,000 people took part. No fewer than 10,000 people attended the conferences, workshops and cultural activities each day. It was an excellent decision to come to Nepal. This is an incomparably better result than the WSF in Mexico in May 2022.

However, the WSF as such has not achieved the same level of participation as in the first decade of its existence since it was first held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001. There were very few participants from Europe, Latin America, Africa or North America. In short, there was a good level of regional participation but a weak presence from other continents. This shows how difficult it is for the WSF to take global initiatives that have a real impact.

There is no mobilizing international dynamic

***Sergio Ferrari**: Do you think the last major pre-pandemic gathering for the 2019 WSF in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, was a success?*

ET: Not exactly. If we think about this edition in Salvador de Bahia, although it was well attended, it was essentially reduced to the north-east region with participation from a few other regions of Brazil. Unfortunately, the presence of other

continents was weak in Salvador de Bahia.

Today we see a contradictory reality. On the one hand, the World Social Forum is no longer a real force of attraction and impetus. On the other hand, it is the only global space that still exists. That's why it's still important for international networks like the CADTM to take part.

I am convinced that if the WSF had real strength, such as we had in February 2003 when we called for major mobilisations for peace and against the war in Iraq, its power today would be significant, both in confronting the genocide in Palestine and in helping to build a broad check on the growth of the far right that can be seen in many parts of the world.

When I say this, I am referring, among others, to Narendra Modi in India, a violent nationalist, anti-Islam and anti-Muslim; to Ferdinand Marcos Junior in the Philippines, heir not only to the family dictatorship but also to the repressive Rodrigo Duterte; and to the reactionary regression of the regime in Tunisia, increasingly similar to the former dictatorship of Ben Ali before the Arab Spring. In Europe, there are extremist, warmongering governments like Vladimir Putin's in Russia, Giorgia Meloni's in Italy, Viktor Orban's in Hungary and Ukraine's neo-liberal, pro-NATO right-wing government. I'm also thinking of the real threats posed by Chega, a new far-right party in Portugal that is aiming to win 20% of the vote, whereas it was absent from the electorate between 1975 and just three years ago; the possibility of a victory for Marine Le Pen in France in the next presidential elections; VOX in Spain; the electoral victory of the far-right party in the Netherlands; the advance of the AFD in Germany…

In Latin America, presidents such as Nayib Bukele in El Salvador or Javier Milei in Argentina have a more radical economic and social program than Pinochet himself in the Chilean dictatorship. All this in the global context of a

possible electoral victory for Donald Trump in the forthcoming US presidential elections. Not to mention the fascist government of Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, promoting a racist, genocidal and colonialist project.

In search of better proposals

***Sergio Ferrari**: If the World Social Forum doesn't have the strength to be a force for impetus and union in a global reality that you describe as dramatic, the question is obvious: what do you think progressive sectors should do?*

ET: I think that the formula of a WSF with only social movements and NGOs but without progressive political parties (as defined in the 2001 Charter of Principles) does not allow for an adequate fight against the extreme right. Faced with the rise of far-right and fascist projects, we need to look for a different kind of international convergence. With this in view, the CADTM, along with other social actors, has contacted the PSOL (Socialism and Freedom Party) and the PT (Workers' Party) in Porto Alegre, the birthplace of the World Social Forum since 2001, to propose the creation of an organising committee that would convene an international meeting in May to discuss the way forward, with a view to a major gathering in a year's time. With a broad vision to integrate social movements of all kinds—feminists, climate justice activists, progressive believers—with a view to reflecting on the best way to resist the far right. Major forces such as Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST) could play an active part in this. If they have achieved success in Brazil by breaking free from Jair Bolsonaro with a broad policy of political and social alliances, it is essential to draw concrete political lessons from this. The World Social Forum could continue, but we are convinced that a new framework of forces capable of remobilizing is needed.

***Sergio Ferrari**: There are initiatives like the International Peoples' Alliance that are already thinking along these lines…*

ET: Of course, it should be involved and play a role. But we need a new, broader United Front initiative. We think that this first meeting could be convened in May 2024 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and it would be conceivable, for example, to have a strong presence from Argentina, radical left forces with the left of Peronism, trade union organisations such as the Central de Trabajadores de Argentina and even the CGT (Confederación General de Trabajadores) and very diverse social and feminist movements. This would be a first step towards a major conference in 2025 in Sao Paulo, for example, if the left-wing alliance (PT, PSOL, etc.) wins the municipal elections in 2024.

The construction of this new international initiative would be broad and diverse, incorporating various revolutionary currents, from the 4th International to social democracy via the Progressive International, across the whole range of left-wing sensibilities. As well as progressive organisations and personalities in the United States (e.g., Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and the UAW auto union, which won a major victory in 2023). And left-wing parties and movements in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Arab region. We also need to broaden participation to include committed figures from the cultural world who are making their own contribution. It is necessary to convince as many forces as possible, including those who have to overcome historical differences and divisions and who understand and accept the great priority challenge of the moment, namely the fight against the extreme right. We know that such an appeal will be neither simple nor easy to put into practice; it requires great generosity and strong political will. The complexity of the historic moment and the dangers facing humanity and the planet mean that we must try to make it happen.

Eric Toussaint
www.cadtm.org CADTM international
8 Rue Jonfosse, 4000 LIEGE Belgique
Photo: Protest at WSF in Nepal, CADTM.

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Two years of war : Statement of Fourth International on Ukraine

This statement was adopted by the International Committee of the Fourth International on 25 February 2024.

a) In the context of the anniversary of 24 February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, we express our global internationalist and systematic support for Ukraine's right to self-determination and right to resist occupation and oppression, as we express it for all peoples whoever be the colonial oppressor.

b) We affirm our political independence from the neoliberal Zelensky government. That is why we aim to develop direct internationalist links from below with the left, feminist, LGBTQ+, social and environmental struggles and currents within the popular resistance to build a free, democratic therefore pluralist, independent nation.

c) Therefore we continue to give our support to the demands expressed by left political and trade-unionist Ukrainian currents:

· An immediate end to shelling, the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine;

· to increase the resources consolidating the public services and social protection so much needed in the context

of war and for the future independent Ukraine, and resist the ongoing attempts by the neoliberal government of Ukraine to use the war as an excuse for dismantling public services and destroying social protection

· The need to abolish all forms of “aid” conditional on privatizations;

· The support for material and financial aid which does not increase the Ukrainian foreign debt, in line with our support for the demand of cancellation of the existing debt;

· A general orientation to use funds devoted to help Ukraine resistance and reconstruction in order to contribute to building a social and democratic European project, which means the reduction of inequalities and therefore opposition to the logics of fiscal and social dumping and “competition”;

· The increase of Ukrainian wages – individual and social income – as an outlet for Ukraine industrial and agricultural production is to be radically opposed to the ongoing dominant policy (which is trying to increase Ukrainian “competitivity” in exports by reducing taxes and wages)

d) Our support to Ukrainian armed and non-armed resistance against the Russian invasion also means our solidarity with all citizens of the Russian Federation who refuse that war and are repressed because of their democratic stance.

e) We oppose the logic of ‘Great Russian power’ and domination over neighbouring countries. The victory of the free and democratic Ukrainian people is organically favourable to the emergence of a pluralist, peaceful and democratic Russian Federation and union of the peoples of Europe.

The Russian aggression and threats against its neighbours creates more support for NATO in those countries. The defeat of Russian aggression would therefore facilitate the struggle against NATO. We oppose the use of the Russian invasion of

Ukraine as an excuse to increase military budgets. We have always been, and continue to be against any logic of counter-posed military blocs or zones of influence. We struggle for the dissolving of military blocs that are in the service of imperialism such as NATO and the Russian-led CSTO alliance. In our struggle against imperialism and for the self-determination of all peoples we fight for the defeat of Putin's project.

We reaffirm such a programme for the second anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine helping to combine our full support to Ukrainian resistance to the war and to neoliberal policies with promoting new European and international progressive projects integrating eco-socialist anticapitalist dimensions.

Republished from: https://fourth.international/en/510/europe/588

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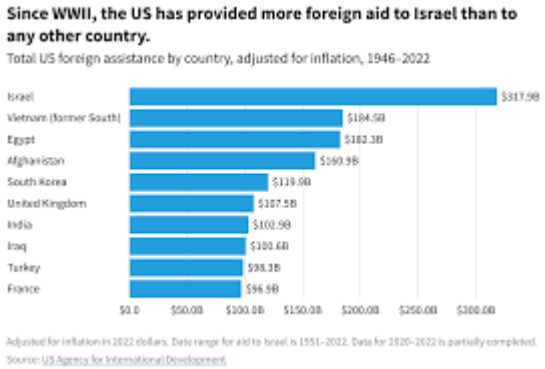
The First US-Israeli Joint War

THE ISRAELI MILITARY forces' war on Gaza, following Hamas's 7 October attack, is the first Israeli war in which Washington is a co-belligerent. The US openly supports the war's proclaimed goal and is blocking calls for a ceasefire at the United Nations – all while providing arms and ammunition to Israel and acting to dissuade other regional actors from intervening in the conflict to help Hamas.

The US did not give Israel military support at its creation: it presented itself at first as an impartial arbiter between Israel and its Arab neighbors, ordering an embargo on arms packages to both that remained in force until the end of Dwight Eisenhower's presidency (1953–61). In the early years, Israel had to rely on West Germany and France for its funding and arming. The situation changed when John F. Kennedy, faced with radicalized Arab nationalism led by Nasser's Egypt and setbacks to US influence in the Middle East, decided to rely on Israel and began to send it arms.



This was the beginning of a 'special relationship' that would prove very special indeed: between its creation in 1948 and the start of 2023, Israel received more than $158bn in US aid, including more than $124bn in military aid, which makes it the largest cumulative recipient of US funding since the second world war.(1) Every year the US provides Israel with military aid to the tune of almost $4bn.

Yet Washington did not openly support Israel's war against its Arab neighbors in 1967 (it could not endorse the invasion of the West Bank at the expense of Jordan, another ally). During the October 1973 war, the "special relationship" did translate to an airlift of weaponry to Israel – the goal, however, was to help it to contain the offensive launched by Egypt and Syria. Once Israel managed to redress the situation to its advantage, Washington exercised strong pressure on it to end hostilities. The US did not openly support the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and intervened as mediator for the evacuation of Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)

combatants in Beirut. Nor did it support the war launched by Israel against Lebanon in 2006, or its subsequent successive offensives against Gaza.

This time, though, US support for Israel has been explicit and massive. In the aftermath of 7 October, Washington decided to send two US carrier battle groups into the eastern Mediterranean, led by the aircraft carriers USS Eisenhower and USS Ford, a marine intervention unit, as well as an amphibian assault group led by the USS Bataan in the Black Sea and the USS Florida nuclear submarine, which carries cruise missiles. At the same time, Washington alerted its air bases in the region and urgently delivered military equipment to Israel, including missiles for the Iron Dome aerial defense system.

Washington thus provided a regional cover to Israel, so that it could devote the bulk of its forces to a war against Gaza whose stated objective, from the outset, has been the eradication of Hamas. The US and other western states have openly supported this goal. The fact is, however, that the eradication of a mass organization that has governed a small, very densely populated territory since 2007 cannot go ahead without a massacre of genocidal proportions. This is especially true since the Israeli army had the clear intention of minimizing losses in its own ranks during the invasion, which called for the intensive use of remote strikes, the flattening of urban areas in order to avoid urban guerrilla warfare and, therefore, the maximization of civilian deaths.

The US's responsibility in this massacre includes providing Israel with a large portion of the means to commit it. As of late November, Washington had sent its ally 57,000 artillery shells and 15,000 bombs, including more than 5,400 BLU-117s and 100 BLU-109 ('bunker buster') bombs, which weigh 2000 pounds (almost a ton) each.(2) The New York Times reported military experts' astonishment at Israel's 'liberal' use of these 2,000-pound bombs, each of which can flatten a tower several stories high, and which contributed to making Israel's

war against Gaza a massacre of civilians ‘at a historic pace’.(3) By 25 December, the US had provided Israel with 244 arms deliveries by cargo plane, as well as 20 shipments by boat.(4) In addition, the Guardian revealed that Israel had been able to draw on the vast stockpile of US weapons already ‘pre-positioned’ in the country.(5)

To finance all of this, on 20 October, the Biden administration made an extra-budgetary request of $105bn to Congress, including 61.4bn for Ukraine ($46.3bn in military aid), $14.1bn for Israel ($13.9bn in military aid) and $13.6bn for the fight against illegal immigration at the border. The US president believed he could wrangle a green light from the Republican right for Ukraine by tying that aid (a bone of contention) with causes dear to them – yet by the end of 2023, Biden had still not succeeded in having his request approved. The Republican right has used Biden’s strategy against him by demanding even more drastic measures at the border, putting him in an uncomfortable position with his own party.

In order to provide Israeli Merkava tanks with 45,000 artillery shells for $500m, the Biden administration has bypassed Congress by passing an emergency measure on 9 December, a package of 14,000 shells for $106.5m. It repeated this man oeuvre on 30 December for $147.50m, provoking the anger of Democrats calling for more controls on arms packages to Israel. For all this, Biden bears a direct share of responsibility for the massacre perpetrated by Israeli forces in Gaza. His exhortations for Israel to be more ‘humanitarian’ ring hollow and are easily dismissed by critics as hypocrisy. His disagreement with Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu on the plan for the day after the war does not change the two governments’ joint responsibility for the war itself.(6)

Ultimately, Biden – who, during his 2020 presidential campaign, promised to reverse course on his predecessor’s markedly pro-Israel politics, notably by reopening the US

consulate in East Jerusalem and the PLO office in Washington – did none of this. Instead, he followed in Donald Trump's footsteps, first by focusing on encouraging Saudi Arabia to join the Arab states that had established diplomatic relations with Israel under Trump's aegis, then by giving unconditional support to Israel in its invasion of Gaza. In so doing, he has managed to anger his own Democratic Party – which is today more sympathetic to the Palestinians than to the Israelis (by 34% to 31%), according to a poll published on 19 December – without satisfying the Republicans either. In the end, 57% of Americans disapprove of Biden's handling of the conflict, according to the same poll.(7)

Translated by Lucie Elven

Notes

1. Congressional Research Service, U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel, CRS Report, Washington, 1 March 2023.
   back to text
2. Jared Malsin and Nancy A Youssef, "U.S. Sends Israel 2,000-Pound Bunker Buster Bombs for Gaza War," *Wall Street Journal,* 1 December 2023.
   back to text
3. Lauren Leatherby, "Gaza Civilians, Under Israeli Barrage, Are Being Killed at Historic Pace," *New York Times,* 25 November 2023.
   back to text
4. Harry Davies and Manisha Ganguly, "244 US cargo planes, 20 ships deliver over 10,000 tons of military equipment to Israel – report," *Times of Israel,* 25 December 2023.
   back to text
5. "Gaza war puts US's extensive weapons stockpile in Israel under scrutiny," *The Guardian,* 27 December 2023.
   back to text
6. Read Gilbert Achcar, "Israeli far right's plans for expulsion and expansion," *Le Monde diplomatique* in

English, December 2023.
back to text

7. Jonathan Weisman, Ruth Igielnik and Alyce McFadden, "Poll Finds Wide Disapproval of Biden on Gaza, and Little Room to Shift Gears," *New York Times,* 19 December 2023.
back to text

Le Monde diplomatique, January 22, 2024

This version and translation is from Solidarity US: https://solidarity-us.org/the-first-us-israeli-joint-war/

*Gilbert Achcar, Lebanese-born socialist, is a Professor at SOAS, University of London and a member of Anti*Capitalist Resistance in England & Cymru. His most recent book is "The New Cold War – The United States, Russia and China from Kosovo to Ukraine" widely available from good bookshops. He will be speaking at an 'Internationalism Today' event organised by Anti*Capitalist Resistance in London on 3 February 2024 (also available online via Zoom for those in Scotland – register here): https://anticapitalistresistance.org/what-internationalism-do-we-need-today/*

Scottish Kurds protest against Erdoğan invitation

Kurds in Scotland and their supporters have protested at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh against any invitation to Turkish state President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to visit Scotland, reports Mike Picken for ecosocialist.scot.

The apparent invitation arose after Scottish First Minister, and leader of the governing Scottish National Party (SNP), Humza Yousaf met briefly with the Turkish state President while they were both in Dubai in December 2023 for the COP28 summit. Kurds are angry that Erdoğan is using the Gaza crisis to launch military attacks on Kurdish populations inside both the Syrian and Iraqi state and continue his persecution and murderous policies towards the 10 million Kurds inside the Turkish state. In the Kurdish-led liberated region of Rojava in neighbouring Syria, Erdoğan has committed exactly the same sort of brutal bombing and attacks on civilian infrastructure that he accuses Israel of in Gaza.

Damage caused by Turkish air attacks on civilian electricity infrastructure in Suwaydiyah North & East Syria. Photo: Rojava

So when news that Yousaf had invited Erdoğan to Scotland came out in the media in January 2024, Kurdish and solidarity organisations such as Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan, alongside trade unionists Mike Arnott of the Scottish TUC and Stephen Smellie of UNISON Scotland, moved swiftly to condemn the invitation by issuing a public letter of protest. The Kurdish community in Scotland organised a demonstration at the Scottish Parliament on 25 January to demand the SNP refuse to invite Erdoğan and instead condemn his regime's murderous policy against the Kurds. The protestor's views were recorded by progressive media outlet The Skotia on Instagram (video below) and the open letter of protest received wide media coverage.

View this post on Instagram

Prominent Glasgow SNP councillor Roza Salih, herself a refugee from Iraqi Kurdistan, had previously drawn attention to the matter in a post in December on Twitter/X in December, covered by The National daily newspaper:

> *“Humza being friendly and laughing with Erdogan is an offence to the Kurdish people”*
>
> *Roza Salih, Scotland’s first refugee councillor, has criticised Humza Yousaf for shaking hands with the Turkish president https://t.co/XHu2iH28P0*
>
> *— The National (@ScotNational) December 2, 2023*

International Movement demands release of Öcalan on 25th Anniversary of his incarceration

Meanwhile the Kurdish movement internationally is organising a global mobilisation to demand the release of Kurdish political

leader **Abdullah Öcalan**, with demonstrations across Europe up to the **25th Anniversary** of his unjust imprisonment and solitary confinement by the Turkish state. An Internationalist Long March is poised to spotlight this anniversary, beginning in Basel-Switzerland on 10 February, and will include key events such as a conference in Strasbourg on 15 February and a pan-European demonstration in Cologne and Düsseldorf, Germany, on 17 February. SNP Westminster Member of Parliament, Tommy Sheppard, recently met with Öcalan's lawyers at the Council of Europe meeting and has written to UK government foreign secretary to call on him to take up Öcalan's incarceration by the Turkish government and demand his release (text below).

Text of Open Letter by Kurdish solidarity organisations and individuals on the invitation of Turkish president Erdoğan to Scotland

STATEMENT:
We, the undersigned, condemn the invitation that the First Minister of Scotland, Humza Yousaf, has made to Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Turkish state's record on human rights abuses is well documented, both internally and externally. Women, ethnic minorities and migrants bear the brunt of its oppressive policies. In particular, the Turkish state continues a policy against the Kurdish people that seeks to suppress basic human

rights and political autonomy through military force, legal repression, and assimilationist policies.

Erdogan's party destroys civilian infrastructure beyond Turkey's own borders for political leverage and to disempower an already economically disadvantaged population in Syria and Iraq. Yousaf's response to journalists was dismissive when challenged on this. We condemn the cooperation between Erdogan and any segment of the British state. The First Minister's response to press questioning whether the invitation was "a good idea considering his treatment of the Kurds" was that "as a NATO ally", it was a legitimate invitation "if he was visiting the UK". This is hypocritical: The SNP positions itself as distinct from Westminster and with a more discerning eye towards human rights abuses and regional autonomy.

While Erdogan has been vocally supportive of Palestinians, 40% of oil imports to Israel come via Turkey, and the two governments have a long term and high value arms industry relationship that has been ongoing throughout the periods of intensification in Israeli attacks over the last decade. Erdogan does to the Kurds everything that he accuses Netanyahu of doing to the Palestinian people. Both Israel and Turkey have been crafting a Middle East where business and trade with western countries are more valuable than justice or freedom. The power to define terrorism and the legitimate use of violence are now highly developed tools to repress even the most basic self-determination of peoples.

From January 13th – 16th 2024, Turkish military forces carried out 224 ground and air strikes in north-eastern Syria, targeting agricultural and energy infrastructure such as oil fields. In nine locations, electric power stations were struck, which led to power outages and water supply issues that are currently affecting millions of people. This type of attack is a frequent but under reported reality and Erdogan is exploiting this moment when the world media is

rightfully watching Gaza. The targeting of vital infrastructure is itself a war crime and these attacks are also an unprovoked act of aggression.

BAE Systems, Thales, Leonardo and other weapons manufacturing companies that have factories in Scotland supply both Israel and Turkey. In 2019, white phosphorous – banned for use as an incendiary chemical weapon – was reported to have been used by the Turkish military in north-eastern Syria. An investigation at the time showed 70 British export licenses for phosphorous.

Domestically in Turkey, the political repression of the left-wing parliamentary party HDP has led to more than five thousand of its members being arrested, the stripping of MPs' parliamentary immunity and their imprisonment, and widespread implementation of the "trustee" system by Erdogan's party that forcibly removed all elected HDP mayors from office and replaced them with government-appointed officials. This has disproportionately affected the Kurdish people in Turkey, where attempts at democratic expression are crushed, and more than eight thousand Kurdish political prisoners are languishing in Turkish prisons. Kurdish language musicians, teachers and campaigners are often met with criminalisation – the Kurdish language is unrecognised by the Turkish parliament despite being the second most spoken language in the country, and language rights are linked to terrorism as a method of delegitimisation.

The UK government and the European Union countries have shrewdly wedded themselves to facilitating Erdogan's AKP government in exchange for the policing of Europe's land and sea borders and its imprisonment of displaced peoples subject to these "push-backs".

As residents of Scotland and members of human rights organisations, we request that the First Minister and the SNP condemn Erdogan and the AK Party for their actions. The

targeting of civilian infrastructure and use of chemical weapons are war crimes, regardless of whether the state that does so is a NATO member.

We request Mr Yousaf's support in condemning these attacks on north-east Syria. We also ask him to assess the human rights abuses that the Kurdish peoples are subject to within the state borders of Turkey and that he supports the struggle for the freedom of political prisoners in Turkey.

We are in a moment that requires brave leadership on myriad human rights abuses, the repression of the self-determination of peoples and the destruction of the earth, happening across the globe. We implore the First Minister and Scottish government, particularly in this moment, to resist shallow alliances that fail to look at the geo-political situation holistically. The moment demands an uncompromising acknowledgement of the colonial legacies of the current genocidal treatment of the Palestinian and Kurdish peoples.

We ask Mr Yousaf to meet with the Kurdish communities in Scotland and campaigners to discuss this issue. We believe that Scotland can do better and we would like to talk about how.

LIST OF SIGNATURES

Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan
Kurdish Community Scotland
Zagros Community Scotland
Women's Rights Delegation from Scotland to North and East Syria, May 2023
International Human Rights Delegation on political prisoners in Turkey, December 2023
Edinburgh University Justice for Palestine Society
Mike Arnott, President of Scottish Trades Union Congress
Stephen Smellie, Depute Convenor UNISON Scotland
International Solidarity Movement (ISM) – Scotland

Text of Letter from SNP Westminster MP Tommy Sheppard to UK government foreign secretary David Cameron

TOMMY SHEPPARD MP

The Rt Hon Lord David Cameron
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH
26th January 2024

Dear David

I am writing on behalf of several constituents to ask you to make representations to the Turkish Government in the case of Abdullah Ocalan.

You will know that Ocalan is regarded by millions of Kurds throughout the world as their leader and he is key to achieving a permanent and peaceful solution which respects the rights of the Kurds in Turkey and neighbouring countries.

He has been held in solitary confinement on the island prison of Imrali for almost 25 years. This is contrary to several judgements of European Court of Human Rights which have found the manner of his detention to be in violation of the statues to prohibit torture.

As a UK member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council

of Europe, I met with Mr Ocalan's lawyers earlier this week. They tell me that he has been denied any communication with the outside world and any visits from his legal team for almost three years now.

This case does great damage to Turkey's reputation and is an egregious breach of international human rights law. It is also a running sore and an insult to the many thousands of Kurdish people who have made this country their home.

I would ask you to take up this case with the Turkish authorities, demanding that Mr Ocalan be allowed access to his lawyers, that his isolation end, and that after a quarter of a century in solitary confinement, his case is reviewed, and plans made to end his incarceration.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Tommy Sheppard
Member of Parliament for Edinburgh East

Gaza: Support the New Hetherington Occupation at Glasgow University

Students have occupied a building at Glasgow University to demand divestment from arms industries in the light of Israel's genocidal war in Gaza. Jennifer Debs reports for ***Heckle*** *– online journal of the Republican Socialist Platform.*

Almost thirteen years have passed since Glasgow University's Hetherington House was last alive with student protest, but as of Monday 22nd January, that long dry spell has come to an end.

Once again, the windows of the building are brightened by flags and protest signs, and once more the halls are filled with political chatter and radical demands. Nearby, university security guards hover uneasily, keeping an eye on the front door and everyone that comes and goes. Looking at the scene, you might think it was 2011 again.

But this is a new generation of student activists, even if the causes they fight for, like that of Gaza, were also upheld by a previous generation. The new occupiers are part of the Glasgow Against Arms and Fossil Fuels (GAAF) group, and they have taken over Hetherington House with the demand that the University of Glasgow divests from its investments in the arms industry.

Credit: @gaafmovement on Instagram

Inflamed by the brutal invasion of Gaza, the latest chapter in Israel's campaign of genocide against the Palestinian people,

GAAF are taking action to pressure university management into taking a decision that would have a concrete impact on the funding of murder in the Middle East. GAAF argue that the university has blood on its hands, and that it profits by the shedding of that blood – something that must be stopped as soon as possible.

The occupation is aiming to put specific pressure on the university's finance committee, ahead of its next meeting in February, to make a decision in favour of divestment. GAAF has reason to believe its goal is feasible, given that Glasgow University previously made commitments to divest from fossil fuels in 2014 after a successful campaign by student activists.

Of course, any commitment the university makes will be one that it must be held to, and that will doubtless be a part of GAAF's work should they win the current struggle. The university cannot be allowed to kick this issue into the long grass, not when so much is at stake in Palestine, Yemen, and other sites of imperialist slaughter in the world today.

Credit: GAAF

For now, the occupation is focused on its first goal of winning a commitment to divestment, and on keeping itself running. Yesterday, Wednesday 24th January, a solidarity demonstration of students and supporters rallied outside Hetherington House before marching to the main building of the university. There were speeches about the goals of the campaign and the necessity of arms divestment, and the crowd made plenty of noise to let the university management know they aren’t going anywhere.

This is only the beginning. GAAF intend to keep the occupation going until they win their goal, and they naturally need as much support as possible. With this action, these brave students are striking a blow at the imperialist war machine, and lending a hand to the people of Palestine in their hour of need. Every socialist in Scotland should support this occupation.

Credit: GAAF

If you live nearby, go along to 11 University Gardens, have a chat with the students guarding the door, bring them some snacks and fruit, and let them know they are not alone. Occupations always need food and supplies, so find out what they need, and help them get it if you have some cash to spare. If GAAF call a demonstration, get along and show your support. The university and the broader public must know that these occupiers are backed up by a great well of support from the working class.

If you live elsewhere, why not think of organising a solidarity action through your trade union branch, your student union, your tenants' union, or your group of friends? And if the university management attempt to punish the occupiers with disciplinary action like suspension or expulsion, then we as a movement must help GAAF resist and overturn any such decisions. Any victimisation of the

occupiers must be confronted with a firm response: nobody left behind!

When the original Hetherington occupation took on university management all those years ago, they had a network of student groups and anti-austerity collectives at their side, supporting them and taking action in Glasgow and further afield. If the new Free Hetherington is to survive – and not just survive, claim a victory too – then it cannot be a single event. It must be answered in all the rich variety of action and expression the student and workers' movement is capable of.

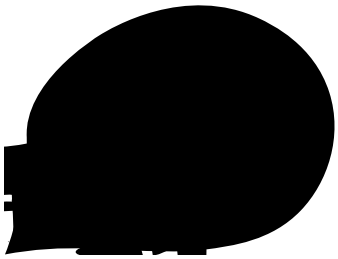
There are many more institutions that fund genocide in Palestine, and this cannot be allowed to continue. But take heart – today we are seeing a new era of student militancy, and hopefully there will be many more occupations to come, not just in Glasgow, but also Dundee, Paisley, Stirling, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. The arms economy needs a good beating. Let the second Free Hetherington be a kick in the teeth, but not the last!

All together – defend and extend the Free Hetherington!

Books not bombs!
No profit from blood!

You can keep informed about GAAF and the occupation on their Instagram page. The occupation is located at 11 University Gardens, Glasgow G12 8QH.

Originally published on **Heckle**: https://heckle.scot/2024/01/support-the-new-hetherington-occupation/



To join the Republican Socialist Platform,
visit: https://join.republicansocialists.scot/

From Ukraine to Palestine – Occupation is a Crime

*Ukraine socialist organisation, **Sotsialny Rukh** ('Social Movement') has published the following statement on the war against the Palestinian people in Gaza. The translation is by the Ukraine Solidarity Campa*ign.

> ***The Social Movement stands** for a just peace in the Middle East, which requires the elimination of structural oppression of Palestinians and systemic violence against the civilian population. We also condemn the Iron Swords Operation launched by the far-right Netanyahu government in response to the condemnable October 7 attacks and the war crimes being committed in its process.*

The war in the Gaza Strip has been going on for more than two

months.

The Social Movement stands for a just peace in the Middle East, to achieve which it is necessary to eliminate the structural oppression of Palestinians and systematic violence against the civilian population. Our organization condemns the bloody attack carried out on October 7, 2023 against the civilian population as part of the attack on Israel by the militarized Islamist movement Hamas. The brutal massacres of kibbutzim women, foreign workers, Bedouins and other civilians, which claimed more than a thousand lives, as well as the kidnapping of civilians as hostages, cannot have any justification.

However, we condemn the Iron Swords Operation launched by the far-right Netanyahu government in response to the October 7 attack and the war crimes being committed in its process. The actions of the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip are punitive against its entire population, about half of which are children. Israel has imposed a total siege on the Gaza Strip, which has been under an illegal Israeli-Egyptian blockade since 2007, preventing the supply of water, electricity, food and medicine to Gaza's more than 2 million people, turning it into "the world's largest open-air prison ".

According to various data provided by international organizations, within a few weeks of this operation, up to 18,000 civilians, including 7,800 children were killed and another 50,000 people were injured; 85% of the nearly 2 million population of the Gaza Strip – were forced to flee their homes. More than 200 medical workers and more than 100 UN employees were among the dead. UN confirms that at least half of the population of Gaza is reduced to starvation. It seems unacceptable to justify the imposition of a humanitarian catastrophe and the terror of a powerful military machine against the civilian population under the pretext of a "war on terror", as the Russians did in Ichkeria/Chechnya or the Americans did in Iraq.

Israel's next military operation in the Gaza Strip is the exact opposite of an effective resolution of the conflict. Such a policy has been going on for decades, since the state of Israel, after confrontation with neighboring Arab countries, reinforced by British colonial policies, displaced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their land, after which millions of their descendants were doomed to flee (events known as the Nakba – "catastrophe" in Arabic). The Israeli authorities continue to ignore numerous UN resolutions, the latest of which was adopted on October 27 by the votes of 120 of the 193 member states in the General Assembly and called for a ceasefire. Reports from the UN and human rights organizations have repeatedly compared the segregation of Palestinians practiced by Israel to the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Israeli settlers, many of them militant fanatics, continue their policy of colonization and violence against the Palestinian population in the West Bank with the connivance of the Israeli authorities, who carry out the daily humiliation, arbitrary detention and killing of Palestinian men and **women {and children}??.** Even before this year's events, according to the calculations of the Israeli human rights organization

Bezelem, since 2000, Israelis have killed more than 10,000 Palestinian men and women. Moreover, the general rule is the disproportionality of violence on the part of Israel, with which it responds even to exclusively peaceful protests. For example, during the suppression of the Palestinian **[Great March of Return]** to the wall blocking Gaza Israeli security forces killed 195 Palestinians, including 41 minors **[in a year since March 2018]** (data from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). And in terms of the number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank, 2023 became a record year for the entire time that the UN has been keeping statistics (and this is as of October, when Israeli security forces killed more than a hundred people in this part of Palestine, which does not have any Hamas bases). The indifferent reaction of the world community, no more than "deep concern", led to the further despair of local residents in peaceful ways of resolving the conflict, which is what the fundamentalist forces are using.

The current Netanyahu government, also filled with reactionaries and religious fanatics who openly dehumanize the Palestinians and call for their murder and genocide, has gone even further than its predecessors. Israel itself at one time played a not insignificant role in supplanting the mainly secular and non-violent resistance to the occupation among the Palestinians of the time of the first Intifada with a more right-wing, violent and fundamentalist variety. Netanyahu and his officials admitted that they have encouraged the reactionaries and religious fanatics from Hamas, because that weakened the Palestinian Authority, introduced additional discord into the condition of Palestinians and sabotaged the prospects of building a sovereign state for them.

This reckless policy did not change even after Egyptian, but also Israeli intelligence, current and retired military ranks warned of possible escalation as a result of the blockade and colonial policy. Thus, the former head of the Israeli Navy and

the Shabak secret service, Ami Ayalon, warned that “when Palestinians see us destroying their homes, fear, frustration and hatred grow. These are the reasons that push people to terrorist organizations.”

Netanyahu, like other conservatives, constantly used the rhetoric of “defence against threats” to justify their attacks on democratic freedoms and further build-up of the security apparatus, which, however, did not avert the attacks of Hamas from Gaza but instead was preoccupied with terrorizing the Palestinians in the West Bank. After all, the never-ending spiral of violence has not and will not increase security for anyone except extreme conservative-nationalist forces. Such an atmosphere has already led to the most right-wing Knesset and government in Israel’s history. And the current war has provided an indulgence for the Netanyahu cabinet against which mass protests continued for most of 2023 (characteristically, a poll conducted on the eve of the escalation showed that the majority of the population of Gaza did not trust the Hamas movement, which more than a decade and a half ago after a civil conflict with Fatah established an authoritarian one-party government here).

At the same time, the mainstream of both leading parties of the main patron of Israel – the United States – demonstrated an immediate readiness to provide unconditional military and diplomatic support for almost all actions of the Israeli government. Here, both the contrast with the hesitation regarding arms supplies to Ukraine and the desire of the most reactionary circles of the American ruling class – the right wing of the Republican Party – to finance the ethnic cleansing and adventures of the Netanyahu government at the expense of depriving Ukrainians of aid are notable. In this, the Trumpists are similar to many other far-right forces in the West: having many anti-Semites in their ranks, such parties at the same time protect the ability of both Israeli and Russian security forces to kill residents of Palestine and Ukraine

with impunity.

What’s more, Washington itself contributed to the current rise in tensions, supporting Israel’s encroachment on Jerusalem as its capital exclusively since the Trump administration. Now the US is vetoing initiatives in the UN Security Council, such as Brazil’s proposed provision of humanitarian corridors or the latest ceasefire resolution of December 8, which was voted for by 13 out of 15 members of the UN Security Council. As in the case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this once again proves that the permanent members of the UN should be deprived of their veto powers which paralyze the ability of the international community to stop the carnage.

Russia’s full-scale aggression against Ukraine has increased the atmosphere of international tension and impunity, enabling the escalation of a series of conflicts that put entire communities on the brink of survival as already happened with the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh as a result of the aggressive actions of the Aliyev regime in September of this year. The current round of confrontation in the Middle East is of the same ilk and resulted in disturbing trends in the rest of the world, in particular, a surge in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia (up to attempted Jewish pogroms, such as in the North Caucasus controlled by Putin’s Russia, armed attacks on Palestinians such as the students in Vermont, or the murder of people such as the Palestinian boy in Chicago or the police shooting of Jewish tourists and a local guide in Egypt).

Unfortunately, the reaction of the Ukrainian authorities also reveals an extremely biased and one-sided approach: rightly condemning the attacks on civilians in Israel and honouring the dead, it at the same time prefers to ignore the dead civilians in Palestine. Despite the fact that Ukrainian diplomacy at the UN has consistently condemned the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands and other violations by Israel in almost all cases, whose authorities take an ambivalent position on the Russian occupation and provide the latest

precedents to follow. Instead, the shameful rhetoric of demonizing Palestinians, declaring all of them, from infants to the elderly, as “terrorists” prevails in the Ukrainian media.

Yes, one should be aware that for many of the self-proclaimed “friends” of Palestine, whether they are well-known Hamas partners and sponsors, such as the authoritarian authorities of Qatar, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Russia (which maintained emphatically friendly relations with both the Netanyahu government and with Hamas), the tragedy of the Palestinian people is only a bargaining chip. But reducing the Palestinians to “proxies of Tehran and the Kremlin” in the domestic information space is as illiterate and outrageous a caricature as the “proxy” justification of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Instead, it is in Ukraine that the suffering of the Palestinian people should be understood: there, too, the occupation by a state that possesses nuclear weapons and superiority in the armed forces continues, simply disregards UN resolutions and international law, denies the rights to subjectivity and resistance. The tragedy we are now experiencing should sharpen our sensitivity to similar human experiences in all corners of the world. The Ukrainian letter of solidarity with the Palestinian people, posted on the platform of the “Spilne” magazine website, demonstrated such alternative voices to the official one, which affirm the universal right to self-determination and resistance to the occupation.

“How lonely are you, our loneliness, when they win their wars,” asked the Arab writer Hiba Kamal Abu Nada in her poem, when “your land is sold at auction, and the world is a free market… This is the age of ignorance, when no one will intercede for us.” The 32-year-old poet became one of the thousands of civilian victims of Israeli airstrikes this year. The duty of the world is not to leave the oppressed alone,

especially when faced with the threat of their physical extermination. Not to put up with bombs and rockets flying at their heads. Neither in Ukraine nor in Palestine.

Therefore, the "Social Movement" calls for an immediate ceasefire and the admission of humanitarian aid to the region, and also expresses its support for the Palestinian people in their legitimate desire for a just and lasting peace.

Originally published by Ukraine Solidarity Campaign: https://ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org/2024/01/26/from-ukraine-to-palestine-occupation-is-a-crime/

More information from: https://rev.org.ua/english/

USA Election 2024: Deform & Dysfunction

The Editors of USA socialist journal 'Against the Current' write on the forthcoming US Presidential election.

IN A POLARIZED, angry, anxiety-and-crisis-ridden United States of America, wide swathes of a fragmented and divided electorate find common ground at least on what they don't want: a 2024 repeat of a presidential election between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. Yet eleven months in advance – subject to change, but not easily – that spectacle is just what we'll get.

Such a prospect, along with Trump's criminal trials and Biden's policy stumbles, may help explain a peculiar popular climate of simultaneous political agitation and apathy. Many

millions of voters including working-class people (aside from Trump cult loyalists) will find themselves voting for presidential candidates and political parties they despise the least, not for choices they actually like.

This malaise, rather than any hopeful excitement, also accounts for why the anti-vax and racist certified crackpot candidate Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. is polling as high as 24% as an independent, or why the rightwing Democratic Senator Joe Manchin might undertake a "No Labels" third-party campaign to "mobilize the middle" that could throw the election any which way.

No one should underestimate what a revived Trump presidency might mean – with his operatives' overt, already promised concentration/deportation camps to be constructed for asylum seekers, forced removals of students for pro-Palestinian activism, targeted attacks on the press, mass firings of government employees to be replaced by regime loyalists, wholesale pardons for the January 6 aspiring insurrectionists, and who-knows-what chaos in imperialist global management.

The campaign of Trump's emerging leading Republican rival Nikki Haley has been endorsed (purchased) by the Koch Brothers' "Americans for Prosperity" (Plutocracy) outlet. This represents an attempt to consolidate a grossly reactionary, but more establishment neoconservative alternative to the runaway criminality of Trump and his prospective second term. That option would surely have appeal to much of the U.S. capitalist ruling class. (One rightwing commentator, Nolan Finley in the *Detroit News,* urges that Haley become the "No Labels" candidate.)

Activism and Ironies

To avoid a one-sided overly bleak portrayal, we should cite positive cases of social action that have made a difference. First, as we've discussed frequently, is the labor activist

revival, culminating in union contracts with big gains for auto workers, at UPS, and steps forward in organizing places like Tesla and Amazon.

Second, at the present critical moment, is the outpouring in the streets demanding a ceasefire in Israel's war against Gaza and Palestine, which we discussed in our previous issue (*ATC* 227, "Catastrophe in Palestine and Israel: Apartheid on the Road to Genocide") and continue our coverage in the present issue.

Third is the continuing popular revulsion against the cynical and deeply evil anti-abortion extremism of the right wing, which is prepared to sacrifice women's lives to the "pro-life" cause, along with book bans and state-level voter suppression measures.

Such examples show that class and social movements continue – as also shown by myriad state, local and community struggles, including around abortion, trans and housing justice among other issues. The fact that these are not generating much positive energy at the level of national electoral politics is one indication of a deformed and dysfunctional political system.

In this space we will not attempt to prognosticate, or chew over polling data, or (for the moment) seriously approach the prospects of an independent progressive alternative. The latter, critically important possibility must be a topic for future in-depth discussion. Here we want to explore some of the multiple ironies at the beginning of the electoral season.

If there's one policy arena where Biden-Harris administration should get at least passing marks and maybe some plaudits, it would be the general health of the post-pandemic economy. Yet that is exactly where polls show "greater confidence in the Republicans" – whose policies have been the most blatantly to enrich-the-rich, impoverish-the-poor, and run-up-deficits

while pretending to be fiscally responsible.

It’s an astonishing public-relations triumph of plutocracy posing as populism. Democratic pundits and operatives are visibly distressed that “Bidenomics” fails to garner the approval it deserves. The reasons for this apparent anomaly go far beyond its mediocre “messaging.”

It’s true that this administration came in with a Build Back Better program that had some inspiring, even transformative potential (even if much of it came cloaked in nationalist rhetoric about countering the rise of China). As it emerged from the desk of Bernie Sanders and the ambitions of Green New Dealers, the program included some serious federal spending – on infrastructure and energy transition – amounting to something like half the annual military budget.

Thanks to Senator Manchin among others, the best part of the program was trimmed back to what became the Inflation Reduction Act. For example, pandemic-relief subsidies that cut U.S. childhood poverty in half – a very significant accomplishment in this brutally unequal society! ran out. Thus in Manchin’s own state – according to official Census Bureau’s estimates, West Virginia’s child poverty rate – the highest in the nation – increased from 20.7% to 25.0% between 2021 and 2022.

Most important, the measurable benefits of the recovery flow overwhelmingly to the high-income layers of the population, who need them the least. Folks at lower-middle income or less levels see very little if any difference in their daily lives.

Inflation levels are well down from their brief eight-percent high point, but that still leaves prices of basic necessities far higher than they were – while the Federal Reserve’s interest-rate hikes that were ostensibly needed to “curb inflation” have themselves exacerbated a housing crisis that especially afflicts young people (and many limited-income

senior citizens too).

The cumulative result is that macroeconomic statistics for the moment look reasonably good, but for many tens of millions of people the real-life economy doesn't feel that way. That hurts the electoral prospects for an incumbent administration, i.e. for Biden in 2024 as it did for Trump in 2020.

Further Irony: Demographics

If there's one factor that should be pushing the Republican Party toward permanent marginality even as it hurtles toward extreme-right lunacy, it's that the United States is demographically becoming no longer a "white" country, and that younger generations are each more diverse than the previous one.

It's precisely young, African American and other nonwhite and immigrant communities, and the LGBT and non-binary population, who are the front-line targets of white-supremacist, Christian-nationalist and religious-right ideologies that thoroughly dominate today's Republican Party – including of course the Trump cult but not only that sector.

Yet it's precisely those younger, less white and less affluent sectors where the Democrats' presumptively overwhelming majorities are narrowing. Polls are showing nearly a quarter of African Americans preferring Trump over Biden, an astonishing (even if it turns out to be short-lived) index of disillusionment.

What's happened? Mainly, we think it's that the Democrats have overpromised and under-delivered real change – in terms of racial justice, student debt relief, immigration reform, tackling climate change, and more. Partly too, it was only a matter of time until the feeling of relief from the (first) Trump nightmare wore off.

To some extent, also, Biden's age and immovability present a

bad look. But on key issues that are really hurting the Democrats' prospects in 2024, it's not Biden that's senile, but *American policy.*

This is particularly illustrated in the present Israeli genocidal war on Gaza. The crucial young sector of the Democrats' voter base is increasingly sympathetic to Palestine, alienated from the party's traditional unquestioning support of Israel, and no longer duped by feeble bleats about a long-dead "two-state solution." The December 1 resumption of the full-scale Israeli offensive, along with escalating murderous military and settler violence, accelerates that deepening and absolutely necessary disgust with Washington's active complicity in the massacre.

As for the Arab American and Palestinian communities, the fury over "Genocide Joe" Biden is difficult to describe if you haven't witnessed it. Leaders in communities like Dearborn, Michigan, a key to the Democratic success in 2020, are openly vowing "we will never vote for Biden again even if the alternative is worse." It's impossible to say right now how this feeling will translate into votes or non-votes next November – keeping in mind the maxim that "all politics are local" – but the Democrats are willfully blind if they underestimate its importance.

Another factor that will require close further attention is the flood of bipartisan money from AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and rightwing sources to defeat progressive, pro-Palestinian congressional representatives like Rashida Tlaib (MI), Cori Bush (MO) and Ilhan Omar (MN) in their primaries. AIPAC has been promising to throw $20 million toward any candidate who'll challenge Tlaib. Any Democratic leadership connivance in these efforts could have fatal electoral consequences.

Immigration Crisis

Another issue bedeviling the Biden administration, clearly, is the immigration and asylum crisis. This is a powerful case of imperialism creating a problem it can't solve. The numbers of desperate refugees and asylum applicants seeking entry at the southern border are overwhelming U.S. and northern Mexican cities, towns and support networks attempting to shelter and feed them.

The refugee crisis is a thoroughly bipartisan product of decades of destructive policies that we've discussed in these pages: decades of "free trade" that's wiped out much of family farming in Mexico, genocidal counterrevolutionary wars in Central America, economic sanctions that greatly contribute to the unraveling of Venezuela as well as Cuba, serial catastrophic interventions in Haiti, and more.

Worst of all, 50 years of an insane U.S. "war on drugs" could not have been more brilliantly designed to turn the drug trade over to violent criminal cartels while shattering lives and communities in North America. On top of all this, the escalating effects of climate change are wiping out means of subsistence such as, for example, coffee crops in Honduras. We've noted before that desperate immigration journeys and calamities are global in scope, as the miseries in the Mediterranean and cruelties of the Italian, British and other European governments illustrate.

This crisis eats away at domestic confidence in the Biden administration's grip on policy, even though it's not of their making – and even though the "alternative" is the outright sadism of the Republicans.

A freshly passed Texas law enables local police to arrest suspected "illegals" on any or no pretext, and local courts to initiate detentions and deportations. In usurping clear federal jurisdiction over immigration, this law is so

blatantly unconstitutional in its application, and so fascistic in its implications, that only the prevailing White Supremacy Court of the United States (WSCOTUS) majority would seem likely to uphold it. (The ACLU is mounting court challenges before the law takes effect in February.)

There remains one area where the right wing and the Republican Party seem determined to self-destruct: their drive to complete the banning and criminalizing of abortion in the United States. In one state after another, where the right to abortion comes to a choice by voters, it wins – decisively. The horrific implications of a Republican sweep of the White House and Congress will keep not only women but a big slice of the entire electorate on side with the Democrats. The Republican determination to continue a losing anti-abortion crusade is rooted in the centrality of that issue to the overall "culture war" assault on gender, racial and social literacy – in libraries, schools, college campuses, and everywhere else.

That specter might, just barely, preserve the Democrats' grip on power after a looming 2024 election choice that hardly anyone outside the Trump cult actually wants. That's a pretty weak reed to grasp, and certainly nothing for a progressive left to bank on. The struggle for an alternative must look elsewhere, beginning with the rising activism we've seen for labor, for Palestine, for immigration and reproductive justice!

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Graphic from Against the Current, title: 'The sequel – not by popular demand'

Tom Nairn and 'The Break Up of Britain' by Neil Williamson (from the archive)

The work of the Scottish political theorist Tom Nairn (1932-2023), and his seminal work, The Break-up of Britain (available here) , was the recently the subject of a well-attended conference in Edinburgh's Assembly Rooms (for an account of the conference see Sean Bell's article in Heckle). However, whilst there was much of value at the conference, a critical perspective on Nairn's work – from a left perspective – was largely noticeable by its absence. It was not, however, always so. Shortly after the appearance of the first edition of Nairn's book in 1977, the following review, written by the late Neil Williamson (who tragically died in 1977, obituary here) was published in ***International****, the theoretical journal of the International Marxist Group (then the British section of the Fourth International, forerunner of ecosocialist.scot).*

Despite, being written some decades ago, it remains an important assessment of Nairn's views on socialism, nationalism, and on the nature of the British State, and – as such – it retains much contemporary interest and relevance.

REVIEW OF TOM NAIRN, THE BREAK-UP OF BRITAIN, 1st EDITION, NEW LEFT BOOKS (1977)

As the rate of inflation on its way up meets the rate of exchange for the pound on the way down, an ideal climate is created for books about 'the crisis'. Given the fixation with Britain's decline shared by bourgeois and socialists alike, it

is amazing how vacuous and tepid most of these studies have been. Tom Naim's book The Break-up of Britain is a welcome exception. For once we have a study which goes beyond a ritual listing of symptoms, and starts to examine the specificities of Britain as an imperialist state in the late 20th Century.

It will be easier to understand Nairn's book if his argument is discussed in two parts. First, the survey he makes of British imperialism, its rise and present demise; then secondly, the more theoretical conclusions he draws about nationalism and its place in European and world history. Although this order may seem back to front, it relates to the order of the book itself and also corresponds to a much firmer and confident first section which will allow us to make more sense of the author's more speculative and tentative conclusions.

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Nairn starts off by describing what he calls the 'transition state' [1] of 18th century Britain which combined in its ruling caste elements from both the agrarian aristocracy and the modern constitutional bourgeoisie. Neither part of the 'old world' of Absolutism, nor the 'modern world' of representative bourgeois democracy, the result was a social formation with a remarkably 'low profile' state and an extremely cohesive, if deferential, civil society.

The basis for the remarkable stability and class quiescence of this society was of course its phenomenal success as an overseas Empire builder and ruler. Unlike the aspiring German or Italian capitalisms, there was literally no necessity in Britain for the restless dynamism so typical of her competitors in the 19th century. It was thus the 'external' relations of Britain to world development which moulded and dictated her 'internal' social structure.

One of the most crucial features of the complacent rule of

Britain's patrician elite was the wholesale incorporation of the English intelligentsia into the service of the state and its rulers. The civil service and the Oxbridge-public school network were the social cords which bound the loyalty of the British upper middle classes to the 'ancien regime' with its monarchy, Lords and assorted paraphernalia which was to disappear elsewhere over Europe by 1920. But there was to be no 'second revolution' in Britain, no dramatic rupture with the dynasties of tradition as seen in the Romanov, Ottoman, Habsburg or Hohenzollern territories. The very success of British society (in world terms) was the basis for the social pact between the ruling class and Britain's 'hard-headed' urban middle class. A potentially much more serious threat was of course the developing labour movement. But according to Nairn this threat never materialised. The energy of working class politics was channelled into the Labour Party, probably the most humble and deferential political animal in British politics.

In Scotland a distinct sub-plot was unwinding. Despite its impressive pedigree of national life (its Church, financial system, etc) the partnership colonial and imperial plunder removed the necessity for the middle class of taking the road of forced march to modern development under the banner of nationalism. The result was a withered and pathetic apology for nationalism with Oor Wullie *[newspaper cartoon strip from 1936]* and Dr. Finlay *[fictional GP, televised in the 1960s*] as Scotland's national symbols. Likewise the intelligentsia of 19th century Scotland found themselves functionless in 'their own' society. Some moved south or overseas, where their talents were put to the natural use of ruling the masses. Others stayed in Scotland and, cut off from the metropolis, their parochialism and dourness was only compensated for by the secure living to be made as captains of industry in the Clyde or Tay valleys.

The spiralling economic collapse of British Imperialism, the

world of IMF loans and ‘one more year of austerity’, has undermined the basis of that old stability. Today it is no longer the virtues of talented and successful amateurism which stand out. Instead it is the vices of a creaky and arthritic political rule which personify Britain.

Again according to Nairn, the labour movement has been totally unable to mount any effective challenge to the British state and its ‘consensus’. Even the most self-active struggles have not gone beyond the bounds of loyalty to Labour’s parliamentarianism. In fact it is bourgeois radicalism which is the most dangerous to the prospects of the British constitution, a bourgeois radicalism in the shape of nationalist movements. Based on oil and the prospects of social-economic renovation which can be derived from its ownership, a mass movement has developed which threatens to go beyond piecemeal reform and political repairing of the ‘normal’ party system. Independence, argues, the author, would in fact shatter the old political order for ever. The ‘ancien regime’ is in no position to absorb and incorporate such a radical restructuring of its operations. In fact, the very inflexibility of the British political order (no federalism, no TV in Parliament, obsessive secrecy, etc.) means that even a mere ‘political’ break in the Constitution entails a considerable social revolution, regardless of the wishes of the participants.

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Although this is only the barest sketch of Nairn’s argument, it describes fairly accurately his central thesis. In its detail it is an impressive, often brilliant, analysis, a panoramic survey of British imperialism’s place in world history. It is not necessary to agree with the entirety of his writing to say that the chapter on the ‘stunted’ nature of Scottish nationality, its ‘schizophrenia’ (a nation but not a state), and its reactionary culture, is the most perceptive survey ever written on the subject. Likewise his designation

of the nationalist movement as bourgeois radicalism correctly defines the social and class nature of a phenomenon which so mystifies much of the left. But perhaps the most impressive feature of the early section of the book lies in its method.

The book is above all a study of the political nature of the 'crisis', in contrast to the predominant economic bias of other doomsday scenarios. As the author explains, this concentration on locating the economy as the source of the British malaise is itself a partial product of the dazzling weight of civil society (e.g. economics) over state life (politics).

But the very ambition of his project is partly responsible for some of the worst defects of the book, for it constantly forces Nairn into a dubious style of argument, constantly vacillating between the extremes of astute political sensitivity on one band and crass impressionism on the other. Two examples can be used to illustrate lack of concern for political detail.

First there is the decision (presumably the author's) to reprint almost unaltered an analysis of 'English' nationalism written seven years ago. But these seven years have seen the face of 'English' nationalism change dramatically with the growth of the National Front/Party into the largest far-right movement in Europe outside Italy. Inside the very heartlands of working class communities, organised fascism is growing where the far left has only the slimmest of toe-holds. But, according to Nairn, this is ' … largely a distraction. The genuine right – and the genuine threat it represents – is of a quite different character.' As this chapter spells out, that character is no less than *[Tory politician]* J. Enoch Powell . Now it is quite true that Powell's literary and political ramblings sum up quite nicely many of the ideological threads of English reaction – the Midlands self-made man, nostalgic for the village church. But seriously to suggest that this' English' dreamland is in the same political league as the

strident ‘British’ nationalism of the National Front explicitly imperialist, racist and self-organised – is a dangerous mistake for a socialist to make.

The same flippancy towards political details is shown in his view of the efficacy of bourgeois radical nationalism in bringing down Britain’s political house of cards. The Scottish Nationalist Party *[sic]* is no longer a party of cranks and eccentrics, and their own perspective is a real and crucial factor in the dynamic of events. As their last conference demonstrated, not only is the central leadership of the party acutely aware of the clapped out condition of British bourgeois democracy, it is also completely dedicated to preserving it.

Many members [2] of the party are in favour of a formal training period of devolution to prevent any sudden radicalism, most [3] are in favour of some jointly administered use of oil resources, and all [4] are in favour of retaining Elizabeth of Windsor, the Commonwealth and the Christmas message as essential features of our new independent Alba. Of course they may not succeed in channelling the aspirations of Scottish working people into such neat constitutional packages (in fact, if anything, it is unlikely), but at least their conscious desire to do so, when combined with their prestigious role at the head of the SNP should have been given a passing note.

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The greatest strength of Nairn’s book is its understanding of the unique continuity of the British state, for its class lineage and powers of incorporation are described in a clear and exemplary way. But paradoxically the author’s (justified) concentration on the strengths of the system lead him to a pessimism about the potential of the forces arrayed against it. We shall return to this in discussing Nairn’s views on nationalism, but an amazing problem emerges in his narrative

of British imperialism. For here is a book written to assess the nature of the present ‘crisis’ which has nothing to say about the only other period when such a term was really justified – that of 1910 to 1914.

These years are unique in Britain’s history for a simple reason. It was only then (as opposed to 1919 or 1926) that the working class experienced a dramatic rise in class confidence and combativity at the same time as the ruling class was increasingly split and demoralised.

The story of the ‘industrial explosion’ of these years is well known. The 1910 miners’ strike, the 1911 transport strike, the 1912 dock strike, and the 1913 lock-out in Dublin were more than isolated economic disputes. Entire communities were involved in often serious confrontations (involving deaths at Tonypandy) with the naked might of state repression. Solidarity strikes were common, and a new leadership was thrown up deeply influenced by the anti-capitalism of syndicalism and vehemently hostile to the reformism of the trade union and Labour leaders. The real dynamic of these events was seen in the support given to the 1913 lock-out, led by Jim Larkin. With his tour of Britain and in the massive support given to the Dublin workers, a political basis was laid for the political link-up, an ‘ideological regroupment’, to use a phrase, between the secular Republicanism of Connolly and Larkin and the proletarian syndicalism of the pits, docks and engineering works of the British mainland.

This was the working class who found a ruling class deeply divided as the complacency and inertia of the British 19th Century state came under increasingly vehement attack. Opposition to the passivity and general stupor of the Liberal Government had led the Tory Party under Bonar Law to step outside the framework of parliamentary consensus in an explicit support for armed rebellion from Ulster. That Sunday afternoon in March 1914 when General Gough, commander of the Third Cavalry Brigade at the Curragh, fresh from a point blank

refusal to obey the lawful government of the day, sat down to discuss with the leader of Her Majesty's Opposition was an ominous day indeed for the British Constitution.

With syndicalism and Irish Republicanism on one flank, and Tory-army sedition at the head of Ulster's rebellion on the other, this must surely be a crucial episode in the history of British imperialism a vital one to discuss in any survey of a coming 'breakdown' of the Whitehall-Westminster state. Yet in Nairn's book the entire chapter is dismissed in some four lines. 'It is true', he explains, 'that neither the Tory right [?) nor the more militant and syndicalist elements of the working class were really reconciled to the solution up to 1914. The clear threat of both revolution and counter-revolution persisted until then, and the old order was by no means secure as its later apologists have pretended.' And that, it would appear, is that.

This is no academic quibble over historical opinion. There are important reasons why Nairn is forced to dismiss such a central crisis in British imperialism, for his estimation of the forces involved leaves him no choice. Without misconstruing Tom Nairn's views, his assessment of the social forces involved in the pre-1914 crisis can be summed up as follows: *Syndicalism* – a sub-branch of Labourism, no more than the militant wing of a movement almost ready made for incorporation and assimilation into the very pores of British constitutionalism. *Republicanism* – a theocratic, backward-looking ideology, full of morbid ghosts and superstitious ritual. *Ulster Protestantism* – a superstitious creed, but nonetheless a legitimate movement for self-determination.

Through such tinted spectacles it is little wonder that Nairn can see little of importance in the pre-1914 period. It means that his survey of imperialism Is totally lopsided, unable to discern the real and crucial weaknesses of bourgeois power which lurk beneath the all-powerful exterior. A bad mistake to make in historical analysis, it can be a fatal one to make in

contemporary practice.

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The exact reasoning behind this view of Britain's last political crisis is found in the last chapter of the book, where Nairn spells out a general thesis on nationalism and its relation to socialism. Correctly he starts from the premise that nationalism itself has unduly influenced attempts to theorise nationalism. Too often arbitrary appeals to the 'national community' or to 'historical continuity' have substituted for a materialist and, rigorous approach to nationalism. However, for the author, this inability to understand the phenomenon is not restricted to bourgeois thought, for nationalism is, in his opinion, Marxism's great failure [5].

In its theorising on the subject Marxism has failed to go beyond the 'great universalising tradition', a tradition which stretches from Kant through German philosophy, English political economy, and French socialism to the proletarian internationalism of Lenin and the Comintern. It is this tradition, Nairn claims, which can only see nationalism as some 'exception' to the general internationalist rule, an irrationalism which human progress and world development will overcome. In fact, he claims, the opposite is true. Nationalism has an eminently rational and materialist basis in the very structure of world development. The uneven development of capitalist modernisation has meant that 'progress' for the peripheral areas of the world (everywhere outside Britain in the early 19th Century) could not be a linear or even one. Consciously led, *forced* social development was the only way to avoid being left on the margins of historical development. Nationalism was rarely democratic, but always populist, drawing on the symbols and slogans of the ethnic masses. For the first time the masses were invited into the making of history, if only as genuinely enthusiastic footsoldiers of the new 'national' elites fighting for their

political lives against stronger and more modern neighbours.

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For that reason any neat division between ‘progressive’ nationalism of the Vietnams in modern history and that of the reactionary variety in Germany or Italy is not helpful. All nationalisms, by definition, have to contain both forward looking and reactionary aspects. Nairn describes the egoism and irrationality of all nationalisms with the following metaphor: ‘In mobilising its past in order to leap forward across this threshold (of development) a society is like a man who has to call on all his inherited and unconscious powers to confront some inescapable challenge. He sums up such latent energies assuming that once the challenge is met they will subside again into a tolerable and settled pattern of personal existence.’ It is thus from the ‘inherited and unconscious powers’ that the myths and symbols shared by all nationalisms, no matter what their nature, are drawn. It is the very progress of humanity, the ‘tidal wave of capitalist modernisation’ lurching forward in drastically uneven ways, which makes nationalism an inevitable phase of human history. Since 1914 Marxism has therefore been on the defensive, its only gains seen in the Third World, where it has contributed to the perspectives of the anti-imperialist revolution. Outside of that unlikely theatre of proletarian revolt, Marxism has been swamped by nationalism, betrayed to its own bourgeoisie.

To this picture Nairn adds a footnote on a new species of nationalism, those of the ‘overdeveloped’ national communities, surrounded by more historically backward nationalities. Israel, the Basque country, and Ulster [6] are cited as examples of the intractable nature of the national question in these areas. He derives from the ‘development gap’ between north and south Ireland that only an independent Stormont – independent, that is, of Britain and Dublin – could lay the basis for a ‘rational’ solution. Ulster nationalism

(as opposed to British loyalism) therefore has to be supported as strenuously as an all Irish republic has to be opposed.

From that brief summary everything discussed in the preceding section falls into place. The impotence of ‘internationalist’ socialist and labourist movements, the progressive nature of some very unlikely candidates for social progress such as Ulster ‘nationalism’, the remarkable absence of any tradition in Britain of social populism from left or right – all are seen by Nairn as being derived from the inexorable march of nationalism. Essentially there has been a fundamental flaw in socialism, its internationalism turning out on closer inspection to be a naïve cosmopolitanism.

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Before challenging his thesis it is necessary to point out some of the more perceptive points that he makes in his argument. To start with, he is correct in his concentration on the uneven development of capitalist modernisation as the central dynamic behind nationalism. Nairn goes beyond this not exactly original thesis to draw out the necessity of rejecting any view of nationalism as some internally generated political process (i.e. the need for a national market, a national tariff barrier, etc.), a view which has prevailed on the left since the days of Stalin. One of the merits of the book is that hopefully it kills forever the dogmatism and static sociology behind Stalin’s famous definition [7]. It is correct to dismiss arbitrary lists of what is, or is not, a nation. ‘Dialects’, for instance, have a habit of becoming a ‘language’ when they get an army mobilised behind them, regardless of their literary merits. As Nairn points out, nationalism does not awaken nations to self-consciousness it invents them where they do not exist. His survey of nationalism and uneven development, regardless of the conclusions he himself draws actually makes it easier to locate nationalism historically with its rise as a system of social thought and its role in class society over the last

century and a half.

However, it is very strange that other aspects of advanced bourgeois nationalism were not examined in this book. For instance it is obvious that the participation of the masses in bourgeois democracy, and the visions of self-rule and popular sovereignty which go with it (regardless of their form), is deeply connected with a belief in one's 'own' nation, one's ' own' state. To a large extent such a view more or less sums up belief in parliamentary democracy – that it is actually possible to win anything the majority of the population desire inside a given geographical boundary. This myth reflects of course a certain capitalist reality, for within the 'normal limits' of the system the majority of electors actually do decide who their government should be. As an entire lineage of social democrats from Karl Kautsky to Tony Benn have shown, once you actually believe that one day the state may be yours through electoral victory (bourgeois democracy) then it becomes increasingly necessary to defend it against intruders (bourgeois nationalism). This remains a crucial theme for later studies on the nature of modern nationalism to take up.

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Despite certain insights by the author, its fundamental argument remains flawed. His conclusion on socialism is summed up thus: 'Exceptions to the rule (of socialism's predominance over nationalism demanded explanations – conspiracy theories about the rulers, and rotten minorities speculation about the ruled. Finally these exceptions blotted out the sun in August 1914'.

Such a strange summary, for three years after the dance of reaction and nationalist hysteria came another momentous historical event – the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. To examine the last fifty years through the prism of August 1914 without any acknowledgement of 1917 obviously produces a gross pessimism towards socialism and bestows on the defeats and

setbacks of the last three generations a permanency and depth they do not have.

Instead of some historically inevitable process (which is in essence Nairn's view of nationalism) the experiences of 1914 and 1917 form, in microcosm, a view of world history which has real self-active agents conscious and able to change the course of that development. The choice between *defeat* with its bourgeois hysteria and its nationalist frenzy, and *victory*, with its internationalism and a genuinely new social order, was not decided by some 'law' of history, no matter how materialist it appears.

These two dates are of course only symbolic, for in fact in the decade after the Russian revolution, despite the defeats, a class confidence and (for the want of a better word) socialist culture flourished all over Europe. One has only to think of the response by millions of working people to the first Russian revolution, to the first German soviets in 1919, to the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 to the civil war in Spain, to understand that there was a 'universalist' consciousness which extended far outside the ranks of intellectuals or party cadre. That consciousness, partly gained from the experience of the mass parties of the Second International, partly developed from the lessons of the Russian revolution, was a tangible and viable building block in the construction of a socialist society.

The most crucial element in the last forty odd years of European (and in that sense world) history is unseen by Nairn. What took place was a dramatic *regression* of class consciousness inside the European working class. Again it has to be stressed: this was fought out by self-conscious agents, for there was nothing 'inevitable' about fascism's victory in Germany or Franco' s march into Barcelona.

Some idea of the extent of that regression may be gained by looking at a place like Scotland and its contrast with today's

corrupt Labour Party and ageing Communist Party. Maclean's role is best known, but there are many more examples of a socialist internationalism among working people which today is not even a memory. When Countess Markievicz, heroine of the Easter Rising, spoke at the Glasgow May Day parade in 1919 there were about 150,000 workers there to listen to her, but this level of popular mobilisation was only reflective of a genuine political sophistication incredible by today's standards. Discussions around constituent assemblies, principled support for self-determination, opposition to imperialist war and militarism were actually commonplace inside the broad labour movement in the immediate post-war period [8].

It was this proletarian consciousness which fascism, the slump and the post-war Cold War were responsible for destroying. The hysteria of nationalism was a logical, if not inevitable, result [9]. It is the possibility of working class people regaining that type of elemental consciousness which today gives the material precondition for socialism – something which Nairn, regardless of his personal view, cannot fit into his theoretical universe.

Tom Nairn has written an important book, but one whose weaknesses are often those of over-ambition and consequent impressionism. As a study of imperialism in its death agony it should be read, sceptically perhaps, but read. Its faults only serve to remind us Just how far the Marxist left is from producing its own 'concrete analysis' of world capital and its British component.

NEIL WILLIAMSON June 1977

Notes

1. As the author acknowledges, this argument is largely derived from the Influential essay by Perry Anderson 'Origins of the Present Crisis', in *New Left Review* No. 23, January

1964. However also ever-present, but never recognised, is the important study of class structure by Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*(1966).

2. See assorted speeches of Neil McCormick, son of the party's founder and Professor of International Law at Edinburgh University.

3. See the article by David Simpson (Economics Dept., Strathclyde University), published in *Radical Approach,* edited by Kennedy important reasons why Nairn is forced to dismiss such a central crisis (1976). For a fascinating look at the British ruling class's outlook, see Peter Jay's article in support In *The Times*, 13 May 1976.

4. This was the position adopted by the 1977 conference In Dundee with the unanimous backing of the party's leadership.

5. Again, as the author states, this argument is heavily influenced by Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change (*1964), and its chapter seven on nationalism.

6. This section of Nairn's argument is, frankly, total rubbish. His over-developed category of nations is totally arbitrary; what does the Basque country, today the most class conscious and combative part of the population in Spain, have in common with Ulster Presbyterian sectarianism? Why is South Africa not on Nairn's list surely an 'over-developed' country if ever there was one? Perhaps because the contortions necessary for any socialist to support self-determination for white South Africa were more than the author could manage. On Ulster only a comment is possible in this review. Why is there no indication of Ulster nationalism, despite the way it has been kicked about by the British Government since the Troubles began?

The Protestant population can only define themselves in terms of the British connection, and it was this stark fact of political life which led to the eventual demise of the Peace

Movement – an inability to take a simple 'yes or no' position on the security forces, and thus on the whole arsenal of Imperialist repression In the Six Counties.

7. *Marxism and the National Question* by J. Stalin, where he states his famous definition listing historical continuity, common language, common territory, and common economic and cultural life as the defining features of a nation.

8. See, for instance, the STUC annual conferences 1919-1923; Labour Party Scottish Advisory conferences 1917, 1918 and 1921, for excellent insights into the debates at the very heart of the labour movement. We can note for instance that the Scottish Council of the Labour Party reported to its 1921 conference on the nine large meetings it had held to demand self-determination for Ireland, all over Scotland.

9. This is not to say that the support behind the spectacular rise of the SNP (or some party *quid et qua* for that matter) in the post-war world is some linear continuation of fascism. There is little in the content of these movements which corresponds to the demoralisation and political decay of 'traditional nationalism'. Unfortunately, a vigorous analysis has yet to be constructed of the features of this new (nationalist) bourgeois radicalism, with its aspirations of social reform and yet its profoundly electoralist and atomised practice.

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Main photo – revised edition of The Break Up of Britain by Tom Nairn, published 2021.

For the full archives of International

and other International Marxist Group journals of the 1960s and 1970, see: https://redmolerising.wordpress.com/international-img-journal/

Also see another major article by Neil Williamson from 1977 here: SOCIALISTS & THE NEW RISE OF SCOTTISH NATIONALISM

Five reasons why agriculture should be central to our ecosocialist vision

Agriculture (including marine and fishing) are important parts of the Scottish economy. Jess Spear from the Irish ecosocialist magazine Rupture writes about why it is central to an ecosocialist vision.

1. Industrialised agriculture is undermining our life support systems.

Wildlife populations are collapsing and many species, unable to scrape a living, are simply going extinct. Deforestation and land clearance destroys ecosystems and replaces them with monoculture crops (eg, wheat, barley, soy) or farmed animals. Big monoculture farms effectively starve wildlife of food and pollute the soil and adjacent lakes, rivers and streams. The continuing expansion of intensive farms means further destruction of ecosystems, more wildlife starvation, and more animals going extinct.

2. And fueling the rise of new pandemics.

Loss of habitat drives wildlife into areas inhabited by humans and increases contact between human populations and wildlife, which then increases the likelihood of zoonotic spillover (that is, infectious diseases jumping from animal to human). In fact, most human diseases originated this way. Big factory farms, with billions of chickens, pigs, and cows reared in often cramped and unsanitary conditions, are also breeding grounds for new pandemics.

3. Climate change will disrupt our food supply.

Millions of people are already suffering from food insecurity because of our rotten, for-profit food system. However, the situation stands to get worse with multiple extreme weather events happening simultaneously – such as a heatwave and drought at the same time, as we saw this summer and last – lead to harvest failures and disrupt supply chains. A decrease in the overall food supply will undoubtedly lead to price spikes and more people suffering deprivation. We are already seeing this and should expect more to occur with increased magnitude and frequency as Earth's temperature rises. In fact, a study published this summer outlines how current models underestimate the risk of harvest failures in multiple breadbaskets.

4. Top-down changes in agriculture are fueling the rise of the far right.

Not only is the capitalist response to the climate and biodiversity crises inadequate, what little is being done is far too often unplanned and under the control of private industry. Farmers in Europe in particular are greatly impacted by new regulations meant to curb nitrogen fertiliser pollution. But, rather than working with small farmers and assisting them in the necessary transition away from intensive farming, governments have dragged their feet – in Ireland they continue to drag their feet – and now are forcing farmers to rapidly change the way they farm. This haphazard approach opens the door to the far right, who deny climate change and spread conspiracy theories about land theft. We should all take note of what took place in the Netherlands where the farmer-citizen movement, founded only four years ago, won the municipal elections and immediately cancelled the new environmental policies.

5. We must oppose the new enclosures.

Since the economic crash in 2008, international investors have been buying or leasing huge tracts of agricultural land used by subsistence farmers or indigenous peoples. While the global working class, with its tremendous latent power and common interest in overthrowing capitalism, will undoubtedly play a leading role in transforming society, peasants and indigenous

peoples are already battling big corporations and states that support them (and winning in some cases). Ecosocialists should support these struggles unconditionally. Additionally, we support the international peasant movement – La Via Campesina – for food sovereignty and for getting rid of the transnational agribusinesses dominating our food system.

Interview: Jess Spear- Agriculture and Eco-socialism

Rupture Radio By Rupture Media Jan 09, 2024

This article is taken from Rupture 11 which has a feature dealing with Land. Subscribe today to support Rupture and get the print magazine delivered to you three times a year.

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O'Kane (Save Our Sperrins)

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- Irish historian Conor Kostick on self-determination

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uscscotland@gmail.com

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