

weekly WORKER



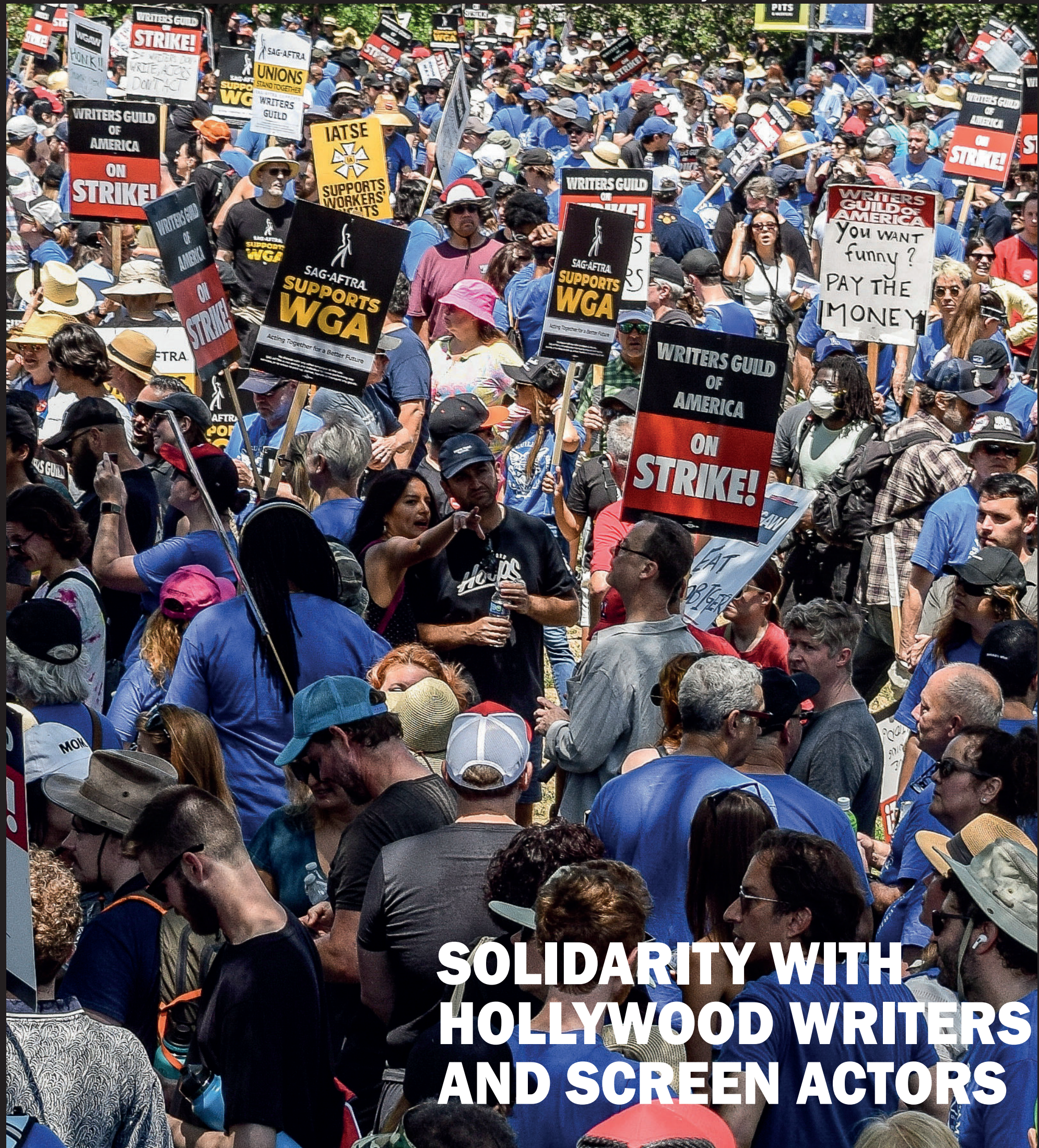
Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee produces yellow peril China report

- Letters and debate
- Labour and its discontents
- Ukraine's stalled offensive
- 'Critique': 50 years publishing

No 1452 July 20 2023

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10



LETTERS



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

Dictatorship

I respect and appreciate Tony Clark's response (July 13) to my letter (July 6). Tony is very clear and explicit that he is opposed to Marxism, seeing it as completely antithetical to the sort of socialism he is in favour of. Given, as Tony kindly says, I am writing from a Marxist perspective, it is clear there are going to be fundamental differences in philosophy and approach between Tony and, I suspect, the great majority of readers of this paper.

Marxism proceeds from the basis that society is divided into classes and people belong to various classes, according to their economic position in society and their relationship to the main means of production and distribution - although obviously ideology, culture, etc also play significant roles.

If you fail to understand the division of society into antagonistic classes, it is not surprising if you then get terribly confused over concepts like 'dictatorship' or 'democracy', as these do not exist separately from classes, and are not able to see that - as well as being opposite concepts - they are also interrelated and interdependent: different aspects of the same basic essence, in this case, class power and class rule.

Is the United Kingdom today a dictatorship or a democracy? Certainly, we have a well-established parliamentary system, there are relatively free and open general elections every four or five years, and we have a number of important democratic rights - won through many hard years of working class and popular struggle - such as free speech and the rights to strike, demonstrate, publish, organise, stand in elections, etc.

People will instantly understand, especially in the present context, that these are not absolute rights - you either have them or not - but *relative*: ie, they exist to some degree, but the content of them is constantly changing and subject to the balance of forces between the popular will and the state.

Members of the working class and working people more generally - the majority of the UK population - do not have any real control over their lives. They are subject to powerful economic forces, which ultimately meet the needs of the small minority who collectively own the means of production and distribution - and whose needs and interests are diametrically opposed to those of the working class.

So you could say the UK is a mix of dictatorship and democracy, but this is terribly confusing and means very little. Marxists would argue that the most important fact is that we live in a capitalist, class-divided society, where the minority capitalist class is the ruling class, and rules through a combination of formal democracy, consent, passive acquiescence, ideology, coercion and downright repressive measures.

The capitalist class exercises *power* mainly through its domination of the state apparatus, in order to try and ensure society continues to operate in its interests. *Power* is the capacity to make things happen - to construct, as well as to oppress. Those who exercise power feel *empowered*, as it is in their interests. It is 'democracy' for the capitalist class. Those *subject* to capitalist class rule (the majority of us) will feel that power exercised *against* our will, *against* our interests. If we say it is democracy *for the*

capitalist class, it is not completely unreasonable to say this is dictatorship *against the working class*.

Marx, Engels and Lenin used the term 'dictatorship' simply to mean the *rule* of one class over another or others. Tony tries to develop some terrible conspiracy theory of how Marx was hijacked by Blanqui and the whole of socialism was diverted into a dead end of 'dictatorship', as opposed to a 'democratic' socialism. In my letter, I showed that class rule was at the heart of the original *Communist manifesto*, so no 'hijacking'.

Yes, Marx, Engels and Lenin made a number of frankly blood-curdling statements about what might happen to the capitalist class if they resisted the socialist revolution and the establishment of socialism, but they said far more about the democratic essence of their concepts of socialism. Engels indeed famously equated the "ultra-democratic" Paris Commune with the "dictatorship of the proletariat": ie, two sides of the same coin.

Was the USSR a dictatorship or democracy? From a class perspective, the question is nonsensical. Tony seemed last week to regard it as a dictatorship (because some enemies of Soviet power were shot or otherwise repressed), yet in other letters he has described the 1936 constitution as ultra-democratic and Stalin as some sort of ultra-democrat in apparently wanting to massively democratise Soviet society! No confusion here ...

In any socialist revolution, including in the USSR, the working class establishes its own state power and class rule *in its interests*. It is therefore 'democratic' for the working class and 'dictatorial' for the overthrown classes and those who seek to undermine and reverse the new socialist order. Hence the famous slogan of Lenin and the Bolsheviks: "the democratic dictatorship of the working class and peasantry" - which confuses Tony terribly because he does not recognise the class division of societies and the class essence of state power.

Specifically for the USSR, working class state power was established in one (exceptionally large and rich in human and material resources) country in a world dominated by viciously hostile imperialism and capitalism, so the working class state power had a major international dimension as well.

For clarity, my own view is the USSR was certainly a socialist society where the working class had established its political and economic rule, and where the state acted in the interests of the working class and majority working people. But, certainly, a great deal more could have and should have been done to genuinely democratise Soviet society to really empower working people, so that the state really acted at the behest of working people rather than just on its behalf.

Yes, a great deal of coercion and repressive measures were used especially in the 1930s against enemies and perceived enemies of Soviet power, but Soviet society was also characterised by very high levels of popular consent and support for the overall system, as demonstrated through the herculean efforts of the Soviet people during and after World War II.

In summary, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' simply means the class rule by the (majority) working class - no more, no less. Marxism through its analysis and guide to action provides the working class with the understanding necessary to overthrow the rule of the capitalist class and capitalism, and replace it with the political and economic class rule of

the working class: ie, socialism. Tony in all his correspondence, despite his very unique insights and perspectives, has demonstrated no credible alternative to Marxism as a means of actually achieving socialism of any variety.

Andrew Northall
email

Falsification

I read Jack Conrad's state capitalist/bureaucratic-collectivist articles on the alleged restoration of capitalism in the USSR in 1928 due to the adoption of the first five-year plan with a great sense of frustration and disappointment ('First plan backgrounds, June 15; 'First plan realities', June 22). However, when these were followed by the Lars T Lih's 'Back to Nevsky' supplement on July 6, I had to respond to this Stalinite short-course-type falsification of the history of the Russian Revolution and reject the championing of the right opposition to that revolution by Kamenev, Zinoviev, Stalin and others.

We thought we had made some progress when the championing of "renegade" Karl Kautsky by Ben Lewis and Lih was marginalised due to internal opposition. Lih ridiculously proposes that this virulent opponent of the October revolution was in fact its political architect - see 'Karl Kautsky as architect of the October revolution' in *Jacobin* - while Lewis continues to titillate his establishment academic audience with this nonsense. Of course, Lenin was the architect of the Russian Revolution and Trotsky was his number two, in direct ideological and political opposition to Kautsky - John Rees spells out Kautsky's backward, mechanical, anti-dialectical ideology from before the 1890s in his book *The algebra of revolution*.

Lih states: "Of course, all histories of 1917 (and certainly all Bolshevik histories) are highly politicised. But, starting in the mid-1920s, several topics of party history in 1917 became subject to severe distorting pressures that did permanent damage to our understanding [This is complaining that the truth was getting an airing! - GD]. Among these pressures: Trotsky's 1924 bid to discredit the Bolshevik leadership in 1917 [That would be the right leaders who opposed the revolution!] and the furious response by his former comrades [rightist opponents of the revolution], Kamenev's and Zinoviev's move into anti-Stalin opposition in 1925 [who openly admitted their mistakes then]; the Lenin cult [storming the Winter Palace and abolishing the constituent assembly to consolidate the rule of the soviets]."

Lih writes about the parts of the April theses that Nevsky (I must admit I had never heard of this 'great revolutionist' before) "does *not* include in his discussion of Bolshevik misgivings, for the simple reason that these parts were not controversial among Bolsheviks". Another big lie! He continues: "These non-controversial items [which were in fact the most controversial items of the theses!] include the core issues of the time: the war (opposition to the imperialist war, hostility to 'revolutionary defensism') and the attitude toward the government (hostility to the "bourgeois" Provisional Government, plus a drive to establish an exclusive worker-peasant *vlast* - power). I have elsewhere documented what Nevsky takes for granted, although controversial today: Bolshevik leaders such as Kamenev and Stalin had no problem with these core positions, since they had strongly advocated them [in fact they strongly opposed them - the biggest lie!] prior

to Lenin's arrival."

This is Lenin just after the October revolution:

"And now, at such a moment, when we are in power, we are faced with a split. Zinoviev and Kamenev say that we will not seize power [in the entire country]. I am in no mood to listen to this calmly. I view this as treason. What do they want? Do they want to plunge us into [spontaneous] knife-play? Only the proletariat is able to lead the country."

The last sentence here is important. It is an outright rejection of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry', which Jack Conrad and Lih falsely assert that Lenin still held. Here Lenin removes all doubt on what he meant in his April theses - defended so well against the rightists in his 'Letters on tactics' (April 8-13):

"The person who now speaks only of a 'revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' is behind the times. Consequently, he has in effect gone over to the petty bourgeoisie against the proletarian class struggle; that person should be consigned to the archive of 'Bolshevik' pre-revolutionary antiques.

"... Indeed, reality shows us *both* the passing of power into the hands of the bourgeoisie (a 'completed' bourgeois-democratic revolution of the usual type) and, side by side with the real government, the existence of a parallel government which represents the 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'. This 'second government' has *itself* ceded the power to the bourgeoisie, has chained *itself* to the bourgeois government. Is this reality covered by comrade Kamenev's old-Bolshevik formula, which says that 'the bourgeois-democratic revolution is not completed'? It is not. The formula is obsolete. It is no good at all. It is dead. And it is no use trying to revive it."

Is this a dogmatic, ill-informed Lenin, as Jack asserts? This widely testified truth of the course of the Russian Revolution is a myth, Jack tells us, invented by Trotsky in his *Lessons of October* in 1924, and far too many foolish or ill-intentioned

leftists and even uninformed bourgeois academics (like EH Carr presumably) were taken in by him. In fact, so wrong is Trotsky's take on the revolution that the very opposite is the truth, Jack assured us back in 2017, when he reaches the apogee of his political argumentation:

"Subsequently, Lenin talks of the differences being 'not very great', because Kamenev had come round to his viewpoint. Unfair - if anything, Lenin had come round to Kamenev's viewpoint, at the very least he clarified statements that had been hastily written or wrongly informed" ('Putting the record straight', November 9 2017).

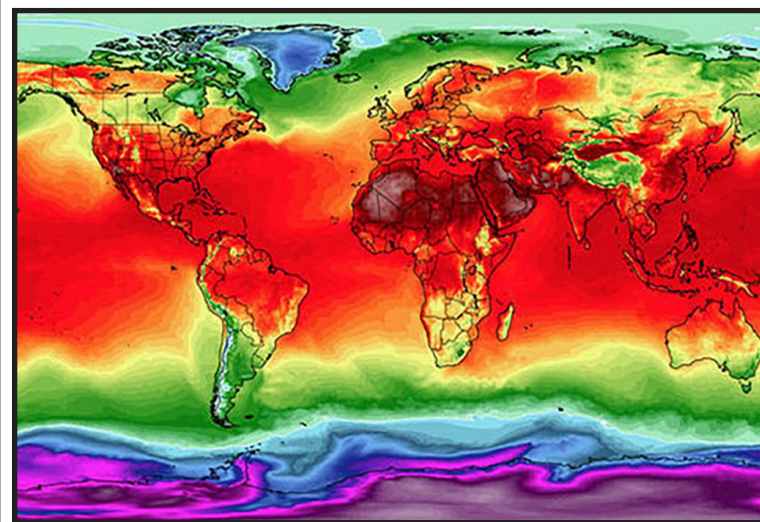
Oh, well done there! The whole world has got the history of the great revolution upside down and completely wrong. The real leaders were Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin and not those bumbling idiots, Lenin and Trotsky, who not only did not understand revolution, but also did not understand the peasantry and Marxism in general, like our sagacious triumvirate.

Jack Conrad told us in 2019: "It is more than ironic then, that with the History of the *Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) - short course (1939)*, we find Stalin - widely accepted as the main author of this notorious work of truths, half-truths and downright lies - pirating Trotsky's account of 1917" ('Marxism versus holy script', January 10 2019).

He wasn't "pirating Trotsky's account of 1917": he was telling the truth, because it suited his purpose - justifying executing them both in August 1936. And Stalin did tell the truth when convenient. He summarised Trotsky's role in 1917 in *Pravda* (November 6 1918). In 1934, before he had consolidated his bloody, totalitarian regime with the great purges, the following quote was still there in his book *The October revolution* (it did not appear in Stalin's *Works* of 1949, of course):

"All the work of practical organisation of the insurrection was conducted under the immediate leadership of the chairman of the Petrograd soviet, Trotsky. It is possible to declare with certainty

Online Communist Forum



Sunday July 23 5pm

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

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

that the swift passing of the garrison to the side of the soviet and the bold execution of the work of the Military Revolutionary Committee the party owes principally and above all to comrade Trotsky."

Jack's arguments continually confuse strategy with tactics - the root of his problem. Lenin's April theses set the *strategic* goal of the second - socialist - revolution. Kamenev - followed by Muranov, Stalin and then Zinoviev - led the opposition to this: their strategic goal was a bourgeois revolution led by the working class, which entailed support for the Provisional government. Trotsky had pointed out the flaw with this argument back in 1905; once the working class had taken revolutionary power, it was impossible to expect them to tolerate bourgeois exploitation. This central aspect of his 'permanent revolution' theory was fully accepted by Lenin.

Once Lenin had won that month-long argument, then the tactical question was the time of the insurrection when circumstances were right. But even then, as John Rees tells us, "Riazanov and Kamenev had both opposed the insurrection, and felt the lash of Lenin's terrible tongue." Lenin proposed the expulsion of Kamenev and Zinoviev.

By 1924 they were repeating the same 'errors' committed before the April theses and during the October revolution. Trotsky had to take up the fight against them - much of that work consists in unchallenged quotes from Lenin. To reject *Lessons of October* is to reject Lenin in the first place - Zinoviev admitted as much during the brief period of the Joint Opposition in 1926-27.

Trotsky recounts in his book, *Stalin's gangsters*, Zinoviev stating in 1926: "We say, there can no longer be any doubt now that the main nucleus of the 1923 opposition, as the development of the present ruling faction has shown, correctly warned against the dangers of the departure from the proletarian line, and against the alarming growth of the apparatus regime ... Yes, in the question of suppression by the bureaucratised apparatus, Trotsky proved to be right as against us.

"In this manner, Zinoviev admitted his mistake of 1923 (in waging a struggle against 'Trotskyism') and even characterised it as much more dangerous than that of 1917 - when he opposed the October insurrection!"

This is why Lih so strongly opposes Kamenev's and Zinoviev's move into anti-Stalin opposition in late 1925.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Red police?

Mike Macnair takes issue with the failure of the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Appeal to raise the demand for replacing the police with a conscript militia ('Silence on the alternative', July 13). While in recent years the demand to 'defund the

police' has arisen from Black Lives Matter protests, Macnair is correct that no immediate alternative is being proposed.

But an obvious question arises about the traditional socialist demand: are there any examples of a conscript-based militia taking over the function of law enforcement? Has the policy been implemented by the proletariat in the course of revolutionary upheavals during the 19th and 20th century?

If not, then perhaps the comrades of the SWP and Socialist Appeal are not unprincipled, but genuinely uncertain. Conscript-based recruitment might disrupt the closed culture of policing, but it would not necessarily eliminate the voluntary aspect of service. Since conscription can be and is resisted for service in armed forces where it exists, shouldn't we expect to see similar resistance to militia service if introduced? In which case, those who accept being drafted into the militia may be people already likely to seek the job of career police officer.

Ansell Eade
Lincolnshire

Population

Jim Nelson makes some very good points about my support for China's one-child policy, and my support for the Greens' call to bring the population of the UK down to 25 million by 2100 (Letters, July 6).

Jim is right when he explains that the education, employment and equality of women is the key to bringing down the population of the world from its current nine billion to just three billion by 2100. However, Jim has no answer to men and women in Nigeria who are "breeding like rabbits", with the population of Nigeria expected to grow from its current 180 million to 300 million by 2050.

To bring down the population of the UK to just 25 million by 2100 will require the adoption of a one-child policy, together with men and women being paid to be sterilised. I'm sure that there are many women of child-bearing age, especially single mothers in receipt of universal credit, who would jump at the chance of a government grant of £750 if they agreed to be sterilised.

I don't just talk about people being sterilised - I practise what I preach. When I was 40 I paid a GP £80 to have a vasectomy - it's the best £80 I've ever spent and I wish I'd had it done earlier. Before then, I always used a condom. Thirty-two years ago, a very wise lady told me: "Always use a condom, as some women get pregnant to trap men into a relationship". It's a pity that Nigerians don't know what a condom is.

I have been involved in socialist politics since I was 18, but I have never been so politically isolated as I am today. Being unemployed for the last 31 years hasn't helped with my political isolation. The defeat of Corbynism has set back the cause of

socialism by decades. Hundreds of thousands of Corbyn supporters have become completely demoralised and I am one of them.

Whilst Jim blames capitalism for climate change, capitalism isn't going to be overthrown any time soon. There is no Bolshevik Party and no mass communist party anywhere on the planet. The best we can do is to build the circulation and readership of the *Weekly Worker* as a resource which future generations can access when revolutionary opportunities are more prevalent.

John Smithee
Cambridgeshire

Prisons

Scott Evans states in his article: "The discipline of the labouring classes is placed above pure economic logic" ('Drug war and its failures', July 13). But that ignores the effect of the prison industrial complex in America and the role played by the private sector.

The increase in the prison population has resulted in economic profit and an increase in the influence of private prison companies, where such a large percentage of the population are either employed in the prison service or incarcerated. Giving long prison sentences for minor drug offences and making profit from their labour is little better than slavery for the poor.

Then there are all the other companies that benefit and the influence of their lobby groups: private construction companies, prison food and medical services, criminal justice lawyers, etc. That is why the private sector should have nothing to do with the criminal justice system.

Roger Day
Gravesend

Zionist scouts

We call upon the chief scout, Bear Grylls, to tell the Scouting Association he leads not to expel volunteers who campaign against Zionist support for Israel.

The Scout Association has expelled me, treasurer of the 150th Craigmound Scout Group, for being affiliated to the Campaign Against Bogus Antisemitism (CABA). My crime? At the request of the 150th committee, I put up an advert on behalf of the scout group seeking volunteers for our committee, along with my personal landline phone number as a contact for more information.

A Zionist complained that this was the same number as was used on the CABA Facebook page. Although I had never mentioned my politics at the scouts, I was suspended and after one year, with no right to respond, expelled.

I had previously given 10 years service at scout executive meetings, organising finances and payment for youth leader expenses, fundraising at festivals, preparing and submitting accounts for the scout group for its charity registration, claiming gift aid from the tax department, organising meetings, Christmas sing-alongs, etc. I hold the Chief Scout's Award from Bear Grylls.

I am shocked and upset at my treatment. The scouts appear to be working to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism, which equates criticism of Israel to anti-Semitism. But Rabbi Yisroel Dovid Weiss of Neturei Karta writes in my support, saying: "Pete is in no way anti-Jewish."

Please call upon the chief scout to reinstate me (see 'Don't let the scouts weaponise antisemitism' at change.org/scoutsihra) and stop the scouts from witch-hunting anti-racist campaigners for Palestine.

Pete Gregson
Edinburgh

ACTION

Oh, Jeremy Corbyn - the big lie

Screenings of this feature-length documentary, which explores a dark story of political deceit and outrageous anti-Semitism smears. Organised by Platform Films: www.platformfilms.co.uk.

Bournemouth, Saturday July 22, 5.30pm and Sunday July 23, 7pm: Poole Hill Brewery, Poole Hill, Bournemouth BH2. Entrance free.

Bristol, Monday July 24, 5.15pm: Tony Benn House, Victoria Street, Bristol BS1. Asa Winstanley introduces his new book *Weaponising anti-Semitism*, followed by screening of the film. Hosted by Unite Community. Tickets £3.

Portsmouth, Tuesday July 25, 1.45pm: Location to be announced on the day. Admission free.

Wimbledon, Wednesday July 26, 7pm: Tunnel 267, The Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW19. Tickets £10 (£5).

Irvine, Wednesday July 26, 7pm: Harbour Arts Centre, 116 Harbour Street, Irvine KA12. Admission free.

Torrington, Wednesday July 26, 7.30pm: The Plough Arts Centre, 9-11 Fore Street, Great Torrington, EX38. Tickets £7.50 (£5).

Morecambe, Thursday July 27, 9pm: West End Playhouse, 21C Yorkshire Street, Morecambe LA3.

Oxford, Saturday July 29, 2.10pm: Phoenix Picture House, 57 Walton Street, Oxford OX2. Tickets £10 (£5).

Build the strike wave, fight anti-union laws

Saturday July 22, 1pm: Public meeting, The Railway Club, rear of 3 Stuart Road, Plymouth PL3.

Organised by Plymouth National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=6169305756457592.

From picket line to parliament

Saturday July 22, 3pm: Public meeting, UVW, 140 Cambridge Heath Road, London E1. Rachel Keke shares her incredible story: in the space of a year moving from the picket line of a 22-month strike of chambermaids into the French parliament as an MP for NUPES, struggling against low pay and outsourcing. Followed by Q and A. Organised By United Voices of the World:

www.facebook.com/uvwunion.

Introduction to Living Rent

Wednesday July 26, 6.30pm: Online briefing. Living Rent is Scotland's tenant and community union. Learn about the history, vision, structure, campaigns and activities, which include securing home repairs, stopping evictions and preventing rent increases.

Organised by Living Rent:

www.livingrent.org/introduction_to_lr_jul23.

Troublemakers at work

Saturday July 29, 9.30am to 5pm: Conference, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Bringing together workers who have won improvements at work, taken strike action and transformed weak unions into a strong voice for workers. Also those who want to win a pay rise, start a union or mobilise an existing union at work. Workshops and plenary sessions.

Registration £10 (£5). Organised by Troublemakers At Work: troublemakersat.work/conference-2023.

Uncensored: the festival

Saturday July 29, 4pm to 10pm: Festival, Brookside Farm, Causeway, Nailsea (near Bristol) BS48. Music, poetry, stand-up comedy and speakers. At 8pm the film *Oh, Jeremy Corbyn: the big lie* will be shown on a giant screen. Tickets £15.

Organised by Not The Andrew Marr Show:

www.facebook.com/events/678576277641026.

Chopped liver and unions

August 4 to 26 (not Sundays), times vary: The Space on the Mile, 80 High Street, Edinburgh EH1. *Chopped liver and unions* tells the story of Sara Wesker, who organised many strikes by garment workers in the East End of London in the 1920s. Tickets £10 (£8).

Performed by Lottie Walker. Part of the Edinburgh fringe festival: tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/chopped-liver-and-unions.

No to Nazis in Leeds

Saturday August 5, 12.30pm: Counter-protest outside the Britannia Hotel, Mill Green View, Seacroft, Leeds LS14. Far-right groups are gathering to intimidate refugees there.

Organised by Leeds Stand Up To Racism:

www.facebook.com/events/215221088048313.

'Merchants of death' walking tour

Saturday August 5, 2pm: Central London walk, starting at St James Park Station, 55 Broadway, London SW1. Visiting the offices of some of the major arms companies which will be exhibiting at the September London arms fair, including BAE Systems and Leonardo. Get inspired to take action against the fair. Free registration.

Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade:

caat.org.uk/events/london-caat-merchants-of-death-walking-tour-pre-dsci.

Shut down Amazon - support the strikers

Saturday August 5, 5.30pm: Rally, BHX4 warehouse, Lyons Park, Sayer Drive, Coventry CV5. Join Amazon strikers on the anniversary of their first strike. Over 1,000 workers at the Coventry site have now joined the GMB, and strikes have spread the Amazon site at Rugby, Staffordshire. Organised by Rank and File Combine: www.facebook.com/events/840542570974768.

Weaponising anti-Semitism

Friday August 11, 6.30pm: Online and onsite book launch, IHRC, 202 Preston Road, Wembley HA9. Author Asa Winstanley discusses his new book - *Weaponising anti-Semitism: how the Israel lobby brought down Jeremy Corbyn*. Free entry, registration required.

Organised by Islamic Human Rights Commission:

www.facebook.com/events/3476675772593840.

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Colin Turner, Esen Uslu, Tina Werkmann and Ian Wright

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HOLLYWOOD

Tinseltown's hot summer

Writers and screen actors need to win in their strike against the media giants, says Paul Demarty. But our aim must be a better, a higher culture

It is perhaps counterintuitive that, despite being an industry built on the near-religious veneration of particular individuals, Hollywood is one of the most unionised places in the United States.

The unions are divided, regrettably, by craft; nonetheless, their coverage is extensive. You have the writers', directors' and (more dubiously) producers' guilds (WGA, DGA and PGA); the Screen Actors' Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA); and, for the unsung heroes of Tinseltown - 'below the line', as they say - the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) and the Teamsters. There is some unevenness in IATSE's density, admittedly, but any one of these unions can bring the whole place to a halt.

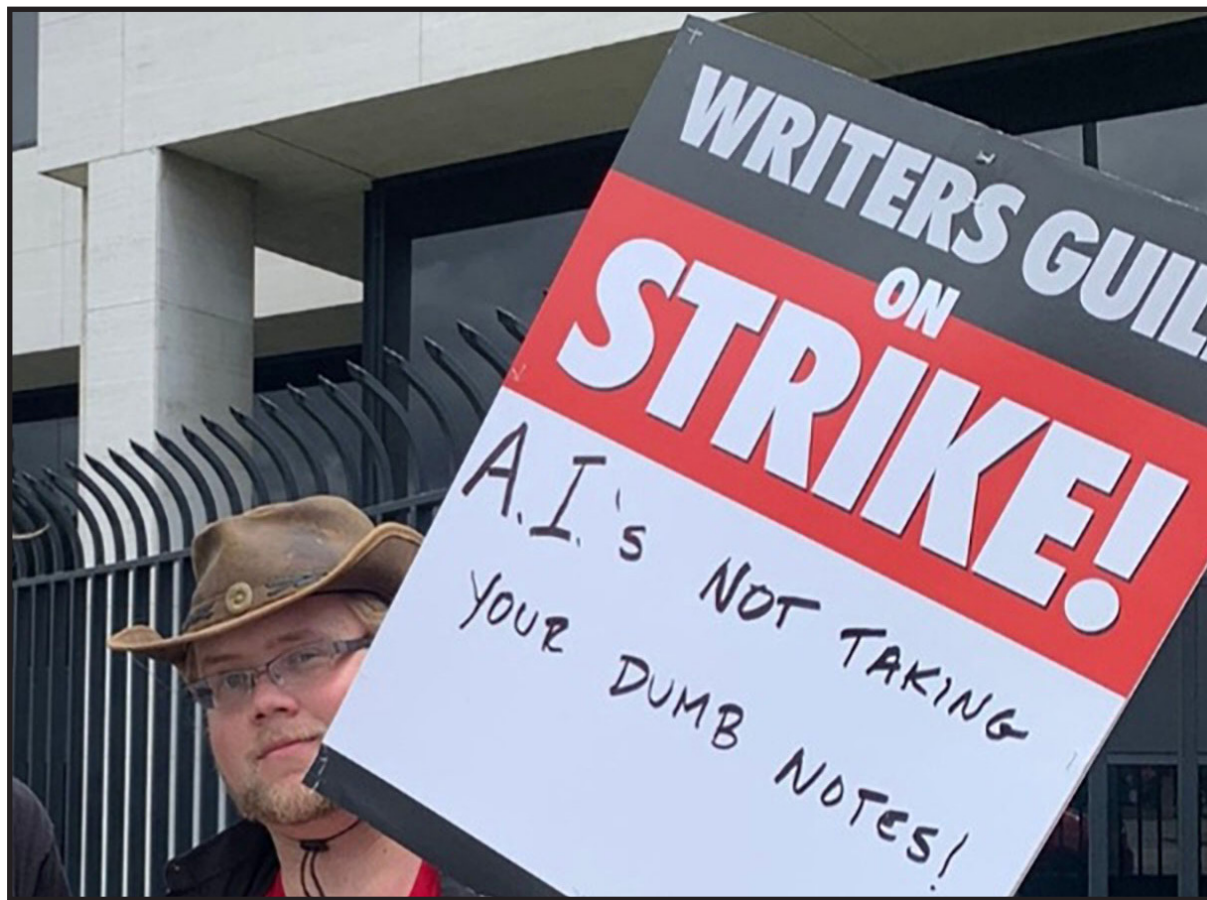
It falls to the WGA and now SAG-AFTRA, this time, to remind us of this fact. The writers have been on strike for over two months now; last Friday, the actors guild joined them. The stars of the long-trailed Christopher Nolan blockbuster, *Oppenheimer*, walked out of the London premiere. Both unions are in sectoral disputes with the Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), the industry body that periodically agrees an industry-wide contract. The points of dispute are very similar.

Both the actors and writers want decent residuals (basically, royalties) from streaming services, having fought tooth and nail to get them out of the Hollywood studios and over-air broadcasters in battles past. The AMPTP, on the other hand, sees streaming as an excellent opportunity to wind the clock back and keep more of the pie themselves. There are particular 'workplace' demands: SAG-AFTRA wants restrictions on self-taped auditions (the industry has been making ever more absurd and expensive demands on actors merely to get on the pile¹), and the WGA wants to get its members access to sets (common in the studios and TV networks, but rare at the streamers, and important for honing craft and getting on in the industry).

What has dominated the headlines, of course, is the question of generative artificial intelligence. The WGA wanted an assurance that writers would not be replaced with AI models; the AMPTP refused, offering only an annual "consultation" on "disruptive technologies" - a clear signal that these desiccated philistines were just desperate to try exactly that. In relation to the use of digital likenesses of actors, the 'compromise' offered by the producers was, in the words of SAG-AFTRA negotiator Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, "that our background performers should be able to be scanned, get one day's pay, and their companies should own that scan, their image, their likeness and should be able to use it for the rest of eternity on any project they want".²

The industry lobby denies this, claiming that such usage would be restricted to "the motion picture for which the background actor is employed". Supposing this is true, however, it is hardly reassuring. What counts as the "motion picture" here in a TV or streaming series context? An episode? A season? A whole series?

The matter of AI deserves closer consideration, if only because it appears here as a concentrated expression of wider social anxieties.



Now joined by screen actors

When SAG-AFTRA president Fran Drescher told her members, "If we don't stand tall right now, we are all going to be in trouble - we are all going to be in jeopardy of being replaced by machines", she said no more than I have heard from worried software engineers, advertising creatives, photographers and many others in jobs that, while in some cases were quite precarious, were nonetheless largely insulated from the threat of obsolescence through technological advancement.

ChatGPT

We first need to be more precise about what we are calling AI - one of the most promiscuously overdetermined expressions in the English language. At issue is the latest generation of deep learning models. A model is essentially an *algorithm*: a deterministic series of computations that transform a particular input into a particular output. Given, typically in the case of popular products like ChatGPT and DALL-E, an instruction in plain English, the model produces some more text, or an image, or a video clip, or whatever. What goes on in between need not detain us in detail, though the details are interesting in their own right. The important part is the 'learning': the model, first of all, includes a corpus of works fed to it and initially manually categorised. It may then be given feedback on the outputs it produces: is this a good response to the prompt, "Paint me Donald Trump's banquet of hamburgers in the style of da Vinci's *Last supper*"? And, depending on if the operator gives a thumbs-up or thumbs-down, the algorithm will modify itself.

The salient facts here are, firstly, that human input is still required, but of a rather more mechanised and really subsumed sort than even the most exploited of junior screenwriters. The second is that there are *two* inputs - the prompt and the corpus of training data. The cardinal rule of all software systems - 'Garbage in, garbage out' - is pertinent. Applied to software engineering itself, some kinds of

results from the currently modish, large language models are plainly useful. There are only so many ways to sort a list of numbers in ascending order, and far fewer good ones. ChatGPT ought to save us the effort. A great deal of the trade, of course, is not amenable to such automation, since it involves decision-making under conditions of uncertainty (when the customer says they want X, do they *really* want X, or Y?), non-obvious trade-offs between different goods (should the code be as efficient as possible, or as easy to understand as possible?) and so on.

Superficially, a creative pursuit like film-making resembles the latter part of the programmer's craft more than the former. Yet, even in the best case, creativity is as much about borrowing as invention. Pablo Picasso is supposed to have quipped, "Good artists borrow, great artists steal". From high culture (James Joyce's *Ulysses*, for obvious reasons) to low (sampling in hip-hop music, say), new works grow in the composted remains of the old. Nor is this a distinctively modern phenomenon - Renaissance painters would train for years copying the works of masters, to say nothing of eastern icon painters, the orders of classical architecture, and so forth.

There is a distinctively *capitalist* mode of such 'composting', however. Capitalist firms use intellectual property to assemble their own corpus of works, from which they may produce revenue. They do this by monopoly of the means of production and distribution of cultural products, in which situation they may use the conventional methods of marketing to turn their properties into enormous branding empires. The characteristic cultural form of capitalism is not film, or music of any genre, or even television: it is *advertising*.

We need only think of Disney here: it has its well-known cartoon characters (Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and friends); its vast back catalogue of cheerful animated classics; science fiction megaf franchises like *Star wars*; and the all-conquering cinematic behemoth

of our day, Marvel Studios. All of these verticals have long since turned to eating themselves. The last *Star wars* trilogy was something like a billion-dollar equivalent of Gus van Sant's shot-for-shot remake of *Psycho*, so obviously in hock was it to the original films. The animated classics are all being remade in what may loosely be termed 'live action' (in reality, green-screened to a plasticky sheen). Marvel's latest big idea is the 'multiverse', which is a licence for infinite reboots, and perhaps finally the disproof of Alan Moore's caustic description of such comic-book-film 'universes' as "sprawling, meaningless but at least still finite".³ If good artists borrow and great artists steal, great cultural corporations steal from themselves.

In short, there are worse ways to think of Disney than as - alas! - an extremely analogue, extremely slow and extremely primitive AI. And it is this 'machine' that is the real threat (and its junior competitors, like Netflix and so forth). It ensures that the relevant AI systems will only be used for the worst, most scandalous ends: smothering creative endeavour, destroying the Hollywood craft unions, and drowning the rest of us in indistinguishable, aesthetically barren, but profitable 'content'. For a glimpse of the future here, we need only take a look at the working conditions of the visual-effects artists, whose job it is to populate the green screens with actual action - a thoroughly globalised industry, it is poorly protected by the Hollywood unions.⁴

There is no reason to suppose that AI should not be a *tool* of writers or even actors (although, given the absurdly prissy guardrails that afflict the mass market tools,⁵ probably more specialised ones will be more useful here). In any case, there is nothing *fundamentally* more dystopian about the use of these tools than, say, using the I-Ching or Oblique Strategies and other generative methods, as Philip K Dick, John Cage and many others have profitably done in the past. The important matter - as it is in all labour disputes, at the end of the day, even those bizarrely involving

millionaire celebrity 'workers' alongside starving extras - is who is in charge. The captains of this industry have film in a death-grip, and we wish them a humiliating defeat.

Victory?

The question therefore remains: in this pair of disputes, who *is* winning?

In the actors' and writers' favour, between the two - so long as discipline is maintained - production in the conventional centres of film and TV is pretty well shut down. Whether or not AI *can* replace actors or writers in the production of a certain sort of mechanically extruded cultural slop, the replacement has not yet happened. Even the best AI-generated scripts require a *lot* of punching up, even to make sense. An AI-generated model may look good in a crowd, but not in a tearful close-up. (Even video games are extensively reliant on motion capture to have any kind of immersive effect.) It was no surprise to see significant dips in the share prices of major media corporations on July 14 (Disney's stock ticker almost exactly tracks the state of negotiations with SAG-AFTRA after the last month).

That said, it is the nature of the industry that there are long lead times. Strikes now will cause a dearth of content in two years. Corporations optimised for churning out cheap, predictable, thoughtless crap have ways to cushion these sorts of shortages. And, in any case, as we have seen, the industry is increasingly happy with endless exploitation of its existing products.

Given the clear intention on the part of the industry to break the power of these two unions, they have every interest in playing for keeps. Yet it is worth issuing a challenge of a sort: onward to victory, yes, but victory *for what?* To be blunt, it seems perfectly plausible to me that the assembly of moronic Marvel movies and worthless Netflix 'content' *really is* better left to computers, once they get the hang of it. (It is precisely this that marks it out as moronic and worthless.)

The victory of artists over misnamed 'producers' impliedly points to a whole different political economy of the arts as a whole. But that in turn points beyond the limits of 'pure' trade unionism, never mind the peculiar craft unions working above the line in Hollywood - to a true mass, working class movement, with its own embryonic political economy and cultural apparatuses, which can fight for artistic freedom from the rule of shareholders and accountants; for an end to IP (intellectual property), which does basically nothing to help artists and creatives, though they are often deceived on this point; and ultimately for far wider involvement in the arts, broadly conceived, than capitalism permits ●

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Notes

1. jacobin.com/2023/06/actors-sag-aftra-auditions-are-work-pay-labor-union-contract.
2. www.theverge.com/2023/7/13/23794224/sag-aftra-actors-strike-ai-image-rights.
3. slovobooks.wordpress.com/2014/01/09/last-alan-moore-interview.
4. gizmodo.com/disney-marvel-movies-vfx-industry-nightmare-1849385834.
5. Author Kat Rosenfield's attempt to brainstorm a fictional murder with ChatGPT is an amusing case in point: twitter.com/katrosenfield/status/1672969824656322561. (DALL-E 2 also refuses to render my Donald Trump scenario above, which is a pity.)

LABOUR

Doing deals with Sir Keir

Is building a Labour Party mark two a viable strategy? Kevin Bean of Labour Party Marxists looks at the Unite policy conference and beyond

The various responses to the proposal at Unite's policy conference held in Liverpool to disaffiliate from the Labour Party were almost a perfect illustration of the thoroughly confused and incoherent politics of what now passes for much of the left in Britain.

The motion, proposed by supporters of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, called for the union to sever its links with Labour and give its support instead to parties and candidates committed to the interests of the working class. SPEW's disaffiliation call is linked to its project to build a new workers' party through the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. Temporarily put on ice during the brief Corbyn years, it has been brought back to 'life' under SPEW's general secretary, Hannah Sell. However, not only do the election results continue to be abysmal (two percent here, one percent there) - that for sub-reformist politics - Tusc has even managed to lose the only jewel in its tawdry crown. Mick Lynch decided he had had enough and RMT walked.

Although SPEW's call for disaffiliation was 'overwhelmingly defeated' at Unite's conference, its arguments about the nature of the Labour Party and its call for a "new workers' party" represent the current common sense of the odds and ends, the flotsam, the jetsam - especially amongst former Labour members and the remnants of the Corbyn movement. This common sense has produced myriad initiatives, campaigns and putative networks, which in their many and various ways all agree that Labour under Starmer has finally crossed over the line to become an explicitly bourgeois and anti-working class party. For many of these projects winning the trade unions away from Labour and thus gaining an instant mass base is the key element in their strategy to build an alternative working class party.

Sharon Graham

How realistic is this scenario in the immediate future? Let us start with the debate in Unite and the response of the union's leadership. Remember how Sharon Graham had campaigned to become general secretary by claiming that she was going to turn away from the politicking in the Westminster bubble that allegedly characterised Len McCluskey's leadership and instead use the power of the union to focus on shop-floor concerns? She certainly won some left support for that 'non-political' stance and for her supposed concentration on the economic interests of the membership. Likewise, Unite's 2021 decision to reduce its affiliation fee to Labour as a sign of its disapproval of Starmer's leadership was welcomed as a sign that under Graham the union was moving to the left and becoming more militant.

Since then, she has continued with this left rhetoric and claims that under her leadership the union has secured a whole series of gains for its members during the current strike wave. At best, these deals have merely allowed the better organised sections of the union to keep pace with inflation, while for many these 'victories' have in reality been illusory and have actually seen below-inflation 'increases'. Given this record and her easily acquired reputation for militancy, Graham's



Sir Keir has moved from Pabloism to prime ministerialism via Corbynism

reaction to the calls for disaffiliation is all the more revealing about the real nature of trade union leaders, not matter how left they claim to be.

Sister Graham not only opposed the demand for disaffiliation, but apparently reversed her previous non-political position and instead made demands on the Labour leadership. She put "Keir Starmer on notice" and said that Unite's support was not a blank cheque and could not be taken for granted.¹ Labour needs to deliver for working people and "talk about what they can do for Britain". Drawing on a favourite refrain of eulogising the Attlee government, Graham argued that Labour needs to "be as bold" as in 1945, and "give people something to vote for". Her key demands were that "key industries like energy and steel should be taken into public hands", adding that Unite would throw union officials and resources into a campaign in marginal seats for these policies, alongside greater involvement by Unite members in the Labour Party at all levels.² All a very long way from her previous 'syndicalist' position of ignoring Labour and concentrating on the "concerns of her members".

Transactional

This supposed change of heart is easily explained. As the general election approaches and the possibility of a Starmer government becomes more likely, the organised working class is turning its attention towards politics and the policies of Labour. Starmer's triangulation strategy aimed at the 'centre ground', his conscious dampening down of expectations of even modest reforms, along with his explicit commitment to the wider interests of British capitalism and the American hegemon, give no grounds for optimism about the future for the working class.

His will be the most rightwing and pro-capitalist Labour government ever, exceeding in its loyalty to the existing economic and constitutional order even that of his mentor, Tony Blair.³ While the real partisans of genuine working class politics can have no illusions in what a Starmer government will mean, trade union

leaders see things rather differently.

Graham's approach is transactional: that is, she sees her function as securing the 'best deal' for her members and furthering the interests of the labour bureaucracy, not least Unite's layer of full-time officials. Trade union leaders, if they act as trade union leaders, not under communist discipline, are merchants in the labour-power of their members, striking deals with capitalists about the price of that commodity. Even the most militant leaderships, while they confine themselves to bargaining within the framework of the economic status quo, are not campaigning against the nature of capitalist exploitation, but seeking to mitigate its effects and gain some (temporary) improvements and concessions. However, even from the earliest period of general unionism in the 19th century, the organised working class went beyond purely industrial forms of struggle and attempted to secure gains through political action and legislation. The formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 was itself a product of this dynamic and a recognition of the limitations of 'pure trade unionism'.

Thus, both the needs of the working class under capitalism and the self-interests of the labour bureaucracy will drive trade unions to adopt basic political positions and so intervene politically to secure them. However, this approach still remains transactional, although in a *political* rather than in an industrial sense. As Graham explained during the Unite conference,

This is the moment of maximum leverage for the union, where we can hold Labour to account ... Now cannot be the time to walk away. We would be weakening our own arm. It would be the worst time to leave the Labour Party when they are in touching distance of power. If we leave we wouldn't influence that power.⁴

So, while calls for 'bolder policies' from Labour do represent something of a new orientation towards high politics, this strategy is still one of applying pressure to gain some

limited concessions rather than challenging the capitalist political and economic order. Although the climate and balance of forces has changed considerably since the 1970s, Graham's rhetoric is that of the union boss cutting a deal with politicians over the heads of the membership, not a militant fighter seeking to mobilise the working class.

Trade unions

Marxists should not, of course, be surprised by any of this. Neither should they misinterpret Starmer's distancing of Labour from the trade unions: like Blair, his triangulation and electoral strategy requires it, as does Sir Keir's desire to constantly prove his unquestioning loyalty to capitalism. Graham's futile posturing and threats to apply "maximum leverage" are grist to Starmer's mill and, as with the child benefit cap and the bedroom tax policy, give him yet another opportunity to demonstrate just how far his Labour Party has come from the 'horrors' of the Corbyn period.

If the conference vote and Graham's defence of the link with Labour shows the umbilical cord between the trade union leadership and Labour politicians - and the essential Labourist politics of even the left of the union tops - it also points up another important feature of the workers' movement in Britain. As it stands, Labour remains a bourgeois workers' party, although Sir Keir's well-documented dalliance with rich business donors and liaisons with lobbyists certainly strengthen the pro-capitalist elements at the top of the party and pose the question of the de-labourisation of Labour. The coming election will be more of an unpopularity contest based on anti-Tory feeling than anything like a positive endorsement of Labour: expectations are low amongst both the organised working class and the electorate as a whole, with many being disillusioned even before Starmer enters No10.

Given the Tory policies that the next Labour government will attempt to maintain, calls for an alternative to Labour and initiatives to build a new workers' party will

grow in intensity from the off. Many of these initiatives will focus on using the existing Labour Party as an organisational and political model: that is, a broad workers' party, based on the trade unions, which will essentially be a Labour Party mark two - albeit one to the left of the current party.

However, Graham's intervention shows that even the left trade union leaders see no viable option for their politics and their interests outside of Labour, although it cannot be ruled out that strong currents of opposition could emerge, both within the unions and beyond, that could put pressure on these leaders and result in disaffiliation and the creation of some new formation in the future. But, unless this new organisation was committed to a Marxist programme, it would remain in essence Labourist, and so firmly rooted in capitalism and the existing constitutional order.

Broad parties simply based on opposition to the worst excesses of capitalism and basing themselves on the existing political and trade union consciousness will only reproduce Labourism in form and content, no matter how militant the rhetoric. Marxists (along with the ruling class) have long recognised that the Labour Party and Labourism remain a major barrier to developing a revolutionary socialist consciousness. The experience of Dave Nellist's Tusc and the countless other initiatives that have been undertaken since the 1990s show the futility of attempting to construct a Labour Party mark two when the Labour Party mark one still exists.

This is not an argument for accepting the dominance of Labourism within the workers' movement and simply adapting to it, or of working slowly to transform Labour from within. Rather it is an argument for not abandoning the Labour Party and the unions to the pro-capitalists, but instead fighting, if we can, to drive them and their politics out of the labour movement and transforming Labour into a united front of a special kind - without bans and proscriptions, and open to all socialist tendencies and working class organisations.

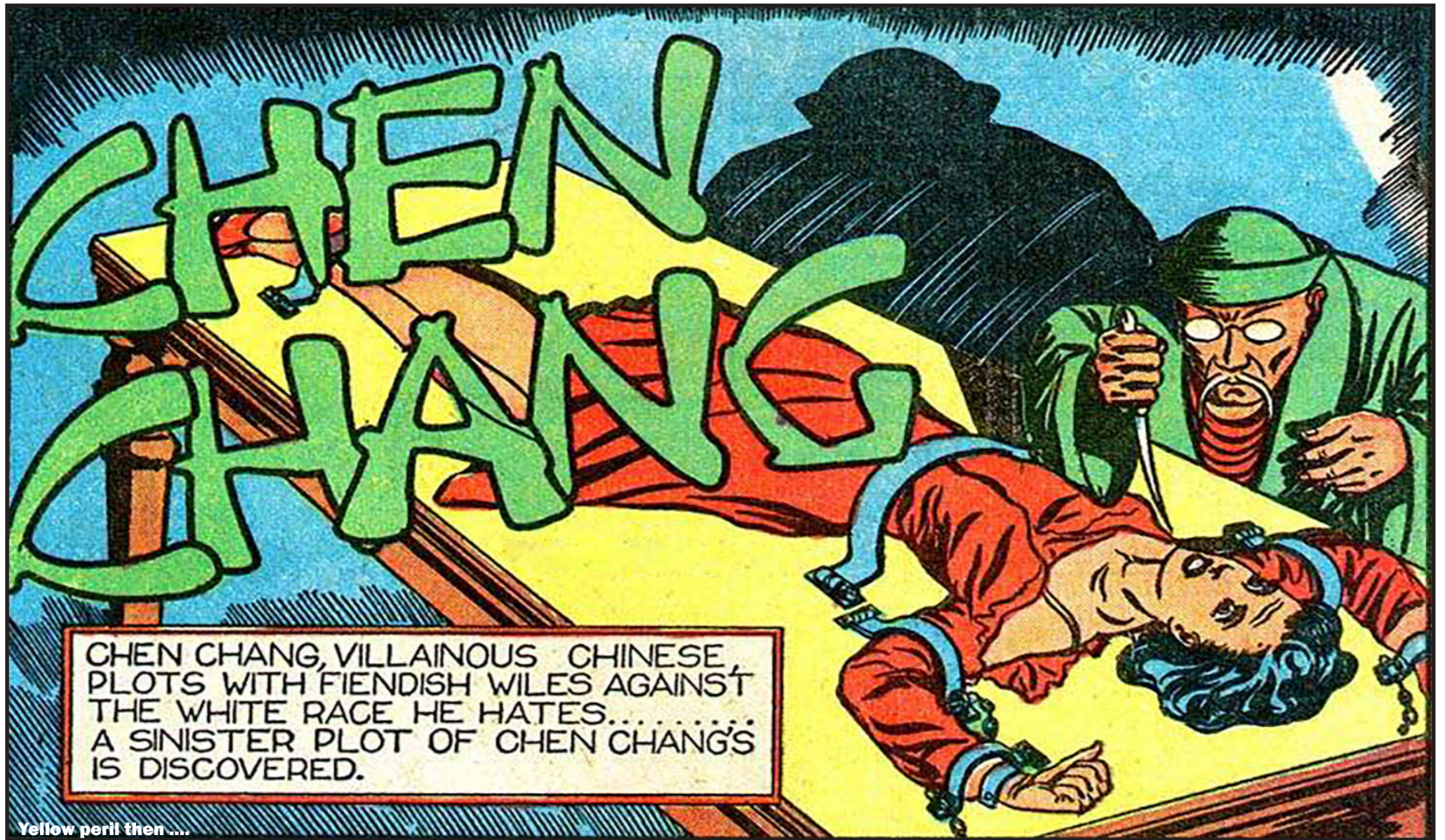
Socialist Appeal

But, with or without success in the Labour Party - a very remote possibility at this particular point in time - what is key is a mass Communist Party, not a confessional sect such as Alan Woods' Socialist Appeal, repackaging itself in the attempt to recruit student radicals. One day they were dull-as-ditchwater clause-four socialists: the next day they reappear as so-called communists. 'So-called' because they refuse to unite with, debate or even talk to other communists - certainly not real communists. That is cynical marketing, not principled Marxism. Obviously, the working class requires something far more serious, far more worthwhile ●

Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jul/10/starmer-put-on-notice-by-unite-leader-after-vote-to-retain-ties-with-labour.
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CHINA



Cross-party yellow peril

Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee has produced a lurid account of the challenge represented by China. **Mike Macnair** argues that the UK is playing catch-up with the US hegemon

In 1903, 120 years ago, Erskine Childers' best-selling *The riddle of the sands* was published. The book told a story of holiday-making British yachtsmen uncovering a secret German plot to invade Britain across the North Sea, using a fleet of tugs and barges based in the East Frisian Islands. The plot is fantastical: Germany invading Britain with tug-drawn barges across 370 miles of the North Sea is a lot less militarily plausible than the unworkable 1940 plan, 'Operation Sea Lion' (to have been launched from Normandy); or than the 'French invasion scare' of 1859-60; or William Le Queux's 1894 French invasion book, *The great war in England in 1897*.

Nonetheless, *The riddle of the sands* dramatised for the British public the 'German threat' to Britain. This threat was actually *not* a threat of German invasion of Britain, but rather of German competition in arms markets and capital goods markets, and in geopolitics for influence in Latin America and the Ottoman empire, as well as for colonial possessions in Africa and China - reflected also in German naval expansion. And reflected, too, in unwelcome 'interference' like supplying arms and partial diplomatic backing to the Transvaal and Orange Free State before their conquest by the British 1899-1902 South African War (in which Childers fought). The 'German threat', as dramatised by Childers' novel, supported political backing for British arms-budget expansion and for the reversal of British alliances, symbolised by the 1904 Entente Cordiale with France. The book was thus a landmark on the road to 1914.

In the 21st century there are too many thrillers and alternate-history

fantasies out there for the *open* production of fiction to have this sort of political influence. The fantasies produced to cover real commercial and geopolitical motives instead take the form of official announcements and 'intelligence reports', like the case made in 2002-03 for the Iraqi Ba'athist regime's 'weapons of mass destruction' (WMD) or the story of 'Russian interference' in the 2016 US presidential elections.

China report

The latest fantasy of this type is the report on China by parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee - a joint committee of nine members of both houses, though some have changed during the production of the report: actually listed are 11 MPs (six Tory, three Labour, two Scottish National Party) plus one peer - former 'First Sea Lord' Lord West of Spithead. The report was laid before parliament on July 13.¹ The government promptly responded, with prime minister Rishi Sunak issuing a written statement about what the government is doing about the 'China threat' on the same day.²

The ISC would be a classic case of 'regulatory capture', but for the fact that it is plainly *designed* to give the *appearance* of regulatory oversight, while in fact being controlled by insiders. Its members have to be 'cleared' to see classified information, and eight out of the 12 are either former military or security, or have held ministerial or shadow responsibilities in these fields. The exceptions are the two SNP MPs, Diana Johnson (a shadow junior minister shadowing the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 2016, resigning in the coup attempt against Corbyn that year, and vice-chair

of Labour Friends of Israel) and Jeremy Wright, who as attorney-general in 2014-18 will also have been security-cleared. The effect is not political oversight over the security apparatus, but a parliamentary lobby group for the security apparatus pressing for increased legal powers and increased resources for this sub-group of the state bureaucracy.

The report they have published is massively redacted, sometimes in places where it seems a real stretch for whatever is omitted to be classified. Readers are, in effect, asked to give *personal trust* to the members of the ISC, on the basis that we are not allowed to know what the actual grounds of their opinions are. If these are anything like the Iraq WMD dossier or the 'Russian interference in the US elections' story, when they are finally released they will turn out to be unsupported speculations and products of superficial web-browsing.

A Chinese invasion of Britain is a lot less easy to imagine than a French or German invasion in the late 19th or early 20th century, or even a Soviet invasion in the cold war period. In Frederik Pohl's humorous *Black star rising* (1985), the late 21st century former USA is ruled by a still-Maoist China, when space aliens arrive. In David Wingrove's dark (and sprawling) 1988-99 *Chung Kuo* series (an even longer rewrite has been in progress since 2017) a Han-derived culture rules a 200-year future world. In both cases Chinese rule is *preceded* by internally driven 'western' collapse. The same is reportedly true of Song Han's 2066: *red star over America* (2000), which is untranslated.³

In place of an invasion fantasy, we get a subversion fantasy. This has a superficial appearance somewhat similar to cold war subversion fantasies;⁴ but the underlying geopolitics is profoundly different. We are headed not for a 25-year period of 'containment', with only in the long term a new turn to 'roll-back' à la Carter and Reagan (and since). The US agenda - once the proxy war of conquest of Russia has issued in a 'colour revolution' and a new Yeltsin, and Russia has been disarmed, de-industrialised and Balkanised - is an analogous war of conquest leading to China being partitioned, disarmed and de-industrialised. This may imply a new 1914 (but this time with nukes); in any case, not a new cold war.

The report tells us that China threatens us with *economic* power and political influence. Thus:

China is engaged in a battle for technological supremacy with the west - one which it appears to be winning. China's 'Made in China 2025' strategy is an initiative designed to help China become a manufacturing superpower through investing in, and then leveraging, foreign industries and foreign industry expertise in order to help China master complex design and manufacturing processes more quickly. China targets other countries' technology, Intellectual Property (IP) and data in order to "bypass costly and time-consuming research, development and training". This approach means it can exploit foreign expertise, gaining economic and technological advantages and thereby

achieving prosperity and growth more quickly - and at the expense of others (p21).

And:

China's ruthless targeting is not just economic: it is similarly aggressive in its interference activities, which it operates to advance its own interests, values and narrative at the expense of those of the west. While seeking to exert influence is a legitimate course of action, China oversteps the boundary, and crosses the line into interference in the pursuit of its interests and values at the expense of those of the UK (p3).

So 'influence' crosses into 'interference' when it is "at the expense of" the "interests and values" of the UK.

What are these "interests and values"? Evidence to the committee from one of the bits of the 'security community' identifies these:

If you think of UK interests as being in favour of good governance and transparency and good economic management, which I think is fair, we regard those as things which are good in their own right, but also serve our national interest, because it helps with trade, investment, prosperity and stability and so forth, then I think that China represents a risk on a pretty wide scale (p15).

The claim that the UK has an interest in "good governance" is pretty laughable after the last few years of the chaotic Conservative administration. The claim that it has an interest in "transparency"

is equally indefensible, in the light of the role of the City of London as organiser of the world's main network of offshore operations, the continued use of dodgy interlocutory injunctions on privacy and commercial confidentiality grounds, and so on. "Good economic management," coming from a UK government agency, plainly means no more than primacy of the financial sector and compliance with International Monetary Fund 'restructuring' programmes, up to and including Yeltsin-style de-industrialisation.

China allegedly threatens these "interests and values", according to the report, firstly, because

China wants to be a technological and economic superpower, with other countries reliant on its goodwill - that is its primary measure of sovereign success. MI5 observed:

*** [redacted text] it is going after IP [Intellectual Property], it is building itself as a power, it is positioning China in the world at the top of the tree (p11).

Secondly, it is doing so because "China is building global military capabilities to rival the US by 2049" (p12).

What this amounts to is a claim that China is a threat to the UK if it does not accept a fully-subordinate position in the world order. I have written about this issue before, in relation to the US government's conceptions of grand strategy. The ISC report transposes into "UK interests" what are, in reality, US interests in preventing the emergence of a 'peer rival'.⁵

The report goes on to provide an analysis of *how* China 'interferes' against UK interests:

In terms of cultivating influence, [the government] told us that the [Chinese intelligence services] use the following methods:

- covert support for foreign political parties;
- covert funding and support of groups favourable to the [Chinese Communist Party];
- using trade negotiations or investment activities as a platform to influence key decision-makers through bribery and corruption;
- co-opting academics, think-tank employees, former officials and former military figures;
- using cultural and friendship institutions to access key thinkers and decision-makers;
- obtaining and releasing materials to discredit individuals opposed to China's views;
- funding of universities, both to influence research direction towards Chinese priorities and to gain access to prominent individuals through philanthropy; and
- covert media manipulation to undermine support for policies and views deemed harmful to China (p20).

These are, of course, merely the methods which the CIA and other 'western' security apparatuses routinely use in 'third world' countries and have, indeed, also used in Europe. The problem is that we do not want such methods used against us (except by the USA ...!).

Case studies

Within its general framework, the second half of the ISC report provides us with a series of 'case studies'. Universities (pp103-21) are claimed to be 'soft targets', needing considerable 'toughening' - not only by section 9 the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act, which is targeted against China (universities

may not permit overseas funders to limit freedom of speech, but the minister may exempt, for example, US funders), but also by substantial expansions of security service control over collaborative research projects which *might* have military uses or *might* involve the UK losing technological advantages, and by positive vetting of researchers.

A similar "Case study: industry and technology" (pp123-49) is considerably vaguer. But the general issues are helpfully discussed:

The Communist Party of China (CCP) deems both economic well-being and technological advancement as essential to its national security and maintaining power, and to mitigate perceived threats from the west ... China's overall aims are to gain technological parity with the west, and eventually to surpass them, in a process it identifies as 'national rejuvenation' (quote from government evidence, p123); and

Success will enable China to project its economic, military and political power globally, as steam and computing did for Britain and the US respectively in the 19th and 20th centuries (quote from National Cyber-Security Centre evidence, p123); and

As an advanced and open economy, the UK is a clear target for China. The UK has a reputation for being open to foreign investment, and China invests in the UK more than in any other European state. Foreign direct investment [FDI] into the UK from China between 2000 and 2017 was approximately £37 billion (with the next largest recipient of Chinese investment being Germany, at £18 billion) (p125).

Chinese FDI in the UK may be merely a means of acquiring technical advantages (pp129-30). And - shock, horror! - the Chinese are engaged in pursuing their state interests through diplomacy in international standards-setting bodies (pp132-33), so that

Without swift and decisive action, we are on a trajectory for the nightmare scenario where China steals blueprints, sets standards and builds products, exerting political and economic influence at every step. Such prevalence in every part of the supply chain will mean that, in the export of its goods or services, China will have a pliable vehicle through which it can also export its values. This presents a serious commercial challenge, but also has the potential to pose an existential threat to liberal democratic systems (p134).

A similar analysis is applied to the special case of Chinese willingness to build nuclear reactors for the UK, with the additional fear that this allows the Chinese to obtain control of 'critical infrastructure' (pp151-80). All this stuff is no more than fairly naked protectionism in the style of Joe Chamberlain and his followers in the late 19th to early 20th century.

The last section of the report is an 'Annex' on "Covid-19" (pp181-91). This merely recycles the combination of real information about the Chinese government's initial attempts to cover up the bad news about the outbreak with the various free-floating speculation about the virus possibly being a laboratory product; so it is just a form of dog-whistle China-phobia production.

A constantly recurring theme of the report is Chinese "theft" of "intellectual property". I have written

about this issue at length in the past,⁶ and do not propose to repeat much of what I have said there. "Intellectual property rights" are merely statutory monopolies. The point was elaborately made from a leftwing point of view in Michael Perelman's 2002 book *Steal this idea*, which I reviewed in 2003; and from a rightwing free-market point of view in N Stephan Kinsella's 2001 article, 'Against intellectual property',⁷ and Michele Boldrin's 2010 book, *Against intellectual monopoly*.

As several authors have pointed out, the USA in the period of its industrial *rise* took the same attitude to "intellectual property" that the Chinese have more recently. It is with the US's move into relative *decline* in productive industry that increased dependence on "technical rents" has carried with it an increasingly ferocious promotion of "intellectual property". The UK is in a much more advanced state of decline than the US, so that it is unsurprising that the ISC should be so heavily concerned to protect anti-competitive *rentier* interests. Indeed, the report recognises that in some respects China may be ahead, so that "intellectual property theft" would be useless to them:

HMG cites artificial intelligence (AI) as an area where increasing Chinese dominance is causing concern, since, if China becomes the market leader, western countries might have to accept the rules and regulations that China attaches to the technology and Chinese standards on AI applications ... (p125).

Solutions

The report has an overall tone of criticising the UK government for being late to identify the Chinese 'threat' and not doing enough to address it. The solutions it proposes are partly drawn from US practice, and partly would increase the power of the securocrats. Thus

The government's lack of understanding contrasts with the approach of the US, which has already produced a national strategy on critical and emerging technologies, aimed at protecting its technological dominance, in which it lists what it considers to be its 20 priority technologies (p4).

And the report identifies serious concerns about economic decision-making and *existing* Chinese political influence:

If the government is serious about tackling the threat from China, then it needs to ensure that it has its house in order, such that security concerns are not constantly trumped by economic interest. Our predecessor committee sounded the alarm, in relation to Russia, that oligarchs are now so embedded in society that too many politicians cannot even take a decision on an investment case because they have taken money from those concerned. We know that China invests in political influence, and we question whether - with high-profile cases such as David Cameron (UK-China Fund), Sir Danny Alexander (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank), Lord Heseltine (The 48 Group Club) and HMG's former chief information officer, John Suffolk (Huawei) - a similar situation might be arising in relation to China (p4).

The UK should copy the US in requiring 'foreign agent registration' and in addition should criminalise 'economic espionage':

In evidence to this inquiry, the intelligence community told the committee that legislative change is even more necessary in relation to China. MI5 told us that "a Foreign Agent Registration [Act]-type power, which the Australians and Americans enjoy, ... [would] have proportionately more effect against ... Chinese activity". A key issue of concern is the theft of non-classified information, which can be difficult to grip because a significant amount of the activity does not currently constitute a serious criminal offence in the UK (p97).

[O]ne of the committee's key concerns was that any such legislation must introduce an effective 'economic espionage' offence - something that the UK intelligence community suggested could be an important tool in the battle against China. At present, there are no criminal offences covering economic espionage that are not specifically linked to classified research or technology. A new offence might cover companies, research collaborations, joint ventures, seed funding, venture capital and access to academics and students covertly to obtain information data and intellectual property to secure commercial advantage against the UK (p98).

There should be 'intelligence community' oversight of decisions on foreign investment in the UK through the recently created 'investment security unit', it seems. So much, then, for 'neoliberalism' and 'free market globalisation'. *State interests* require security apparatus controls on foreign investment, on universities, and so on. The Orwellian nightmare approaches, as Oceania (US-UK) needs its own state security apparatus with tentacles everywhere, in order to combat the looming threat of Eastasia (China).

Turn

The mention of David Cameron and Danny Alexander in the passage quoted above brings up another similarity between the ISC's horror-fantasy about the Chinese threat and *The riddle of the sands*: the abrupt turn in UK policy which is involved. In 1894 Le Queux was writing about the danger of *French* invasion (backed by Russia), and the Brits were saved by German aid; for Childers nine years later the danger was *German* invasion (and Le Queux was to write in 1906 a German-invasion book, *The invasion of 1910*). Back to the halcyon days (in the light of what has followed) of the Con-Dem coalition of 2010-15, and the 'China narrative' was all about the opportunities for the UK in getting closer to China.⁸

Around 1900, what was involved in the radical turn of policy was the UK as a declining world hegemon (but still a world hegemon), trying to defend its interests by swapping allies in order to 'contain' rising Germany. The Entente policy of increasingly aggressive encirclement of Germany and Austria-Hungary, which followed, resulted at the end of the day in August 1914.

But, although 1914-18 led to the destruction of the tsarist regime, the Kaiser-Reich, the Austro-Hungarian empire and the Ottoman empire, 1919-1939 showed that it had *failed* to resolve the underlying problem of the global economy, which was the declining British empire as a vampire, sucking financial tribute out of the world. It took the destruction of the UK's strategic global position, through the fall of France, the Low Countries, Denmark and Norway in 1940, to force the UK to agree in

summer 1940 to hand over world leadership to the US. Even then, the UK tried to weasel out of the deal, with Keynes's proposals at Bretton Woods in 1944, and by trying to act independently in alliance with France and Israel in Suez in 1956.

Since then, the UK has been very clearly a *vassal state* of the US. Not a colony or semi-colony: the king's or feudal lord's vassals were his military sub-tenants, not his serfs. Between 1956 and the 1990s the UK had quite significant military capability, though decreasingly practically independent of the US; it could be considered as a US attack-dog in the colonial world. In Afghanistan and Iraq the vaunted counter-insurgency capability of the British military proved to be a paper tiger, and Libya in 2011 only confirmed how limited UK military capability was. The UK has now become not a US attack-dog, but a US yap-dog: "Bark bark bark / Bark bark BARK BARK / Until you could hear them all over the park."⁹ Its role is not to provide military services, but to be the loudest voice advocating the most aggressive policy (by comparison to which the US itself can try to appear 'moderate').

It is the US's policy which has turned, with GW Bush's 2000 characterisation of China as a "strategic competitor", Obama's 2011 "pivot to Asia",¹⁰ followed by Trump's open protectionism against China, and Biden's continuation of that policy. The Cameron government was badly late grasping the turn of US policy towards China, and from 2015 distracted by Brexit. And now the ISC is playing catch-up.

Communists should not be defenders of the Chinese regime any more than social democrats should have been defenders of the kaiser regime (which was also in many respects more 'progressive' than Britain in the late 19th to early 20th century).

Equally, however, we should not fall for the horror-stories produced as part of this report and/or in the media - as, for example, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's *Solidarity* serves as an echo-chamber for the Biden administration's China policy round the Uighurs, Taiwan and so on. These horror-stories are all, like *The riddle of the sands*, drum-beats of the coming war.

We cannot be advocates both, on the one hand, of the general liberation of humanity and, on the other hand, of the right of the USA or the UK to "security" from industrial and inter-imperialist competition and from "intellectual property theft": ie, violation of monopolies ●

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NATO

Their fantasy, our nightmare

Ukraine's offensive is getting nowhere and when a compromise is eventually reached Zelensky will be in deep trouble, argues **Daniel Lazare**

Nato is on a collision course with reality - the rhetoric at last week's summit meeting soared ever higher, even as the situation on the ground turned increasingly grim. In Vilnius, the talk was about turning the Baltic into a Nato lake and extending the alliance's reach all the way to the western Pacific. A Nato communiqué declared:

We are boosting our shared awareness, enhancing our resilience and preparedness, and protecting against the [People's Republic of China's] coercive tactics and efforts to divide the alliance. We will stand up for our shared values and the rules-based international order, including freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.¹

That is, 5,000 miles away. Closer at hand, the story was different, as the Ukraine's much-ballyhooed summer offensive ground to a halt in the face of Russian drones, artillery and minefields - so densely sown that seemingly every square foot is alive with explosives. Reports from the front were bleak. Eric Schmidt, long-term head of Google and now chairman of a hi-tech Pentagon advisory board, said after a tour:

Since 2014, the Russian side has dug themselves in, in this horrific way. So if you were a Ukrainian soldier with your commander saying go across this five-kilometre disputed area, you'd have to get through the tanks, the mines, the machine guns, the drones ... it's an insurmountable task.²

Indeed, drone footage released by the Russian defence ministry last month shows wounded Ukrainian soldiers lying in the middle of a minefield, their legs (what's left of them) in tourniquets, as they await rescue. When a Bradley armoured vehicle finally arrives, a medic emerges and jumps onto a nearby patch of blackened earth that appears safe - only to trigger another explosion that blows off one of his legs and mangles the other.³

It is a nightmare that flies in the face of upbeat reports by lapdog journalists and government officials. Nato secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg was typical: "The support that we are now providing together to Ukraine is now making a difference on the battlefield as we speak," he said a couple of weeks into the campaign. "The offensive is launched, and Ukrainians are making progress, making advances."⁴

Except that they are not, due to unsustainable levels of punishment and what *The New York Times* describes as "startling" losses of heavy equipment.⁵ "What we do know is, the more land Ukrainians are able to liberate, the stronger hand they will have at the negotiating table," Stoltenberg added. If so, the outlook is discouraging, since the territory Ukraine has so far 'liberated' is nil.

So why the happy mood in Vilnius - the chest-thumping, the smiley group-photographs, the tough tone towards China? The answer is simple: rhetoric is outstripping reality. As Nato approaches its 75th anniversary, it is subsisting more and more on dreams of global domination, even as the real world goes to pot.

The New York Times marked the



Volodymyr Zelensky: Jewish president who could easily face anti-Semitic backlash

start of the summit by publishing an op-ed by a couple of *New Left Review* writers named Grey Anderson and Thomas Meany that presumably was meant to be ironic, but came across as starry-eyed and naive. Nato was never about military defence, at least not primarily, they wrote. Rather, its purpose has been to "bind western Europe to a far vaster project of a US-led world order, in which American protection served as a lever to obtain concessions on other issues, like trade and monetary policy".

Imperialism

The article continued saying the quiet part out loud:

Nato acted as a ratings agency for the European Union in eastern Europe, declaring countries secure for development and investment. The organisation pushed would-be partners to adhere to a liberal, pro-market creed, according to which - as president Bill Clinton's national security advisor put it - "the pursuit of democratic institutions, the expansion of free markets" and "the promotion of collective security" marched in lock step ... When European populations proved too stubborn, or undesirably swayed by socialist or nationalist sentiments, Atlantic integration proceeded all the same.⁶

Quite right. But what Anderson and Meany forgot to mention is that other things have proceeded as well, such as imperialist aggression - the war on Serbia, the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the misnamed war on terror, etc - plus refugees, financial crises and a misconceived war on drugs that is spreading havoc from US cities and French banlieues to vast swathes of Latin America, Africa and Asia. If such events do not flow directly from Nato, they are nevertheless in accord with the militarism it represents.

But the good times in Vilnius continued - especially once Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan dropped his opposition to Sweden joining the alliance after nearly two centuries of neutrality. CNN praised Nato's "reinvigorated sense of unity", while the Murdoch-owned *Wall Street Journal* congratulated Biden "for helping to keep the alliance together".

To be sure, Volodymyr Zelensky sounded a discordant note by complaining that Nato was not offering Ukraine a fast-track to membership. But the Americans smoothed his ruffled feathers by

explaining that Nato could not possibly admit Ukraine right away, since the alliance's famous article 5, which says that a blow to one is a blow to all, would put it on a path to war. Because that is unacceptable, the only solution is for Ukrainians to continue dying, while Nato supplies weapons that Russia continues to destroy.

As the summit was winding down, Biden told Zelensky:

I hope you all got a sense today ... how much support you have, It's real. And I hope we finally have put to bed the notion about whether or not Ukraine is welcome in Nato. It's going to happen. We're moving - you're all moving - in the right direction. I think it's just a matter of getting by the next few months here.

To which Zelensky could only reply that the meeting was a "great success" and that he was grateful for whatever Nato aid he could get.⁷

Biden also went on about the "genuine courage" of ordinary Ukrainians: "When you see a 65-year-old woman on television after her apartment has been bombed out, picking up the pieces, going to help the next-door neighbour, I mean, it's - it's just astounding." Left unmentioned, of course, was the US role in sparking such destruction by backing a neo-Nazi-led coup in Kiev in 2014 that rendered Russian intervention all but inevitable. In a move that drew remarkably little attention in the press, the Biden administration upped the ante in November 2021 by encouraging Ukraine to sign onto a reckless statement pledging to take back the Crimea.⁸

Take back a region that voted 97% in favour of unification with Russia in March 2014, following an 83% turnout? It was the equivalent of Russia and Syria pledging to take back the Golan Heights or Mexico pledging to take back Texas. Vladimir Putin's 'special military operation' that followed four months later may have been illegal, insupportable and all the rest. But unprovoked it was not, which is why the US bears responsibility for the horrors that have ensued.

Equation

Biden concluded the July 11-12 summit with an enthusiastic speech at Vilnius University filled with the usual clichés about "liberty and freedom", but which was mainly notable for the equation it drew between America's 45-year anti-Soviet crusade and its current

struggle against Russia. Lithuanian independence in 1991 was "a resurrection that quickly became a revelation". Today, he said, we have a nation which stands as "a stronghold of liberty and opportunity, a proud member of the European Union and of Nato".

Left unmentioned as well was Lithuania's first independence in June 1941, when, on the heels of Operation Barbarossa, it became a proud member of the Axis and celebrated by slaughtering thousands of Jews with such ferocity that even the Nazis were taken aback.

Biden went on:

When Putin, and his craven lust for land and power, unleashed his brutal war on Ukraine, he was betting Nato would break apart. He was betting Nato would break. He thought our unity would shatter at the first testing. He thought democratic leaders would be weak. But he thought wrong.

Perhaps - but the jury is still out. Given the dramatic gains throughout the EU by far-right nationalists who are cool to Ukraine (if not downright hostile), it is plain that patience is running out and that the appetite for a prolonged war of attrition is limited.

The political strains have already caused one country to crack, thanks to Yevgeny Prigozhin's short-lived mutiny in Russia, and it may cause others to as well. Certainly, Zelensky is vulnerable. As the military analyst, Edward Luttwak, recently noted, he is a Jew who heads a country that originated in an anti-Semitic bloodbath led by a Cossack hetman named Bohdan Khmelnytsky in the mid-17th century. Khmelnytsky was followed by Symon Petliura, another national hero, who killed tens of thousands of Jews during the Russian Civil War. He was followed by a third hero, Stepan Bandera, who killed thousands more during World War II, along with as many as 60,000 Polish peasants during an ethnic-cleansing campaign that his pro-Nazi Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists launched in the west-Ukrainian province of Volhynia.

That amounts to a lot of bloodshed by nationalists whom the US now regards as champions of democracy. Instead of "opprobrium", Luttwak notes, Khmelnytsky "has a city, a region, countless streets and Zelensky's own Presidential Guard brigade named after him. Given the nationalists' bigoted mistrust of the president, ... he cannot be seen to be a compromiser."⁹

Yet a compromiser is what he

will have to be, if he does not want to see his country destroyed. Given that the Irish Republican Army launched a civil war in 1922, when Dublin surrendered control of the Six Counties in what is now Northern Ireland, who is to say that the Azov battalion will not launch a civil war if Kyiv surrenders control of the pro-Russian provinces of Donetsk, Luhansk and the Crimea?

We have already had a taste of what might happen. In October 2019, Zelensky ran into a buzz saw of opposition when he unexpectedly descended on the front lines in Luhansk. His goal was to push for a mutual withdrawal that Ukraine had agreed to as part of the Normandy Format, but what he got instead was an argument from a local commander named Denys Yantar - a leader of a far-right Azov battalion spinoff known as the National Corps - who said he was opposed: "Listen, Denys, I'm the president of this country," Zelensky erupted. "I'm 41 years old. I'm not a loser. I came to you and told you: remove the weapons. Don't shift the conversation to some protests."

Azov battalion

After a video of the confrontation went viral, Andriy Biletsky, founder of the Azov battalion, threatened to flood the area with far-right militants: "There will be thousands there instead of several dozen." Sofia Fedyna, a rightwing member of parliament, threatened violence. "Mr President thinks he is immortal," she said, but he should be aware that "a grenade may explode there by chance".¹⁰ Protestors in Kiev predicted "riots" if Zelensky made concessions, while a "moderate" politician named Svyatoslav Vakarchuk warned: "There are clear red lines that Ukrainian society, and especially the active part of Ukrainian society, is not willing to cross and not willing to let anybody cross, including the leaders of the country and the president."

So Zelensky's bluff was called. Hemmed in on all sides, he had no choice but to go along with it, when the US pushed for a more confrontational stance once Biden took office.

As a result, he is trapped - unable to make concessions due to rightwing pressure, but unable *not* to make concessions, now that the offensive is running aground. If he tries to stand firm, the result will be a deepening deadlock at the front, along with growing instability in Kiev.

This does not bode well for his survival or for that of Ukraine. As for Nato, it is riding high for the moment, but its bubble is about to burst ●

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FRANCE

No call for staying calm

Paul Russell looks back at the disgusting record of police savagery and gives his take on the challenges faced by the left in the next presidential election

In 2002, president Nicolas Sarkozy abolished neighbourhood police patrols, announcing that the police would from now on be a law-and-order force alone. Following this, subsequent government rulings simply increased police powers - notably Emmanuel Macron's 2017 legislation authorising police use of firearms against anyone refusing a gendarme's order to stop. Since then - uniquely in Europe - 13 youngsters have been killed by police firearms, including three so far this year.

Following the police killing of 17-year-old Nahel M on June 27, sparking a series of riots across the country, the main police union declared: "Today we are at war against vermin." Presumably Nahel M was one of those "vermin" who needed to be eliminated - as he was by an officer shooting at point-blank range. An online 'Go fund me' initiative raised a million and a half euros for the officer's defence and would have raised more, had not an embarrassed government stepped in to stop further contributions. Meanwhile, a fund for Nahel's family lingers at the lower end of a few hundred thousand euros.

Vichy France

This is the latest in a long list of appalling actions carried out by French police, who do not have a distinguished record, to put it mildly. For example, back in July 1942, Paris police rounded up some 13,000 Jews, including 4,000 children. They were imprisoned in the Vel d'Hiv stadium in the suburb of Drancy. Packed together in totally unsanitary conditions and with little food or water, they were then dispatched by cattle truck to German extermination camps. The police initiative was an enthusiastic response to the request from the government of Vichy France to the capital's police: demonstrate clearly to the German administration that Vichy was perfectly capable of carrying out such brutalities on its own.

Not until the middle of August 1944 did the Paris police react to the imminent liberation of the capital by going on strike, along with postal, railway and metro workers. Workers on the railways, unlike the police, had been active in resistance networks throughout the occupation - and at great cost. Given that the police had bided their time until the last moment, when leading elements of the French Second Armoured Division had penetrated the suburbs, this was a measure of their pusillanimity during the occupation.

Senior police commander Maurice Papon avoided trial for collaboration and the expulsion of Jews to Nazi Germany. Quite the opposite - he even received the Legion of Honour! Then in the 1950s, as the Algerian crisis deepened, Papon was dispatched there to oversee - and to participate personally in - the interrogation and torture of Algerians suspected of belonging to the National Liberation Front. Back in Paris in 1961, Papon coordinated the repression during the Paris massacre: a peaceful march of pro-independence Algerians confronted by a police attack, which resulted in many deaths - possibly 200 (police files are still closed). Algerians were beaten to death or thrown into the Seine. The following day, Papon announced that perhaps three Algerians had died. Thousands



Riots are not a sign of strength, but desperation

were rounded up - and not just Algerians, but Spanish, Portuguese, Moroccans, along with anyone of the wrong colour. They were imprisoned in makeshift camps ... also in the Vel d'Hiv!

But back to the reaction to Nahel's death. Violence erupted in his suburb of Nanterre, with similar actions occurring in some of the larger cities across the country. Disaffected and marginalised youth - two thirds of whom were under the age of 18, according to some reports - staged an urban revolt, attacking vehicles, shops, schools, libraries, town halls. In one case, they even ramrodded the home of a mayor. Agitators attempted - sometimes succeeding - to set fire to these buildings. Their weapons included Molotov cocktails. Several hundred police suffered injuries and responded with tear gas and water cannon, drones, helicopters and armoured vehicles. Three thousand demonstrators were arrested.

No doubt the state was taken by surprise, but it has been there before - notably during the *gilets jaunes* ('yellow vest') protests that erupted across France in 2019. That was a more rural affair, with agricultural workers joining smallholders and shop owners from provincial towns to protest against the increased cost of living, together with the steady degradation of transport links and social infrastructure. The movement extended nationally, with the blocking of major roads and entrances to towns.

The main enemy was Macron's government, with the police a close second. When the protestors surfaced in Paris, they were joined by the *bloc noir* ('black bloc'), an amorphous group of anarchists who rampaged along the Champs Élysées, smashing vitrines - especially those belonging to banks and larger corporations.

There is an evolving situation that is French only insofar as these events

have occurred in that country - even if France has an issue with race and Muslims in particular, given its self-image as a secular, egalitarian society.

Left response

At heart, this is a problem of neoliberalism and endless years of austerity. It is the problem of a breakdown in the state's ability to control the agenda, to find sufficient numbers who identify positively with it. The right has been calling for French society to re-impose a hierarchy, though without explaining how this is to be achieved and despite the evergreen French monarchists lamenting the loss of male authority, by blaming the French Revolution for having guillotined France's premier father, Louis XVI, in 1793.

Two important factors - the nation-state and working class solidarity - have been fractured by a market which promotes individual autonomy. In France, as in other countries, a rising pushback is occurring in the trade unions, even if the traditionally larger and more militant trade union, the CGT, has lost ground to the more moderate CFDT. Which leaves the political scene and its leftwing parties - notably the Nouvelle Union Populaire, Écologique et Sociale alliance - to bear the brunt of rightwing attacks and the burden of replying in kind.

Under Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Nupes - and especially his France Insoumise ('France In Rebellion') - refused to 'call for calm' in the national assembly during the uprising. It did not call for violent action either, but its refusal to condemn the young rioters incurred the wrath of the centre-right and right in the assembly. Until 2005, FI had distanced itself from ethno-religious disputes - notably French Muslims, and their grievances. However, in 2005, after two youngsters from a

disaffected suburb were shot and killed by the police, Mélenchon began to shift his priorities. Over the next few years, FI members worked in the suburbs. There is now an implantation of several thousand militants.

In his public pronouncements, Mélenchon repeats over and over again that the problem is not the young rioters, but the government's unwillingness to reign in the police, because, he says, it is afraid of them. Yet there are obvious cracks in Nupes, which need to be addressed in a principled way.

Two of the four political parties, the Greens and the Socialists, have publicly demurred at Mélenchon's uncompromising stand. But, while the Parti Socialiste remains committed to Nupes, the Greens are already planning to fight next year's European elections separately, partly because the Greens have always done well in European elections. Mélenchon will have to work hard to ensure that any independent French Green MEPs remain aligned ('in principle') with the Nupes programme.

Right awaiting

Meanwhile, a faction within the PS, as well as the Parti Communiste Français, are also yearning to break their links with Nupes. But, given their recent mauling and collapse at the ballot box, they do not dare do it - for now. Fittingly, on July 1, attending a PS gathering in Lyon with the hopeful title, 'Arise Socialists', Olivier Faure, the party's first secretary, responded to hostile questioning from the minority members who want a clean break with Nupes. Faure conceded that Mélenchon's intransigent pronouncements did not sit well with the PS. And yet Faure took pains to steer clear of former PS member and former PS prime minister,

Bernard Cazenove, who is now busy promoting his "social democratic, republican, humanist and ecological PS" - along with former PS president, François Hollande.

Even an FI deputy, speaking off the record, said of her party leader:

Of course Mélenchon is still strong, but there is creeping fatigue. His old leftie stance is painful to watch. On the matter of pension-age reform, everyone was against it, so why did we end up quarrelling with all the other parties? With the Nanterre kid, it's the same - we emerge angry with everyone.

Waiting in the wings is Marine Le Pen and her far-right Rassemblement Nationale. If an opinion poll published in the daily *Le Figaro* is to be believed, she emerged with the most satisfactory public approval (39%) of her response to the Nahel affair - basically to stay silent! Mélenchon is at the bottom, with 20% approval. Le Pen never tires of pronouncing that the RN is the official opposition, though her party is smaller than Nupes. Le Pen's point, which she wants the electorate to understand, is that hers is a single party, unlike Nupes, and it acts as a government-in-waiting.

Other rightwing parties - notably Eric Zemmour's Reconquête! ('Reconquest!') whose vice-president is Marine Le Pen's niece, Marion Maréchal - may stand against the RN for the presidency in the next elections three years hence, but, upon losing in the first round, Zemmour and co will back the RN in the second, if Le Pen is the run-off candidate.

But candidate against whom? Macron will have terminated his uninspiring two terms, having shattered the illusion that he is the 'Little Prince'. No-one from the mediocre bunch of his party appointees looks likely to replace him as a presidential candidate. The traditional right, Les Républicains, might see their fortunes revive, which would give Le Pen some worries.

However, in a scenario where Le Pen is faced off against Mélenchon, while she can count on the right to back her, Nupes will need every left vote it can muster. Lutte Ouvrière ('Workers' Struggle'), the persistently present Trotskyist party, has a habit of contesting the presidency in its own name and has chosen not to join Nupes. In the first round of the last election, when Mélenchon came just behind Le Pen, who qualified as the run-off candidate against Macron, he expressed frustration at the lack of votes from LO and other far left *groupuscules*, extending to LO's refusing to ask its members to back LFI candidates in the subsequent parliamentary elections, which follow the presidentials by a month.

Nupes is a left-reformist alliance, even if its leader and his FI group within it are much more 'left' than 'reformist'. But Marxists are faced with the dilemma, common to all bourgeois parliamentary systems (where similar parties in Greece and in Spain have come to grief), that it is very difficult to envisage a formula that would allow Mélenchon to proclaim a revolutionary programme; to get elected on it; and to carry it out.

Still, that is the hope and Marxists are nothing if not hopeful ●

CRITIQUE



Hillel Ticktin: big influence on CPGB

Fifty years of socialist theory

Yassamine Mather looks at the role of the journal founded by Hillel Ticktin in 1973

Last month *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory* celebrated its 50th anniversary at a conference held online and at the London School of Economics. Hillel Ticktin, who founded the journal, and Mick Cox, who has been deputy editor for most of this time, reminded us of the early years. They both talked of the journal's historic links with Glasgow University, where we all met.

The first issue of *Critique* - advertised as "A new journal of Soviet studies and socialist theory" in 1973 - had a number of articles that determined its future. These included Hillel Ticktin's 'Towards the political economy of the USSR', Jiri Pelikan's 'Workers' councils in Czechoslovakia', David H Rubin on Godelier's Marxism, 'Historiography of the Russian Revolution in the 20s', by James White, Tamara Deutscher's review of Viktor Serge's *Year one of the*

revolution and another book review by Mick Cox.

As Hillel explained, "The views that *Critique* was putting forward and still puts forward were quite different from the rest of the left." Here in Britain, in addition to the standard pro-Soviet and Maoist anti-USSR positions, as far as the Trotskyist left was concerned, two views of the Soviet Union dominated: Tony Cliff's position that the Soviet Union under Stalin and his successors had undergone a process of bureaucratic degeneration, where a ruling elite had usurped power from the working class and established a state-capitalist system; and the more standard, Trotskyist view that the USSR was a "deformed workers' state", based on what Leon Trotsky had said in the late 1930s. This latter, softer analysis of the Soviet Union was often used (and is still used) to justify some of the most bizarre positions of the

USSR at the time - and ironically it is used today to justify Putin and Russia (presented as legitimate successors of the Soviet Union).

We had some of the first editions of *Critique* available at the LSE and digital versions of all of them are available on the Taylor and Francis website.¹

It is difficult to separate *Critique's* history from Hillel's background and biography. He was born in a family of eastern European immigrants in South Africa, became a Trotskyist activist and was forced to emigrate from the country because of his political activities - he often talks of the bravery of black South Africans who helped him avoid imprisonment. He first came to Britain and then lived and studied in the Soviet Union, where his PhD thesis, which was critical of 'official' communist parties, was rejected.

Ticktin's experience in Moscow and later Kyiv were negative. In his own words:

In Kyiv, I studied Russian, and then I went to write my thesis comparing the racial discrimination in South Africa and in the south of the United States. I was put in the Moscow University's department of political economy - in other words, the main Marxist theoretical department of the Soviet Union. They knew very well that they were not teaching Marxism really, but they realised they could not go beyond where they were. The department had tried to move the theory somewhat, but it was a specific way to interpret Marxism so that it justifies the Soviet Union. I had a supervisor who did not actually supervise me. He warned me that if I wrote anything critical of the Soviet Union, past or present, he would ignore me. And he ignored me.²

It was later in Britain that Ticktin worked on the political economy of the USSR, and developed what is often referred to as 'Ticktin's theory', challenging existing views of the USSR, providing a critical analysis of the Soviet Union's socio-economic structure and predicting its eventual collapse. He argued that the ruling Communist Party

and the bureaucracy held enormous power and controlled the means of production, effectively functioning as a ruling class. He also believed that the party's control over the economy led to inefficiencies, economic stagnation and a lack of innovation. He argued that the Soviet Union suffered from a crisis of legitimacy, as the ruling party's ideology became increasingly divorced from the reality on the ground, emphasising the shortcomings and the contradictions within the Soviet system.

For Ticktin all this is related to the transitional period:

... a period in which the issue of socialism had been placed on the agenda. The bourgeoisie had been warned that they could be overthrown - and had been overthrown in one country. In this period, in which the working class had made its mark, but was still to take power over the globe, the revolution in one country began a necessary period of change. Of course, socialism does not come about simply through a revolution - if that were the case, it would never happen. Socialism comes into being because the basis of it already exists within capitalism. In other words, the socialisation of the means of production actually starts to take place within capitalism.

The journal's historic association with the Glasgow University Institute for Soviet and East European Studies was referred to at the conference and should be mentioned here. The institute's main figure at the time was Alec Nove, who had a long association with the Russian Revolution, but from the Menshevik tradition.

The weekly seminars, the annual conferences held in Glasgow - all played an important role in enriching the journal. Under Hillel's influence the institute fostered interdisciplinary collaboration and became a hub for scholars and researchers.

The 50th anniversary is also a good time to reflect on those members of the editorial board who did not stay long with the journal, as well as those who are no longer with us. At the conference Hillel Ticktin and Mick Cox reminded us that the

first advisory editorial board included Paul Sweezy and Ernest Mandel. As a result of political differences, Sweezy resigned from the editorial board and apparently his resignation letter is somewhere in the *Critique* archives. Mandel, however, remained friendly with the journal and some of the early conference speakers included Ralph Miliband and himself. The editorial board benefited from the work of prominent Marxists such as István Mészáros - the Hungarian philosopher who wrote about the possibility of a transition from capitalism to socialism, following his critique of "bourgeois ideology", including the idea that "there is no alternative". Another important member of the editorial board and a speaker at previous *Critique* conferences was Patrick J O'Donnell, a lecturer of psychology at the University of Glasgow, who died in 2016. Hillel Ticktin also referred to David Rubin and Scott Meikle amongst others.

During the conference there was no time to mention everyone on the editorial board. However, the 50th anniversary is a good time to remind everyone of those board members, most of whom have also contributed as writers for *Critique* and speakers at its conferences: to name just a few, Suzi Weissman, Raquel Varela, Christine Cooper, Peter Kennedy, Bob Arnot, Latief Parker, Savas Matsas, Terry Brotherstone, Michael Vale, Esteban Volkov and Bob Brenner.

Looking forward, the *Critique* editorial board is well aware of the challenges ahead. For 50 years we have managed to produce the journal on a quarterly basis and now, thanks to an effective academic publisher, the journal is widely distributed in universities from Australia to India. It features articles dealing with the situation everywhere from the UK to South America. Facing a complex and increasingly confrontational global situation, we are well aware of the need to, for example, develop a clearer analysis of China and a better understanding of the United States as a hegemon power in decline, while maintaining our reputation regarding political analysis of events in the Middle East ●

Notes

1. www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcso20.
2. commons.com.ua/en/intervyu-z-gillelem-tiktinom.

Fighting fund

All the difference

This week saw a handy increase in the amount of money we received for the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund - no less than £663, which came our way over the last seven days, compared to the £793 we had received in the first part of July. That means that the running total now stands at £1,456 towards the £2,250 we need every month.

Standing out among this week's contributions were no less than three donations of over £100! Thanks very much to comrades AM, KB and GB for your very handy bank transfers/standing orders! Not far behind was MM with £75, while TR (£40), OG (£24), AN and GS (£20 each), SS (£15), JL (£10) and DS (£5) also paid the same way.

On top of that, there was MZ's PayPal donation for £10 and Comrade Hassan's fiver handed to one of our comrades - all of which means that we are now looking for another £794 in the

last 12 days of the month. That is a definite possibility - and something we really need, given the number of times we have fallen short over the last few months.

This time we need you to help ensure we get there - your contributions will make all the difference! Please send us a cheque (as soon as possible, if you want to contribute in that way!) or follow the example of most of this week's donors and transfer the money online - via bank transfer (sort code 30-99-64, account number 00744310) or PayPal (go to weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate).

Let's hope that by this time next week we're in touching distance of that target - or, better still, we break through that £2,250 barrier in the next seven days! ●

Robbie Rix

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to *Weekly Worker*

ECONOMY

Wages, profits and inflation

Are wages driving up prices, or are wages chasing higher prices? **Michael Roberts** comments on an interesting OECD report

The latest employment report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development¹ is a real eye-opener on the cost of living crisis and whether wage rises or profit increases have been the biggest contributor to the rise in inflation. On wages, OECD finds that real wages have fallen an average 3.8% in the last year: “Labour markets have pushed up nominal wages, but less so than inflation, leading to a fall in real wages in almost all industries and OECD countries.”

The falls vary considerably for each OECD country. The biggest falls have been in Scandinavia and eastern Europe, where energy prices rose the most from the loss of Russian oil and gas, while the US fall is one of the lowest - energy prices, although rising, have not shot up as much. Europe has had to switch from pipeline energy from Russia to much more expensive liquid natural gas deliveries by shipping.

The OECD study also reveals in detail how much of the rise in inflation rates since the beginning of the Covid pandemic to now is due to wages and profits. It seems that, on (unweighted) average throughout the OECD, profits per unit of output rose about 22% from the end of 2019 to the first quarter (Q1) of 2023, while wages per unit of output rose about 16%. In some countries, the role of profits in boosting prices was much greater, compared to wages: Sweden - 27% profits rise v 9% wages rise; Germany - 24% v 10%; Austria - 23% v 10%.

The largest rise in profits during the inflation spiral was in Hungary, at over 60% followed by the eastern European states at 30% plus. Wage and profit increases per unit of output in the US were about equal at 14% each. Only Portugal saw a significantly higher contribution from wages per unit of output (18%)



Prices have been soaring, profits too ... but not wages

than profits (9%).

OECD agrees with me and many others that the inflation spike was started by rising commodity and energy prices caused by supply chain blockages after the end of the pandemic and then accelerated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.² As OECD puts it,

The initial surge in inflation was largely imported in many OECD countries and driven by commodity and energy prices. However, over the course of 2022, inflation became more broad-based with higher costs increasingly being passed through

into the prices of domestic goods and services.³

It was not caused by wage rises that never kept up with the inflation spiral, as I previously pointed out.⁴ According to the same OECD report,

The evidence offers no indication of signs of a price-wage spiral so far. Nominal growth has picked up but it exhibits no clear signs of significant further acceleration across countries. The gap with inflation appears to be narrowing in recent months mostly because of a slow decline in inflation, but the erosion of real wages has not halted yet in the vast majority of OECD countries.

Indeed, profit rises were a much larger factor in sustaining the inflation rise. The conclusions from the report are clear: first, average real wages (ie, after inflation) have fallen across the developed capitalist world over the last three years - this is in fact the largest and longest fall for at least 50 years. And, second, the main contributor to higher prices of goods and services over this period has been increases in profits per unit of output, not wages - particularly in the euro zone: “In the euro area, the contribution of profits has been particularly large, accounting for most of the increase in domestic prices in the second half of 2022 and first quarter of 2023.” As for the US, OECD reckons that “amid particularly tight labour markets, wages have generally contributed to increases in domestic prices more than profits in recent quarters”. But “the recent contribution of profit margins was much larger than in the years before the crisis, but has decreased in the most recent quarters.

Data from Europe and Australia show that the strong performance of profits in 2022 was not limited to the energy sector. In the year to Q1 2023, in Europe unit profits increased more than unit labour costs in manufacturing, construction and finance, and grew at the same rate as unit labour cost in “accommodation, food and transportation”. Similarly, unit profits increased

more than unit labour costs in several sectors in Australia, including “accommodation and food”, manufacturing, trade and transportation.

So is this the answer to reducing inflation rates - that firms should reduce profit increases? Well, maybe not, says OECD, because

... firm profitability may be undermined in the short term by a fall in the demand due to the tightening of monetary policy and the erosion of purchasing power. In this context, rising labour costs might be more likely to translate into a reduction in labour demand and potential employment losses. All in all, while the evidence suggests room for profits to absorb some adjustments in wages in several sectors and countries, the exact room of manoeuvre will likely vary across sectors and type of firms.

In other words, trying to reduce price rises by restricting profit rises, while allowing workers’ wage rises to catch up, could cause a slump, as employers reduce their workforces to stop increased labour costs. That would mean rising unemployment. Yes, that is what happens under a profit-driven system of production.

So what is the answer to economic growth without inflation accelerating? OECD says: “In the long run, sustained real wage gains can only be ensured through sustained productivity growth.”⁵ OECD countries need to “make the most of the opportunities afforded by new technological developments, such as artificial intelligence.”

So far, no sign of that! ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com

Notes

1. oecd.org/employment-outlook/2023
2. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/04/27/inflation-causes-and-solutions.
3. www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/b3013c36-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/b3013c36-en.
4. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/05/27/the-two-bs-on-inflation.
5. *Ibid.*

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Summer Offensive

We’re off!

Welcome to the first update on this year’s £20,000 fundraising drive by members and supporters of the CPGB - the Summer Offensive.

The SO is a long-established part of the CPGB’s activity and it plays a vital role in both raising funds to support our political work throughout the year and providing a specific focus for our activity during the summer period. So, between now and the end of August, comrades and supporters will be stepping up activity, raising money from all sections of the working class movement and building support for the politics of the CPGB.

Although the SO is an established part of our annual calendar, it is not just another routine activity. This fundraising drive is important in the work of the CPGB: the funds we raise in the summer will not only sustain our existing activity, such as publishing the *Weekly Worker* and producing new publications like the *Little red climate book*, holding our annual Communist University and organising regular Online Communist Forums, but will also allow us to develop our work in new ways and in new areas, such

as social media and Communist TV (of which more in the weeks to come).

Each week we’ll update our readers on how the campaign is going and the many and various ways that comrades have been raising money. Although we won’t turn down big donations, the experience of past Summer Offensives is that it is the regular small donations which build up the total and finally carry us over the line to reach our target.

We’ve made a good start and our total currently stands at £3,810.99. Special mentions go to Stan K, who has raised £602 so far, including £72 at the Durham Miners Gala, Peter M who raised £425, Jim N who contributed £370, and Clive D who added £310 to the coffers. Many other comrades also raised smaller amounts, but contributions from Jake P, Sarah M and Mark F were significant in making this week’s total.

Next week I hope I can report that we really have started to see the money flowing in and have exceeded this week’s total in a healthy spirit of socialist competition. ●

James Harvey

weekly worker

**Consultants
out on strike
too**

Back on the picket line

Richard Galen reports on the recent round of action by junior doctors and what happens next in the NHS

Coordinated strike action between junior doctors and consultants in England, and a much more credible pay offer to colleagues in Scotland, has increased the pressure on the Tory government. Junior doctors who are, of course, members of the British Medical Association, have just completed a five-day walkout - the longest ever seen in the history of the NHS and their fourth round of industrial action. This is due to be swiftly followed by consultants working to a 'Christmas Day level' for two days from July 20.

The strikes went ahead following a derisory pay offer of 6% plus a one-off £1,250 for the juniors (6% for consultants, 5% for staff in the armed forces), announced on the day that the latest walkout commenced. This was in line with the recommendations of the Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration Board (DDRB) - a supposedly 'independent' advisory body on pay - and is, in fact, a small increase from the previous offer of 5% from health secretary Steve Barclay. But, crucially, it represents yet another real-terms pay cut, and fails to even scratch the surface of the BMA goal of full pay restoration to 2008 levels (in practice, a rise of 35%). Interestingly, an unnamed backbench Tory MP was quoted as stating that the government "basically rigs those [pay reviews] anyway - they are told what the budget is", confirming what many doctors suspected about the 'autonomy' of the DDRB.

On Twitter, prime minister Rishi Sunak declared that this was a final offer and there would be "no more talks on pay", despite not having even had a formal meeting with the chair of the BMA consultants committee. Unsurprisingly, the BMA refused to call off the upcoming consultants' strike, and indeed has gone further, announcing the next two-day action, which is to start on August 24. The latest industrial action is set to cause severe problems for the Tories - not only in terms of cost to the health service (estimated to be as high as £125 million for the juniors' five-day walkout), but also through increasing waiting lists - one of the prime minister's five "key priorities" was to cut them.

Also of note is the fact that government budgets for the health service have not even accounted for fully funding the current pay offer. Part of it is to be paid for by increasing the Immigration Health Surcharge - the extra punitive tax that migrant workers have to pay to access NHS services - as well as the cost of work visas. This will have a huge impact on the vast numbers of so-called International Medical Graduate doctors who are helping to prop up understaffed hospitals across the country, as they will now be paying upwards of £1,000 per year (per person, if they wish to bring their family to the UK) for the privilege of using the NHS services that they themselves are helping to run.

This indicates the laughable



Want their pay level restored

nature of the government's claims that the current pay offer will help to retain doctors - even seen in the DDRB's recommendations that, in an international market, doctors should be incentivised to remain in the UK. Other countries stand ready and waiting to poach doctors from these shores, with the president of the Canadian Medical Association tweeting earlier this week that they are working to make it easier for NHS doctors to emigrate and start jobs advertised as having much better pay and working conditions.

Against this chaotic background, the government has just released the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan. Needless to say, it is lacking in many areas, starting with the fact that future reviews of the plan have not even been legislated, making it likely that it will be conveniently buried if not showing signs of success. The plan emphasises the need to retain staff -

a direct contradiction to the current lack of negotiations on pay rates and increasing barriers to attracting doctors from abroad. It talks about using technological innovations to maximise productivity, yet fails to address how improvements to an outdated information technology infrastructure, commonplace in the NHS, will be achieved.

More worryingly, it proposes increasing the number of doctors by reducing undergraduate medical degree courses to four years (currently five), raising concerns about creating a 'two-tier' system of qualified doctors. Also, without a plan to fund a commensurate increase in postgraduate training places, this will simply create bottlenecks in the career pathway - again prompting doctors to leave the NHS entirely when they realise they cannot progress. And this system also raises the question

of who is going to train all these new graduates, with provision for education by an overstretched, burnout-prone workforce at an all-time low.

Meanwhile, north of the border, the Scottish government, which has devolved powers for healthcare, has adopted a wholly different tack. BMA Scotland has just suspended its latest round of industrial action after an improved offer was proposed - an immediate pay rise of 12.4%, with guaranteed rises matching inflation for the next three years, as well as further negotiation of additional above-inflation pay rises that must "make credible progress" towards full pay restoration. As well as this, although not currently engaging in strike action, BMA Wales is currently in negotiations with the Welsh government, which has "committed" itself to the principle of full pay restoration.

The BMA in England has been clear about what the above means - striking works. The union is currently in the process of rebalancing its junior doctor members to take the mandate for industrial action forward for another six months. Consultant strikes - arguably even more disruptive and costly due to their massive effect on elective work - are likely to continue for the foreseeable future, with many consultants making up lost wages for strike days by covering for their striking junior colleagues at locum pay rates.

Although the current dispute is centred on pay, it is likely that the NHS workforce plan will be the focus of the future for the BMA. If members and the union committees can hold their nerve in this campaign, they are highly likely to be successful in correcting some of its inadequacies ●

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