

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



No feminist - today's left misunderstands and misrepresents Clara Zetkin's contribution to revolutionary Marxism

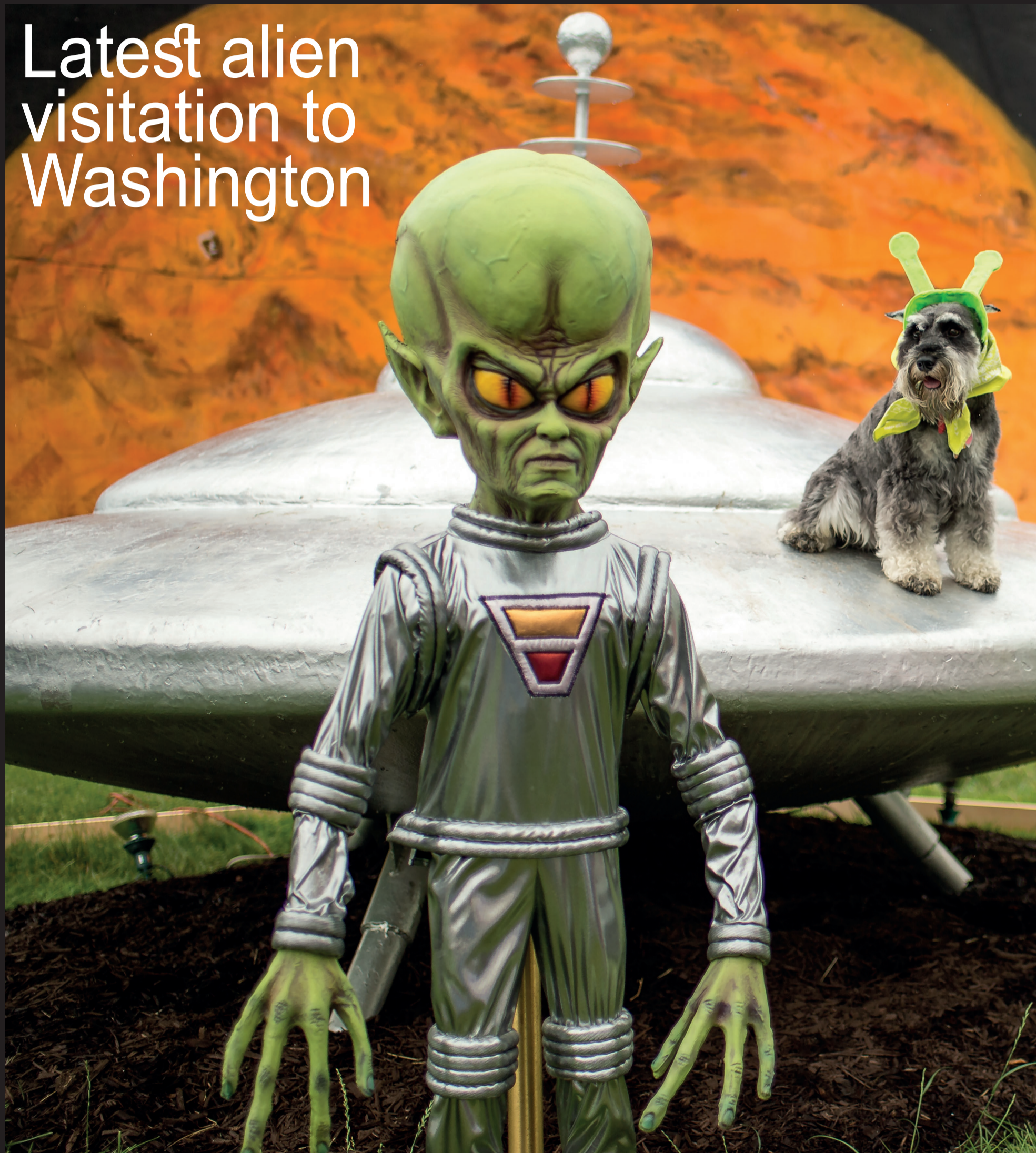
- Letters and debate
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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Latest alien visitation to Washington



LETTERS



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

Rubbish

In the interests of 'balance', I would say that the great majority of Jack Conrad's articles are excellent, well-researched, well-argued and well-written. I probably agree with the large majority of their content - especially those on Marxist theory, the party programme, the history and practice of Bolshevism, the history of the revolutionary movement in Russia up to 1917 and indeed on the current conflict in Ukraine.

I have to say though, his two articles on the five-year plan and the Stalin-led period in the USSR ('First plan backgrounds', June 15; 'First plan realities', June 22) were among the worst he has ever written and appalling on virtually all counts. For a so-called communist to write such rubbish is a complete disgrace and Conrad should be thoroughly ashamed of himself.

Conrad litters his articles with quotes and references from a number of professional anti-Soviet writers and historians ('professional' because they are or were literally paid and made their careers on the basis of their anti-Sovietism, often funded by the US and its secret state), plus from assorted flotsam-and-jetsam Mensheviks and expelled renegades from the Communist Party. Interestingly and correctly, Conrad links and lumps together the Mensheviks and Trotskyists, including Trotsky, Bukharin and Ravovsky.

For good measure, quotes from Alec Nove, another Menshevik and an advocate of 'market socialism', and Trotsky disciples such as Grant, Silverman (never heard of him) and Cliff are also thrown into the mix - although the latter three, being Trotskyists, manage to come to completely opposite and contradictory conclusions about the USSR.

Conrad's basic objectives were to try and portray the Soviet Union (using his infamous gynaecological language - any psychoanalysts out there?) as some form of "freak", an "ectopic" formation, an "abortion of a society".

Anyone with the slightest genuine knowledge or experience of Soviet society or of Soviet people would know not only these are completely absurd and ridiculous statements, but actually deeply insulting to millions of Soviet working people, who achieved astounding feats during Soviet power, and who themselves helped create and build a new society, a new civilisation, based on collectivist and socialist principles.

Conrad's two articles remind me of some of the most rightwing, reactionary and virulent anti-Soviet writers who emerged in the USSR in the late 1980s during the destructive and nihilistic years of late-stage *perestroika* and *glasnost*, when literally almost anything went - the more wild, extreme and hedonistic, the better. We know how that all ended. Some of the extremist language of late *perestroika* and *glasnost* included "terrorism", "the people's political servility", "uninspired social vegetation", "spiritual slavery" and "universal fear" to describe the epoch of the transition to socialism. Is this any different to the tone and content of Conrad's language?

For a self-claimed Marxist and communist to (deliberately) confuse the entire complex epoch of the transition from feudalism and capitalism to socialist construction and socialism - which through the

industrialisation, collectivisation and cultural revolutions took the USSR into the ranks of the world's great powers - as a "counterrevolution within a revolution", is a calumny of gigantic proportions. As to what type of society this alleged "counterrevolution" actually produced, Conrad is completely unable to say - he is just left floundering, throwing out absurd and offensive gynaecological terms in place of any serious historical-materialist analysis.

What *actually* happened was that, first through the political overthrow of the landlords and capitalists in 1917, then through the economic and cultural revolutions of the late 1920s and 30s, millions of working people - led, yes, by the Communist Party - had not only overthrown the exploiting classes of the old order, bourgeois property, the 'free market' and the capitalist state, but *replaced* them by collective and state property, socialist central planning and a socialist workers' state.

Not only were endemic features of capitalism - unemployment, grinding poverty, glaring inequalities of wealth, sex, ethnic and national discrimination and oppression, etc - subsequently eliminated, but the Soviet people became among the best educated and cultured in the world. And probably with the best and most comprehensive healthcare services as well, with a strong emphasis on ill-health prevention, early years, health at work and in later and older age as well.

I have never claimed Soviet society in any epoch was 'perfect' or that mistakes were never made - some with significant, untoward consequences, including political and economic, and some with needless loss of life. I probably became politically conscious from the mid-1970s, and I was clear at the time and since that Soviet socialism was not necessarily the model I would advocate for this country. I have always been consistently clear that from at least the late 1970s, Soviet society and its economy were in major need of comprehensive modernisation, restructuring and democratisation, but on a firmly communist basis and direction.

The real tragedy of the Soviet Union was *not* the socialist construction of the 1930s, but that Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* lacked any strategic conception of a 21st century model of socialism with which to update Soviet society. They just seemed to dismantle, destroy and denigrate; they helped create and unleashed reactionary, rightwing and nationalist forces - many based economically on corruption and criminality. The old political and economic system was weakened, dismantled and ultimately swept away by anti-socialist, anti-working class and anti-democratic forces.

The genuine socialist and communist forces were simply too weak - disabled, disoriented and divided - to resist the restoration of capitalism and the subsequent catastrophe of the Yeltsin years.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Class rule

I see that Tony Clark has now modified his opposition to the term, 'dictatorship of the proletariat', by defining any form of dictatorship as "lawless rule" (Letters, July 27).

This is nonsense. A whole range of dictators, from Napoleon Bonaparte to Adolf Hitler, imposed a series of legislative measures to strengthen their power and suppress any opposition, but this does not necessarily mean that their rule

was "unrestricted by law", as Clark claims. Dictators often impose laws which give them the right to adopt certain measures under particular circumstances, for example.

Previously, as far as I know, Clark limited his description of dictatorship to something along the lines of Wikipedia's definition: an "autocratic form of government which is characterised by a leader, or a group of leaders, who hold governmental powers with few to no limitations". But Marxists also use the term in another way: to describe the rule of a particular *social class*.

Take 'bourgeois democratic' states like the UK and USA. Yes, the working class has won a whole series of democratic rights and made other gains, but, at the end of the day, these are limited by the needs of the bourgeoisie: in other words, it is the operation of capital which determines the way forward for bourgeois governments and guides, restricts or modifies every policy they adopt. That is why it is reasonable to describe capitalist rule as a means of ensuring the *dictatorship* of the bourgeoisie.

In other words, for as long as social classes continue to exist, governments of any class will impose measures to limit the power of the enemy class. Thus, immediately after any working class revolution, for as long as capitalist production still exists, in however limited a form, we will need to ensure that our own collective interests determine the way forward. That is why the class which forms the overwhelming majority of the population will have to impose its 'dictatorship' over the bourgeois minority.

But we must do that in a democratic way: the entire population will elect representatives, who will debate and vote for the appropriate measures - irrespective of the opposition of the bourgeoisie or any other class minority. That is why the Bolsheviks aimed for the establishment of a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" - the rule of the majority, as opposed to that of the minority of capitalists and landowners.

Peter Manson
London

Engage

Comrade Mike Macnair has provided more details to the argument for a conscript militia (Letters, July 27). I would like to clarify that in my questioning of this proposal, I did not state that the workers' movement has never tried a conscript militia: I just expressed a genuine ignorance as to its implementation. So this is not a case of "possibilism" on my part, but a lack of knowledge as to the history of law and its enforcement.

In his article on this phenomenon of possibilism, the comrade rightly argues that what is required is a political voice independent of the capitalists' framework ('Blind leading the blind', July 27). It is within this forum that debates on what our class needs can be debated by the left. Socialist Alliance, Respect, Left Unity, etc were flawed in programmatic terms, but they forced both the confessional sects of the far left and a layer of left reformists breaking from Labour to engage with each other at a political level.

A countervailing tendency to possibilism is *impossibilism*, which is found within those organisations on the far left that failed to engage with regroupment efforts. Although the votes for these past formations and for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the present can be dismissed as derisory, they have been produced via a process which - although it has not succeeded in breaking it - necessarily challenges

Labour's monopoly of working class political representation, albeit only at the level of external pressure at this stage. This raises the spectre of a Communist Party even if most class-conscious workers will opt for Labour in opposition to the Tories.

A political framework centred on electoral intervention can bridge the gap between theoretical discussion among comrades of various groups (which inevitably takes place informally online, on picket lines, at protests and at street stalls) and the inclusion of broader layers, who are reached through the course of an election campaign. But the regrouping of the radical left surely requires a purpose to overcome the organisational barriers to growth.

Regroupment need not involve the construction of a broad coalition for the purpose of governing, but, as seems like a reasonable immediate goal in Britain, the creation of a radical left bloc in parliament which is at least organisationally separate from the bourgeois workers' party, even if its leadership will face the pressure to enter into coalitions.

Despite past failures, it will be necessary for Marxists to engage with initiatives like Transform and urge the creation of a new workers' party, which operates without bans and proscriptions of socialist organisations, but the right to form open factions.

Ansell Eade
Lincolnshire

Shape debate

I read your continuing coverage of the Labour Party with a mixture of despair and relief: despair at the continuing degeneration of the policies; relief that the party's core beliefs are out in the open.

I was excited when Jeremy Corbyn became Labour leader, but the following five years ended any misconceptions I had about the ability of Labour to form a popular socialist government, and about the ability of reformism to achieve any lasting change. The hostile environment created by the media and the establishment in those years showed the limitations of the project - not to mention the number of own goals inflicted by the leadership.

A clear goal of the next general election must be removing the Conservatives from power, but we should be under no illusions about an incoming Labour government: this will be an all-out capitalist project with the faintest red hue. The question then, is what do Marxists do next? I am only in my 30s, but I've already seen the litany of failed 'Labour mark two' projects that have occurred in my political lifetime. What is to be done?

Marxists need to form a vanguard party that allows different tendencies to come together around a core platform. Standing in elections in a first-past-the-post system is a waste of time and resources; instead we must begin to make the arguments that capitalism isn't working, linking our views with the issues that affect working class people the most: the environmental crisis, the cost-of-living crisis, the changing world of work, etc.

Only then can we start to shape the debate about where humanity goes after capitalism.

George H
email

What is Labour?

The latest horror story is that Keir Starmer would not abolish the bedroom tax, so what is the Labour Party for? It arose out of the determination of the economically productive classes of what was then the richest and most powerful country in the history of the world, first to explain their poverty, and then to defeat it.

If there was one thing about which all Labour people really did used to agree, then it was that the state had a duty to eradicate child poverty. Even if you took the hard-line Blairite view that from the day that you embarked on adult life you were solely responsible for what you did with your Sure Start maternity grant, then you were emphatic that you were entitled to it in the first place. And in fact the last Labour government did a great deal about child poverty - the fight against which was the driving passion of Gordon Brown's political life. What is there to Labour now? Nothing - absolutely nothing at all.

As a Commonwealth citizen, Julian Assange is eligible to contest a

Online Communist Forum



Sunday August 6 5pm
A week in politics - political report from
CPGB's Provisional Central Committee
and discussion

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

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

British general election. He ought to do so for the seat of Holborn and St Pancras, which is presently occupied by Starmer. The neighbouring constituency of Islington North is certainly going to return its MP since 1983, Jeremy Corbyn. It is now quite clear that Emma Dent Coad is going to contest Kensington, which she lost by only 150 votes and where she remains a sitting councillor with a very high local profile through the campaign for justice for Grenfell Tower. Should Diane Abbott still be without the whip when the general election is called, then Hackney North and Stoke Newington would be no contest (as it would be if she had the whip, come to that). And so on.

All this and Jamie Driscoll too.
David Lindsay
 Lanchester

Transform

Transform - "a call for a new party of the left", was launched on July 25. Following the launch, 3,000-plus supporters had signed up in the first 48 hours, with 500,000-plus viewings of the launch video. That launch was featured in the *Morning Star*, *The Skwawkbox* and *The Voice*.

The Breakthrough Party, Left Unity, the People's Alliance of the Left, and the Liverpool Community Independents have come together along with support from people across our movement, including former Labour MP Thelma Walker, national president of the BFAWU union Ian Hodson, and former Labour Women's Committee and Momentum national coordinating group member Solma Ahmed, to launch and sign this call for a new left party.

It is therefore a pity that Mike Macnair ('Blind leading the blind', July 27) mistakenly equates Transform with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and the Workers Party of Britain. As most people know, Tusc is a front for the Socialist Party in England and Wales, just like the Labour and Trade Union Group was a front for Militant in Northern Ireland in the 1970s (its current front in Northern Ireland being the Cross Community Labour Alliance).

At the same time, George Galloway's WPB is just a vehicle to be used, so that he and a new member, former Labour MP Chris Williamson, can use the description, 'Workers Party of Britain', on the ballot paper, come the next general election. This follows the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist Leninist) withdrawing from electoral activity and involvement in the WPB in the autumn of 2022 - something described by George Galloway as "pruning".

Earlier this year the People's Alliance of the Left cut off all involvement with Tusc following Tusc's acceptance of someone from the WPB becoming an observer at Tusc steering committee meetings. This was because of the WPB's transphobia. At the same time, SPEW wants Tusc to become a Labour Party mark two controlled by the trade union bureaucracy. It is therefore for the best that Transform has no involvement from the trade unions apart from individual members.

The right wing has regained control of Labour. Jeremy Corbyn, and his politics that inspired millions across our society, have been cast out. Labour now opposes strikes, rejects renationalisation, refuses to defend refugees, and won't scrap student fees - or even the two-child benefit cap. Keir Starmer has overseen the driving out of 200,000 Labour members. 'The many' who supported Labour politics from 2015 to 2019 are denied a political voice.

We need a political organisation that offers a real solution: one that challenges the system at the root of every crisis we face. Over recent months, organisations and individuals from the labour and trade union

movement have come together to discuss a way forward. Now we are taking the next step: inviting all who agree with our core principles to move rapidly towards founding a new party of the left. Together, we can transform politics. The time is now.

John Smithee
 Transform supporter

Get wallet out

When conversations about a new left party occur, very often the issue of funding is brought up. Many on the left believe that a new left-of-Labour party could not possibly financially compete with the bourgeois parties unless it managed to secure the financial backing of the trade unions - see, for example, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's attempt to forge a new left party by aiming to sway trade unions away from the Labour Party and towards itself.

This, however, puts the cart before the horse. Tusc has had the support of a few unions, whose leadership is to the left of the Labour Party. However, how many members of, say, the RMT even knew Tusc existed, let alone supported or voted for it? A mass socialist or communist party should hopefully have the support of unions, but the support of the unions only matters when it is backed up by support for the party from the unions' membership. Only when there is a genuine mass socialist or communist party, when the actual membership of these unions are voting for socialist/communist candidates, is getting financial support from unions a viable strategy.

In the meantime, however, Jamie Driscoll has already proven what can be done by the left in terms of funding. His mayoral-election GoFundMe campaign had already raised over £120,000 in just over a week. There is clearly support out there for campaigns to the left of the Labour Party: people want an alternative and are willing to get out the wallet for that alternative.

Bernardo Credali
 Oxfordshire

Critique

The first point to make in reply to Dan Lazare's letter (July 27) is that *Critique* is a peer-reviewed academic journal and the editorial board is not in a position to decide which article is published. Every article we receive is sent to two academic reviewers, and the editorial board has always included members with wide-ranging views. It is not a politburo and *Critique* has never claimed to be a party journal.

When I referred to the pro-Soviet policies of the Trotskyist left in the article to which Lazare replied ('Fifty years of socialist theory', July 20), I am not referring to Trotsky, but the political organisations which identified themselves as Trotskyist, including the Fourth International. There are many examples, from supporting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to supporting Iran's Islamic Republic in 1979.

Leading figures of the Fourth International were heralding the Islamist slogan, '*Allah-o Akbar*', as an anti-imperialist slogan in London and elsewhere, at a time when the regime was killing leftwing activists. The only justification was the Soviet Union's position on the Islamic Republic, declaring it a country that was no longer in the 'imperialist camp'.

Yasmine Mather
 email

Free Kagarlitsky

On July 26, the Russian FSB security service detained Boris Kagarlitsky, a well-known leftwing theorist, activist and commentator. Following his arrest, he was transferred from his home city of Moscow to a pre-trial detention centre in Syktyvkar, the Komi Republic, where he will be held until late September (at least). Kagarlitsky has been charged with "justifying terrorism" and could

face up to seven years in prison. His colleagues from the YouTube channel *Rabkor* have also been interrogated in Moscow, Yekaterinburg and Penza, and their apartments searched.

To us, it is clear that Kagarlitsky's arrest forms part of a new, large-scale repressive campaign launched by the Kremlin to purge all critics of the war from the political landscape. Since February 2022, Boris has explicitly condemned Russia's aggression and we are certain that this was the only motivation for his arrest.

Kagarlitsky's political career began over 40 years ago and has been far from flawless. In the early 1980s, he was a member of the 'young socialists' underground group and subject to repressions by the KGB. Since the early 1990s, he has played a prominent role in the leftwing opposition - first to Yeltsin's and then to Putin's regime. His numerous books and public statements have greatly influenced several generations of Russian leftists, which is why Kagarlitsky should bear high responsibility for his assessments.

In 2014, he actively endorsed the annexation of Crimea and the creation of the so-called 'people's republics' in eastern Ukraine. Unfortunately, his position contributed to the disorientation of a part of the Russian left. These, as well as many other episodes in Kagarlitsky's trajectory, are utterly unacceptable to the Posle collective. Our fundamental disagreements remain unresolved, and we are willing to discuss them with Boris after his release.

It must be underscored that, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Kagarlitsky was one of the few Russian leftists who, while remaining in the country, condemned Russia's war publicly. Until now, presumably, it was only Kagarlitsky's public stature that had kept the authorities from persecuting him. His arrest suggests that the Kremlin has expanded the scope of repression, and that even more activists are presently at risk.

This is why we are calling for an international campaign to support Kagarlitsky and all political prisoners in Russia.

Posle Media
 email

Poison

Steve Cousins, clearly has no shame. Having failed to retract or defend any of his previous lies and slanders against me, he simply uses a letter responding to Michael Roberts, as a vehicle to just slip in yet another lie and slander. In the space of a sentence he calls me a "catastrophist Marxist", a "pro-imperialist", and "neoliberal" (Letters, July 27).

The first lie is ridiculous, given the amount of time I spend attacking 'catastrophism', and pointing out its lack of any foundation in Marx's or Engels' writings on the economy, and the fact that, as a trend, in general, it is the stock in trade of Malthusians, and petty-bourgeois socialists (Sismondists), as Lenin also describes.

The second is also ridiculous, given the amount I have written attacking actual 'pro-imperialism', including currently the role of petty-bourgeois, moral socialists, whose campism, lesser-evilism and 'My enemy's enemy is my friend' approach has led them into becoming supporters of either the Nato/Ukraine imperialist camp, or else the Russia/China imperialist camp!

The third is also ridiculous, and just a slur that Cousins throws out repeatedly without a jot of evidence to support it, despite me repeatedly challenging him to do so. His approach has become more like that of an internet troll than even that of the shameless Stalinist liars we have all come to know and despise, as a poison in the labour movement.

Arthur Bough
 email

ACTION

Chopped liver and unions

Until August 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.

Oh, Jeremy Corbyn - the big lie

Friday August 4, 7pm: Highfields Centre, 96 Melbourne Road, Leicester LE2. Free screening of this feature-length documentary which exposes political deceit and outrageous anti-Semitism smears. Organised by Highfields Centre: www.facebook.com/HighfieldsCentreLC.

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 exhibiting at the September London arms fair, including BAE Systems. Free registration. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: www.facebook.com/events/938512817219976.

Shut down Amazon - support the strikers

Saturday August 5, 4.30pm: 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 to the Amazon site at Rugeley, 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.

Peterloo guided tour and archive open day

Wednesday August 16, 11am to 3pm: Peterloo anniversary event, People's History Museum, Left Bank, Spinningfields, Manchester M3. Uncover the stories of a defining day for Britain's democracy. Bookings £10 (£6). Organised by People's History Museum: phm.org.uk/whats-on/DAY/16-08-2023.

Peterloo march for democracy

Sunday August 19, 12 noon: March, rally and entertainment. Assemble St Peter's Square, Manchester M2. Remembering the Peterloo massacre. Followed by debates and seminars on democracy, peace and starting a socialist party from scratch. Speakers include Ken Loach, Ian Hodson, Stella Assange and Audrey White. Organised by *The Word* newspaper and Oldham Trades Council: www.facebook.com/events/953870805921542.

Comedy, music and politics

Saturday August 19, 7pm: Evening of entertainment, Trehale Farm, Mathry, Haverfordwest SA62. Includes screening of *Oh, Jeremy Corbyn - the big lie*, the feature-length documentary exposing political deceit and outrageous anti-Semitism smears. Organised by Pembrokeshire Peoples Assembly: www.facebook.com/events/807548790834256.

DSEI: make the connection

Wednesday August 30, 7pm: Online briefing. In September the Defence and Security Equipment International arms fair returns to ExCel in London. Learn how DSEI connects to war, militarised borders and policing, the climate crisis and Palestine. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: caat.org.uk/events/dsei-make-the-connection.

Stand up for choice

Saturday September 2, 1pm: Counter-protest. Assemble at the Millicent Fawcett statue, Parliament Square, London SW1. Oppose anti-abortion groups and stand up for the right to choose. Organised by Abortion Rights: www.facebook.com/Abortionrightsuk.

Remember Burston strike school

Sunday September 3, 10.30am to 4pm: Rally, Diss Road, Burston, Norfolk IP22. Commemorate the longest strike in history. Free entry. Organised by Unite the Union and TUC: www.facebook.com/groups/909894 2153.

Wigan Diggers Festival

Saturday September 9, 11.30am to 9.30pm: Open-air free festival, The Wiend, Wigan WN1. Commemorating Gerrard Winstanley and the 17th century Diggers movement with music and political stalls. Organised by Wigan Diggers Festival: www.facebook.com/WiganDiggersFestival.

Fight Tory anti-union laws - lobby the TUC

Sunday September 10, 1pm: Eve-of-TUC rally, Premier Meetings, Albert Dock, Liverpool L3. If workers take action together, the Tories and their anti-union attack can be beaten. Speakers include Sharon Graham (Unite) and Sarah Woolley (BFAWU). Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/ShopStewardsNetwork.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

UFOs

The truth is elsewhere

David Grusch - a whistleblower on secret government projects to recover and reverse-engineer extraterrestrial spacecraft - has testified before the House Subcommittee on National Security. Paul Demarty investigates the latest alien visitation to Washington

Extra-terrestrial life once again casts its shadow over the proceedings of the US Congress. (Why is it that aliens are unable to leave Americans alone - or should that be the other way round?)

On July 26, the Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs heard evidence from a certain David Grusch - a *soi-disant* whistleblower on secret government projects to recover and reverse-engineer 'unidentified aerial phenomena' (UAPs), which in a more innocent age were called unidentified flying objects (UFOs). Grusch - a decorated airforce officer turned military intelligence operative - made several rather spicy claims, including that several of the UAPs recovered were definitely extraterrestrial in origin; that extraterrestrial biological remains had been recovered; and that at least one person had come to a violent end in order to keep all this a secret.

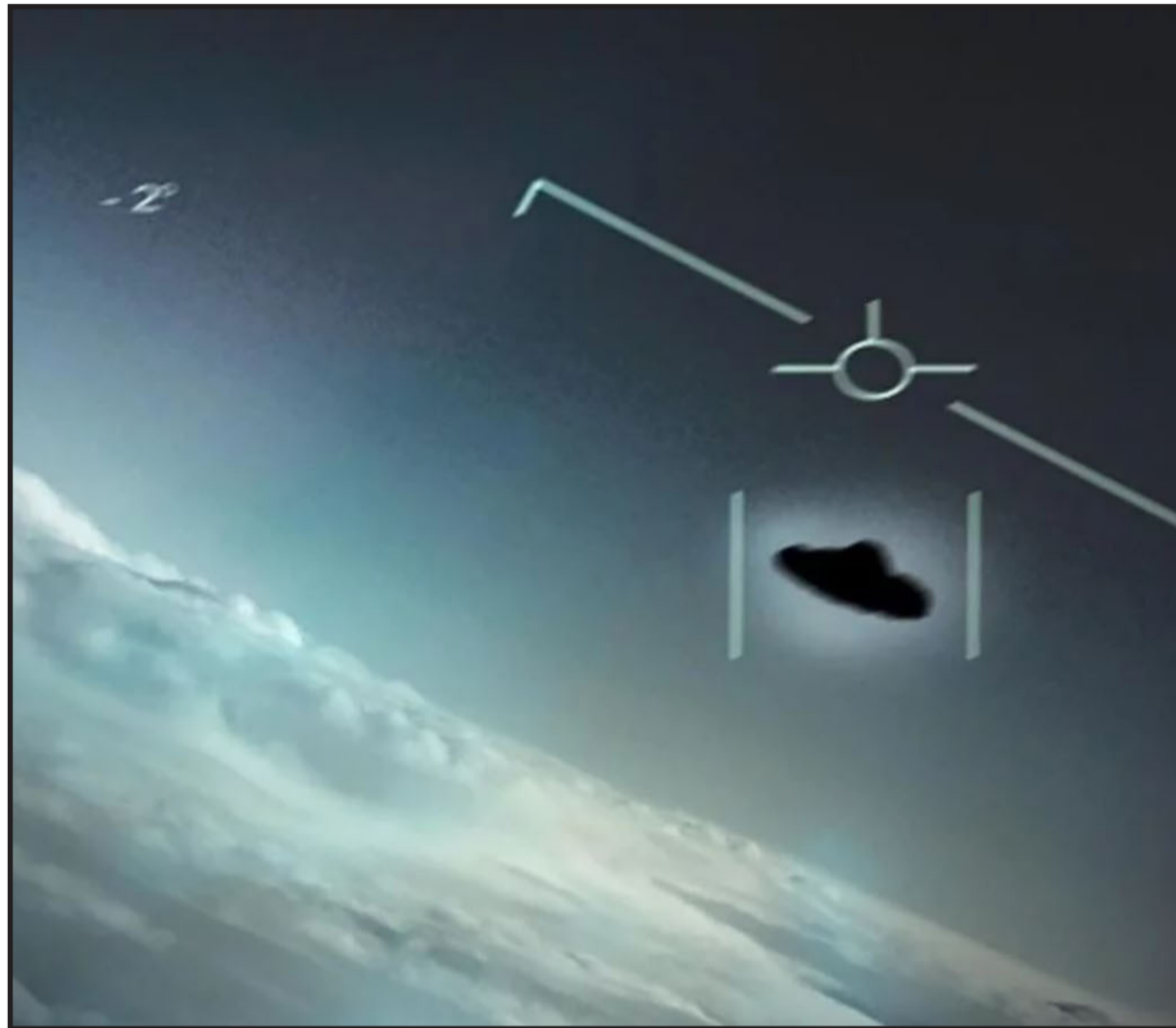
This stuff was eagerly lapped up by several Republican members of the committee. Left Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, whose liberalism is strictly of a mundane sort, tried to put a brave face on it, saying that it was a worthwhile exercise in holding executive authority to account, but it is difficult to ignore the fact that several elected representatives of the Greatest Nation On Earth were more interested in the mechanics of intergalactic space travel than the ballooning military budgets and overreach that they have all (including, of course, AOC) happily waved through.

Exasperated sceptics have offered all the usual reasons for suspicion. After all, Grusch's only real claim on anyone's belief is that he clearly is an 'intelligence community' and airforce veteran - nobody denies this. His claims are all sourced to anonymous contacts - "people familiar with the matter". He has evidence, but he cannot show congressmen in public. No hard, physical evidence is on offer to be tested by scientists. Beyond all that, it offends common sense that a civilisation could be so advanced as to develop faster-than-light travel, yet so foolish as to crash into this little rock of ours, never mind being bested by the crude defences of us brutish primitives who inhabit it.

Mulder and Scully

Cultural obsessions with aliens, as we have argued before,¹ have come repeatedly in waves - especially since the end of World War II and onset of the cold war. There was an explosion of technological innovation in aeronautics; there were the first space programmes.

All of these generated UFO sightings, and then the golden age of alien invasion narratives in film and literature (for example, the *Invasion of the body snatchers*). The late-60s counterculture generated instead a quasi-religious, spiritual interest in interplanetary visitors and alien ancestors, which was all very 'Age of Aquarius' (exemplary here is *2001: a space odyssey*); but, from the 1970s to the 1990s, increasing social atomisation - combined with very real scandals about the FBI and CIA, uncovered by journalists and the 1975 Church Committee investigation - gave us the modern alien conspiracy thriller, typified by the *X-files*.



Unidentified Aerial Phenomena: communists from another solar system?

It is worth bringing this narrative into play, because the most obvious feature of Grusch's story is that it is basically a plot summary of the *X-files*. That show expertly drew on the literature of UFO enthusiasts, about close encounters and abductions, cattle mutilations and collusion between human government and extraterrestrials. Its success, however, ensured a kind of feedback loop. Famously, the number of reported 'close encounters' skyrocketed after it achieved success; all modern tilts at the 'They're here!' narrative are coloured by its influence.

Even the hearing itself has a certain *X-Files* quality to it. Mulder and his sceptical but doughty partner, Dana Scully, beaver away in the depths of the state apparatus to expose the truth: "the truth is out there", as the tagline says - out there in the hidden infrastructure of the deep state to be uncovered, and further out there in the reaches of the cosmos. Their allies include Gruschian deep-state operatives, UN diplomats and one senator. For all the apparent omnipotence of the conspiracy of alien collaborators, and the genocidal project they abet, the existing US constitutional machinery is always tacitly assumed to be adequate to the task of bringing it to heel, and the mere enlightenment of ordinary Americans a sufficient incentive for action to be taken.

We can only speculate at Grusch's motives here. He may be sincere, in which case it is either a case of psychological distress or of his being manipulated for some deeper reason. (Even the latter possibility was foreseen by Chris Carter and co, when they introduced a plotline into the *X-files*, where it appeared that Fox Mulder had been manipulated into his belief in aliens by shadowy

state operatives trying to distract attention from their real crimes, and all the plot events to that point amounted to a single targeted psy-op.)

In that case, this would roughly fall under the concept of a limited hangout, whereby the deep state allows some partial feature of its malfeasance to become public knowledge in order to avoid fuller disclosures. That would also be the case if Grusch *knew* he was manipulating public opinion, of course. Further evidence for this comes from the fact that his life is clearly *not* in danger, he is not suffering the fate the US state inflicted upon Chelsea Manning and would like to inflict on Edward Snowden, and in any case there have been gatherings of the 'five eyes' to discuss UAPs recently anyway.

The question would then be: to what end is this dubious or false information being leaked? Some speculate to ensure funding for the 'space force', reanimated by Donald Trump; but can it really be supposed that *any* further inducement is necessary for the AOCs of this world to write the necessary blank cheques? Perhaps it is a *pure* diversion, from the increasingly rickety political and ideological infrastructure of the US itself. If the *X-files* scenario is less plausible today than it was in the 1990s, that is at least in part because the ruthless competence of the authorities in its fictional world is hardly congruent with a US state apparatus still bruised from the disasters of the 'war on terror', whose global hegemony seems increasingly shaky. A perfectly efficient operation for hoarding alien corpses is, perversely, a projection of power.

In the early 90s, Fredric Jameson argued that the rise of the conspiracy

thriller as a genre from the 1970s tracked the concentration of power, and that the conspiracy is the only available model of the social totality available to atomised individuals: the social totality as a coherent enemy against oneself. Instead of social relations, the conspiracy theorist sees a discrete narrative of malfeasance among men in the shadows.²

All the more so in the case of the alien invasion narrative: we no longer rely on mere *humans* to conspire, but a dangerous and unimaginable adversary, possessed with far greater power than us, yet terrifyingly and intrusively interested in us. Hostile aliens of this sort substitute easily for the ideologically-occluded social forces that dominate us. Humans may then figure as particular kinds of enemies: collaborators and cowards.

Estrangement

One of the purposes of such neat narrative structures is to make the dangerous safe: the enemy, however great its power, is confined in the cage of a beginning, middle and end. There is, indeed, a strange discordance between what people claim to believe about this and their actual behaviour. Several Republican congressmen have asserted their belief in Grusch's assertions - the best known being the Floridian Trump sycophant Matt Gaetz - but, having been alerted to the existence of intelligent extraterrestrial life and human contact therewith, they are to go back to their usual routines of petty negotiation over pork-barrel money and grumbling about Hunter Biden - *really?* How easily the truly remarkable takes its place among the more mundane fantasies of wingnut politicians ...

Not that such fantasies are confined to the right. The left has the famous example of Juan Posadas,

who once led the Trotskyist Fourth International in Latin America, and who for a time had some influence, including, albeit briefly, in Cuba. In 1968, responding to a new wave of UFO sightings, Posadas speculated that such a degree of technological advancement could only be achieved by a communist civilisation, and indeed the aliens' *failure* to invade and dominate further suggested that they had transcended imperialism. They might therefore be valuable allies to the toilers of earth! While for modern 'UFOlogists' of the *X-files*/Grusch stamp, the aliens fill the void of impersonal relations with comfortingly intelligible agency, the Posadists - who had suffered wipeout after a clampdown by the Castro regime - could imagine they were still on the right side of history.

To be sure, fantasy has its place in mental life. The enduring import of science fiction as a genre - even in its trashiest, pulpiest forms - is its ability to estrange human existence by projecting it onto scenarios of pure conjecture. Even its most idiotic, militaristic expressions (Robert Heinlein's *Starship troopers*, for example) may serve satirically (as in Paul Verhoeven's subversive adaptation of the same). Above that low bar, the genre's greats have deployed aliens as absolute, incomprehensible others, like Stanislaw Lem and the Strugatsky brothers; or as quasi-mythic archetypes of human behaviour, as in the various alien races of *Star trek*.

It was this capacity that led Darko Suvin - the founder of science-fiction studies in the literary academy and a Marxist - to consider the genre essentially one of cognitive estrangement: it asks 'What if?' in order to upend our complacent acceptance of the world as it is (though for Suvin the 'What if?' was narrowly restricted to radical scientific and technological discovery as such). The supposed disclosures of David Grusch might be read most innocently as *no more* than pulpy science fiction; but in so doing, the essentially trivial content of bourgeois politics in its surface appearance - the fatuous clown-show of the oversight committee on July 26 - is thrown into sharp relief.

Liu Cixin's well-regarded recent series of novels, *Remembrance of Earth's past*, dramatises the reaction of humanity to the certain knowledge that a hostile alien species will invade in several hundred years time. Without spoiling the plot, it will suffice to say that it is not a pretty picture; but still prettier than our species' efforts so far to confront the existential threats we *do* face.

The argument of Juan Posadas that the little green men must definitionally be communist may well anthropomorphise our extraterrestrial friends to the point of comedy; but it remains a rebuke to those of us here on earth, bound to social relations that drive us cheerfully towards destruction. How much easier it is to fight imaginary enemies! ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. 'Flying saucers over Washington' *Weekly Worker* June 3 2021: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1350/flying-saucers-over-washington.
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THE LEFT

Rebranding as Transform

Yet another call for a new broad left party, yet another disappointment to come. Mike Macnair looks at the latest offering

On July 25 Left Unity announced its participation in yet another call for a “new party of the left”.¹ Besides LU itself, the participants are the Breakthrough Party,² Liverpool Community Independents³ and the People’s Alliance of the Left (PAL).

The PAL has very little web presence, but appears to have originated as a general left non-aggression pact, including the Socialist Party of England and Wales’s front, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, but which split four months after its launch, when Tusc allowed George Galloway’s Workers’ Party observer status.⁴ What remains of PAL is therefore in substance Left Unity, the Breakthrough Party and the Northern Independence Party.⁵ As Clive Heemskerk of SPEW/Tusc commented at the time of the split, in spite of their name-claims to breadth, none of these formations represent either significant forces on the ground, or (apart from the Liverpool Community Independents) electoral impact significantly greater than Tusc’s.⁶

The new Transform name appears to reflect the leadership of Left Unity’s commitments to the ‘Euro left’, which were already present in 2013 when the brand-name linked to was (already belatedly, in terms of the hoped-for political selling impact) the German *Die Linke*. This year’s is ‘Transform! Europe’, which is “a network of 39 European organisations from 23 countries, active in the field of political education and critical scientific analysis, and is the recognised political foundation corresponding to the Party of the European Left”.⁷

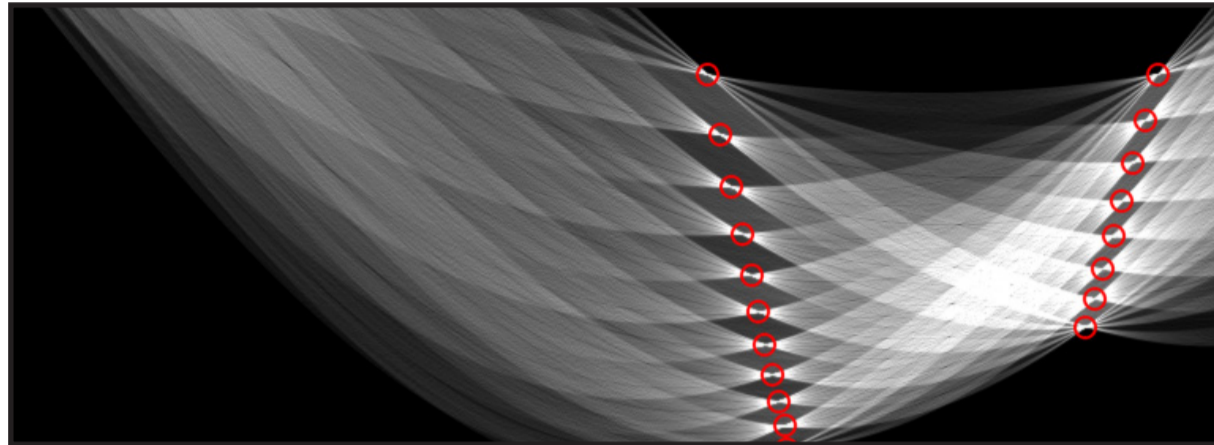
Put the pure rebranding aspect to one side. What does Transform stand for? The call starts with what everyone knows: that we face “an era of crisis: climate change, the cost of living, the erosion of democracy [meaning, of liberalism - MM] and the spread of war”; and that

The Labour Party is failing to provide an alternative. The right wing has regained control of Labour ... Keir Starmer has overseen the driving out of 200,000 Labour members. “The many” who supported Labour politics from 2015 to 2019 are denied a political voice.

We need a political organisation that offers a real solution: one that challenges the system at the root of every crisis we face.

So far, so good - except for the fact that Left Unity is not a refugee from the failure of Corbynism, but the relic of an organisation founded in the belief that Corbynism could not happen, and which refused to join “the many” who tried to make the left surge in the Labour Party work - in the process losing most of its own membership.

“Now we are taking the next step: inviting all who agree with our core principles, outlined below, to move rapidly towards founding a new party of the left.” OK, so what are these “core principles”? To a very considerable extent they are classic modern left “motherhood and apple pie”, with indeterminacy of content which make them *practically* useless to define a political alternative. Let us work through the points describing “the party” It is: (1) “a left party, of and for the working class in all its diversity, seeking to redistribute wealth and power from the elite to the people”.



Chessboard: transformed

The commitment to the working class “in all its diversity” is positive. But the rest of the formula is seriously vague. “Left” (derived originally from where the parties sat in the French Chamber of Deputies) is, by now, near-meaningless. Already in the 1920s *Cartel des Gauches* in France, its meaning was to commit the workers’ party (the French Socialists) to alliance with the equivalent of today’s Liberal Democrats. The call to “redistribute wealth and power from the elite to the people” has the same character: what it proposes is to leave the fundamentals of capitalist order in place, but merely redistribute within this framework; “the elite” could mean, as it does for the right populists, the “metropolitan elite”, while “the people” is even vaguer.

Buzz words

The party is also (2) “eco-socialist, supporting transformative political, social and economic change in order to build a truly sustainable world and achieve climate justice.”

This is a set of fashionable buzz words, which are almost devoid of content. “Eco-socialist” has the character of evading fundamental choices which cannot be avoided.⁸ For example, to deal with global warming or ocean pollution will require common *international* action, as opposed to the ‘green’ advocacy of localism.

“Climate justice”, moreover, has all the vices of “justice” politics in general. I wrote about this 20 years ago in response to Salma Yaqoob’s and George Monbiot’s ‘Principles of unity’ draft platform. I quote only a part of my conclusion then:

The implication should be clear. A political movement which founds itself on the struggle for justice sets itself on the path to paternalist dictatorship. In all probability, not enough time has passed since the fall of the Stalinist regimes and of ‘old Labour’ to let such a movement gain much force in society. But, even if it could, all it would produce is an episode leading to ... the return of the neoliberals.⁹

Point 3 states that the new party “is internationalist, opposing war, imperialism and colonialism, welcoming migrants and standing in solidarity with oppressed people everywhere”. This states a general principle. But what about the present-day concrete? The UK is right now a co-belligerent, along with the USA and other Nato countries, in the war in Ukraine. It is supplying arms to Ukraine and training its armed forces.

This war is *presented* as a defensive war against Russian aggression, just as the Third Anglo-

Mysore war in 1790-92 was in its time presented by the British press as a war of defence of Hyderabad against the ‘aggressor’, Tipu Sultan. Just as the actual aim of 1790-92 was British power in the Indian subcontinent, the actual aim of today’s Ukraine war is a ‘colour revolution’ in Moscow, followed by a new Yeltsin and a new downward step of Russian disarmament and deindustrialisation, and the partitioning of the country to ‘protect against Russian aggression’. It also aims to open the way for a full, aggressive encirclement of China. This is not to celebrate Putin any more than radicals around 1800 should have celebrated Tipu: it is to recognise our own primary responsibility for resisting *our* imperial state.

This war, moreover, and the sanctions imposed on Russia in order to pursue it, is one of the fundamental causes of the general inflation and the resulting cost-of-living crisis - just as occurred as a result of 1914-18.

So what do you have to say about *this war*, comrades, and its character as an operation of US imperialism and its side-kicks, including the UK, and its economic implications? Should the working class accept the ‘sacrifices’ which are made necessary by inflation and the £4.6 billion spent on military support for Ukraine in the last two years (and therefore not available for the NHS, care, and so on)? Silence ...

Moving on, the party is (4) “feminist and anti-racist, fighting for a world where social injustices including racism, xenophobia, ableism, homophobia, transphobia and the oppression of women have been eradicated”.

Again general principles. But does “feminist” mean in the sense of Cheryl Sandberg’s *Lean in* and similar forms of managerialist feminism? Or “gender-critical feminist”? Or ...? I have criticised the political ‘phobias’ earlier this year: by psychologising what are actually political claims, these formulas tend both to excuse the violence of the oppressor and to preclude the open discussion of political differences among the oppressed.¹⁰

The party is also (5) “committed to eradicating regional inequality within Britain and supports the right of the devolved nations to determine their constitutional futures”. This clause contains two points which are each on their own entirely supportable, but which do not comfortably stand together. The reason is that Scotland, Wales and the Six Counties are all substantially subsidised by Westminster, with tax income coming primarily from London and the south-east.¹¹ This reflects the underlying point I made last week: as an ex-hegemon power in long-term industrial decline, the UK is actually

dependent for a large part of its income on the export of ‘services’ - meaning mainly financial, legal, consultancy and advertising and PR services.¹² This flows into the larger economy as City salaries and is extracted as higher-rate income tax.

Communists stand for the right of the Scotland, Wales and Ireland to self-determination, because we stand for republican democracy. We are not advocates of ‘northern independence’ or any other form of localism which lacks that sort of national-cultural and historical foundation. And, while we support the *right* to self-determination, we *oppose* voting for actual independence, because we recognise that the working class needs the widest common action. And “eradicating regional inequality within Britain” will actually need common action on a European scale. This is because the dynamics which produce the skimming of global financial operations by London, which then subsidises the rest of the UK, *also* naturally produce regional inequality within the UK.

Democracy

The party is (6) “a democratic party, in which members empower, organise and educate each other; and (7) it “[d]evelops policy democratically, drawing on the knowledge and experience of its members”.

These are very clearly mere ‘motherhood and apple pie’. Everyone on the left would agree with these ideas *in principle*. The problem is what they mean *in practice*. For example, Left Unity’s constitution was considerably simplified in 2018 from the Heath Robinson structure originally adopted.¹³ But it remains a combination of the Bonapartist method of the direct election of national officers (who then cannot be accountable to anyone) with the federalist method of a national council composed of these officers, together with branch representatives (largely irrespective of branch size).

While Left Unity has formal space in its constitution for caucuses of the oppressed and for ‘tendencies’ (factions), Breakthrough does not. Both organisations have more or less elaborate speech controls/‘safe spaces’ policies, the effect of which is to place sharp limits on possible debate (as we saw in Left Unity in 2013-16, and as has been visible in student politics both before and after then).¹⁴ In the Labour Party in 2015 and since, such policies have been a primary engine of the witch-hunt, against which the Transform appeal protests.

Moving on, the party (8) “Contests elections in order to offer voters a socialist alternative and build power locally and nationally, without

promoting the idea that voting alone can solve the present crises”. And (9) it seeks “to build power in communities, workplaces and on the streets”.

What is needed is a party whose tasks are primarily *political*: that is, in the long run to fight for the political power of the working class as a class *over* the state and the middle classes, and, in the immediate term, as Marx put it in 1871, “a movement of the class, with the object of achieving its interests in a general form, in a form possessing a general social force of compulsion”. Marx contended:

Where the working class is not yet far enough advanced in its organisation to undertake a decisive campaign against the collective power - ie, the political power of the ruling classes - it must at any rate be trained for this by continual agitation against and a hostile attitude towards the policy of the ruling classes. Otherwise it will remain a plaything in their hands.¹⁵

The appeal’s text *evades* the choice between these *political* tasks - the ones for which it is worth standing in elections - and, on the other hand, anarchist ideas of building “power in communities, workplaces and on the streets”.

Finally, the party (10) “Builds meaningful relationships with a wide range of organisations, including trade unions, community and campaign groups, social justice movements and left organisations outside Britain.” This is sufficiently vacuous (eg, what are “meaningful relationships”?) that no objection could be taken to it; but equally, Starmerites could agree to it too.

The unity of small groups on a serious and principled platform could be seriously useful. But this appeal will not provide it. The People’s Alliance of the Left, founded on equally unsound political foundations, split within four months of its foundation and Transform is unlikely to do much better ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

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5. www.freethenorth.co.uk.
6. www.tusc.org.uk/17677/20-06-2022/social-media-statement.
7. www.transform-network.net/en/about-us.
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USSR

Not a workers' state

Did the Soviet Union remain a workers' state from its heroic beginnings to its miserable end? Citing unchanged property relations is clearly unMarxist. What is decisive is production relations, argues **Jack Conrad**

Capitalism does not act, at least under present circumstances, as an *absolute* fetter on the productive forces. Nonetheless, capitalism produces wealth one-sidedly, antagonistically, destructively. The rich become super-rich, monopolies ever more monopolistic. War follows war and economic crisis follows economic crisis. Meanwhile, life for the many is increasingly insecure.

And, in the endless search for profit, capitalism is driven to exploit nature with a ruthlessness that can only be described as criminal. Instead of treasuring nature, it is plundered. Apart from science-denying oddballs, the results are universally acknowledged: record temperatures, droughts, spreading deserts, degraded oceans, deadly air pollution, hellish wildfires, shrinking polar icecaps, rising sea levels and ever more frequent floods. Such developments threaten to bring about mass animal and plant extinctions, economic refugees by the tens of millions and, quite conceivably, civilisational collapse.¹

Yet, by the simple measure of putting the means of production under social control, nature can be restored to good health, all necessary needs met and humanity returned to communism. That return, *on a higher level*, is actually what constitutes the defining aim of Marxism. Inescapably a universal task.

By giving conscious expression to the real movement of history, by fighting to win the battle for democracy, Marxists endeavour to raise the working class to becoming the *ruling class*. A ruling class, because the working class needs a state to organise itself ... and to fend off the old exploiters internally and externally (a basic proposition which distinguishes Marxism from the nonsense of anarchism). But - and this is vital - the socialist state is so democratic, so pared down, so transparent that it amounts to no more than a semi-state that is already withering away.

Negative dialectic

Tsarist Russia was the "weakest link" of the imperialist chain (Lenin). A metaphor which can be misleading. It might be thought that with October 1917 the capitalist system had been broken, riven in two, put beyond repair. Needless to say, capitalism continued as a global system, in which the "Soviet economy was in large measure embedded ... at all times in its history".²

What had been conquered was a huge, but economically peripheral country, which, because of war, revolution and civil war, had been reduced to ruin and starvation. Nor did things go well internationally: defeat in Hungary and Finland, failure in Poland and Germany, fascist reaction in Italy and an Anglo-French *cordon sanitaire* stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

It was as if history had been put into reverse gear. A negative dialectic, which was hardly conducive to the conditions needed to sustain democracy, let alone taking steps in the direction of socialism. And popular exhaustion and unremitting hostility from the world's dominant powers compelled the Bolsheviks to retreat from their programme. The revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry became the dictatorship of the Communist Party. Then the



Workers in 1968: were they the ruling class?

dictatorship of the central committee. Then the dictatorship of the politburo. Each narrowing had far-reaching, but often entirely unexpected, results. Counterrevolution within the revolution took root.

To begin with, the post-civil war Bolsheviks tried to restore the economy, so as to create the conditions necessary for the political revival of the working class. And, yes, that necessitated using capitalist methods. However, as argued elsewhere, a qualitative break came in 1928-29, with the launch of the first five-year plan.³ What had been a process, whereby the apparatus gradually developed sectional interests, reached the point of final rupture. Workers experienced not just a further erosion of civil and political rights, but atomising repression.

Any notion that the resulting social dust remained the "dominating class" is surely untenable.⁴ Indeed, a complete and utter absurdity. Workers faced coercion in every sphere of life. Arresting strike leaders, bogus workplace votes, enforcing speed-ups, internal passports, the effective stigmatisation of trade unions, etc, were blessed with a socialist halo. But, in terms of collective strength, individual freedom and living standards, the position of workers in the Soviet Union was altogether inferior to the admittedly narrow, inadequate and always precarious gains that had been won in the more democratic capitalist countries.

Meanwhile, towering far above the ragged workers, hungry collective farmers and enslaved former *kulaks*, members of the apparatus enjoyed a privileged existence: spacious town houses, servants and chauffeur-driven cars, country dachas, closed shops, imported luxury goods, the best medical facilities, specially reserved Black Sea holiday resorts and the guarantee that their children would attend the best schools.

Not that members of the apparatus could amass capital in their own

"private interests". Yet, despite the obvious absence of capitalist wealth-making (vital, according to Adam Smith, for ensuring "the public good"), the Soviet Union seemed to represent the world's future for a good three or four decades. Leave aside the 'official communist' parties and their millions of members. There were plenty of bourgeois friends of the Soviet Union too. Achievements were much exaggerated. Nonetheless, the steel plants, the hydro-electric dams, the mechanisation of agriculture, the achievement of near universal literacy, the health campaigns, the military might cannot be denied.

State property

According to the standard Marxist account, to the degree that social differentiation, along with the hierarchical division of labour, is flattened, the state too is pulled down, its special functions being absorbed by society at large. *Ipsa facto*, state property ceases being state property. By the same logic, to the degree that the state rises above society, state property will serve as an instrument of exploitation. Evidently, although official doctrine insisted that with the first five-year plan class exploitation had forever been banished, the Soviet state showed not the least sign of withering away. On the contrary, it grew in size, reach and aspirations.

Trotsky was clearly wrong to insist that, because of the nationalisation of industry, the land, the means of transport, etc, the Soviet Union continued to be some kind of workers' state. October 1917 resulted in state property forms: that much is undeniable. But the working class can only exercise control over property collectively. Hence the necessity of democracy. To be meaningful that has to include time off for representatives to master information, provision for debate, the right to present alternative proposals, regular votes, the election and rotation of managers, etc.

Without democracy, state property could only belong to the apparatus. What had been taken from capitalists and landlords therefore once again confronted workers and peasants as an alien force.

Hence, the apparatus in the Soviet Union amounted to considerably more than any 'normal' bureaucracy. As a rule, bureaucracies occupy an elevated, but intermediate social position between the masses and the ruling class. The bureaucracy does the bidding, represents, serves the interests of the ruling class. There is, nonetheless, given the opportunity, an ever-present tendency for the bureaucracy to pursue its own interests. Fields of responsibility are expanded, functions become power, exorbitant salaries, bribes or favours come to be expected. Leading office-holders thereby claw their way into the ruling class - on occasion they manage to rise to the very top. The late Ottoman empire saw the grand vizier reduce the sultan to the status of a pampered puppet.

However, inside the Soviet Union, the apparatus stood alone. There was no ruling class to obey, ape or join.

Property and law

Because Trotsky pivoted so much of his argument on property, we are obliged to examine his thesis, not least because it still remains influential on the left.⁵

At first sight, it might appear that property is nothing more than a thing held, possessed, decided on by a particular person, or group of persons. However, as any worthwhile law commentary will tell you, property is "not a thing".⁶ It is a concept, an institution, a "power relationship" ... with, Marxists argue, origins in the emergence of classes and class society.

Property, is, in fact, a legal expression of the relations of production and, as such, fundamentally concerns relations between people. Under capitalism, those social relations are *indirect*: they

are bound up with the market and appear to be relations between money, land, capital and labour-power (ie, property). But, in fact, as shown by Marx (most fully in *Capital*), behind this "commodity fetishism", even if there is the assumption, in value terms, of like exchanging for like, there lies the production and extraction of surplus value. Workers as a class are exploited by capitalists as a class.

However, with the overthrow of capitalism, there comes the possibility of bringing about "the abolition of property" as an institution, as a power relationship (note, we are not talking about *personal* property: ie, toothbrushes, shoes, smartphones and the like; it is class property that makes way for collective appropriation).⁷

Bourgeois philosophers, economists and political writers are more than prone to eternalise property. John Locke considered that human beings have a natural *property right* over their "own persons" and that, when their labour is mixed with something provided by nature, "he makes it his *property*".⁸ Adam Smith took the individual hunters and fishers among the "savage nations" as his methodological point of departure.⁹ Through the production and exchange of their *property*, he eventually arrives at the "civilised and thriving nations" of 18th century capitalism, along with their complex division of labour, different classes, states and contending schools of political economy.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, Robinson Crusoe has been seized upon. From Claude-Frédéric Bastiat to Murray N Rothbard, Daniel Defoe's eponymous character is celebrated as the quintessential self-made man - adventurous, intrepid, canny, religiously pious and, perhaps clinching it, a conscientious accountant. Crusoe masters his environment through paying attention to detail and sheer hard work. But, contrary to the claims of capitalism's apologists, when Crusoe raised his goats, dried his grapes and tended his garden plot, he did not convert the results of his labour into "property".¹¹ He was just a man on an island. There can, in other words, be no property outside society.

Of course, Crusoe goes on to save Friday from the cannibals and then puts him to work digging, planting, harvesting, carrying and fetching. Two more "subjects" are added to Crusoe's "kingdom": Friday's father and a Spaniard. They too work for Crusoe's benefit. Then, and only then, might we begin to talk of "property".¹² Crusoe, it should be added, got to know his little Caribbean island: its plants, wild animals, seasons, fresh water sources, tides, etc (that is, the natural resources). He also took great care to keep control over the seven muskets, two fowling pieces, two pistols, shot and gunpowder he salvaged from his wrecked Portuguese slaver-ship (simultaneously the means to exploit nature, kill enemies and, if necessary, intimidate subjects).

What about law? Law serves to regulate social production and the results of social production. Legislation, court judgements, contracts, lawsuits and appeals go together to provide predictable boundaries, a certain flexibility and state-enforced decisions. Law can, moreover, be given a new content by successive social formations. With the fall of the western Roman empire, the Frankish, Visigothic and Lombard kingdoms drew upon elements of Roman law. In England the fragmented, custom-based

Anglo-Saxon law was maintained and developed by the Norman conquistadors to further their claims, interests ... and ideals.¹³ Law, it ought to be stressed, is closely related to ideology. Those who make the law always have a particular social ideal lodged in their heads.

Nonetheless, the money-economy was from the beginnings of feudalism working like a social acid. What the Normans called the 'law of Edward' - ie, the legal practices operating at the time of Edward the Confessor's death - thereby undergoes successive mutations. Law reached its highest stage with capitalist rule: in the late 19th century, it became common to talk of the "rule of law".¹⁴

Socialism, undoubtedly, appropriates various aspects of bourgeois law ... nevertheless, even when there is what might be called "proletarian law", the legal form, as such, is already in the process of "withering away".¹⁵ Communism proper dispenses with judges, barristers, prisons, the police, law books and all such crap. Instead there is mediation, arbitration and, hopefully, reconciliation (already the practice in the more enlightened capitalist countries, when it comes to various social issues).

However, as we have repeatedly argued, far from withering away, the legal system in the Soviet Union, just like the ever-expanding state machine, was deemed to have an ever growing role to play in protecting "state property" - pilfering was endemic, though state property supposedly belonged to the "whole people".¹⁶ The anti-worker, anti-peasant thrust of legislation in the 1930s and 40s is unmistakable.

In this context - ie, post-1928-29 - those associated with the Marxist idea of law withering away were denounced as wreckers in the field of jurisprudence. Eg, Pēteris Stučka - commissar for justice in November 1917 and later chair of the supreme court of the RSFSR. Many were arrested, many were executed. Stalin wanted the law to instil a glacial fear into the hearts of the population. Judges, therefore, had to be bound to the principle of retribution. In a series of polemics Andrej Vyshinsky championed 'legal formalism': adversarial trials, law as a series of strict rules, interpreting the law to accord with original intent, etc. All lauded as high cultural achievements that ought to be strengthened and rigorously enforced (not that that prevented Soviet law being extraordinarily arbitrary in practice, even post-Stalin that continued to be the case¹⁷).

Yet, to make the salient point, society's property relations and, closely related to that, the ever expanding body of Soviet law, were *second-order*, not *first-order* determinates. Draconian legislation and the population's willingness to flout the law; the Stalin cult and residual Bolshevism; Russo-centric Soviet nationalism and the underground existence of rival nationalisms; state hostility towards religion and the continued hold of religion - all such factors collide, interact and colour real-life events. In many cases, amidst the swirling multitude of accidents, this or that superstructural phenomenon will largely determine the resulting *forms*. Nevertheless, it is economic realities which ultimately assert themselves "as something inevitable" (Engels).¹⁸

When it comes to locating the Soviet Union in historical terms, it is not what it said about itself in central committee resolutions, ministerial speeches, constitutions, legal rulings, socialist-realist novels and newspaper articles that are decisive. That hardly needs saying. Nor, however, are property relations decisive. Though property relations provide the foundations for the legal superstructure

and therefore stand in close proximity to the relations of production, *in the final analysis* what is crucial are the relations and forces of production themselves. Surely then, the task of the serious investigator is to search out, discover and fearlessly present what lies at the most fundamental level of determination.

State property, in and of itself, has nothing to do with socialism: that is for sure. Ancient China, Babylonia, India's Mauryan empire, the Incas all presided over state lands, state projects, state trade and state serfs. And, of course, there is the "state monopoly capitalism" Lenin discussed. That Trotsky relied on the Soviet state's property relations - ie, the legal expression of the relations of production - just goes to show the tenuous, the superficial nature of his claim that the post-1928-29 Soviet Union remained a workers' state.

Departments

Nonetheless, Trotsky was fully aware of the ruthless extraction of surplus product. Determined to catch up with the west, the regime resorted to the "classic methods of exploitation" and to "such naked and crude forms as would not be permitted even by reformist trade unions in bourgeois countries".¹⁹ And, therefore, while Trotsky credited the apparatus with defending socialistic production, he denounced the forms of distribution as capitalistic. "Where there is scarcity," he said, "there will be a struggle of each against all."²⁰ Under such circumstances, the 'parasitic' apparatus was bound to win out.

Yet the fact of the matter is that the apparatus did considerably more than parasitically misappropriate the best houses, holiday resorts, medical facilities, schools and consumer goods. The apparatus was just as intrinsic to the system as workers and peasants. As Gosplan, the apparatus drew up detailed target figures and did its best to allocate resources and monitor results; as management, the apparatus directly involved itself in the production process, right down to the shop floor. And, though the apparatus could only exert partial control over the product, there can be no doubt that the production process *as a whole* was designed to serve the interests of the apparatus (including the infatuations, enthusiasms and hunches of various top leaders).

The consumption of the apparatus clearly amounted to far more than the use-values they and their families enjoyed. Output that is destined to go to the state machine ought to be included too. Hence, when it comes to department B, it might be helpful if we broke it up into three parts (department A being the production of the means of production and department B being the production of the means of consumption).

Department B can be presented as department B (i) and department B (ii). Department B (i) is the means of consumption going to reproduce workers and peasants. Department B (ii) accounts for the items of *individual* consumption going to the apparatus. When it comes to that portion of output that goes to the armed forces, the prison system, the propaganda machine, the secret police, etc, it is worth designating it as an entirely separate department in its own right. Department B (iii), or, given its sheer scale, what we might call department C, represents the production of the *collective* consumption of the apparatus.

Anyway, what Trotsky believed to be the dual nature of Soviet society - socialistic production, capitalistic consumption - saw him insist upon the inherently unstable nature of the regime. One-man management - of the entire system - could organise production along military lines and ensure the atomisation of the

population. That notwithstanding, a social formation which cannot rationally plan, which is dogged with poor-quality products, which has its pre-history in a proletarian-led revolution, which organises wave after wave of mass killing of its own leading cadre, which faces a hostile world of revisionist powers - such a social formation can only but be extraordinarily fragile.

In the "interests of clarity and simplicity", Trotsky concluded that the Soviet Union ought to be defined as a "contradictory society".²¹ And, as such, either it would succumb to a *violent* capitalist counterrevolution, from within or from without; that, or there would be a *violent* political revolution, which restores the working class to its rightful place - any such development being closely connected to the world revolution. Incidentally, the emphasis on violence has nothing to do with any bloodlust. Trotsky discounted the possibility of a peaceful capitalist counterrevolution, because the working class, having come to power, would not allow the restoration of capitalism without putting up the stiffest opposition.

He clearly refused to countenance even the possibility that the first five-year plan and the 1930s orgy of killings was a social counterrevolution within the revolution. As for a violent political revolution, Trotsky knew that Stalin and his henchmen would never give up their power, their privileges, their grand ambitions without putting up the stiffest opposition too. The supposed lack of *violent* counterrevolution served, for Trotsky, as proof that the Soviet Union remained a workers' state, albeit a degenerate one. Given the largely peaceful events of 1989-91, a proposition that has demonstrably been disproven. There was counterrevolution within the counterrevolution.

Heirs and successors

On the supposed ladder of historical progress Trotsky depicted the Soviet Union as having taken one step forward with October 1917 and half a step backwards with the Stalin regime. The Soviet Union could either take a half-step up or a half-step down. Standing mid-air, so to speak, was clearly untenable. Trotsky convinced himself that the Stalin regime would not be able to survive the coming world war - a war that everyone, apart from the determinedly naive, expected.

When it did survive, when it became the world's second superpower, when it put in place a defensive outer wall of people's democracies, that was bound to trigger a profound crisis in the so-called Fourth International.

But Trotsky's post-1945 heirs and successors could not bring themselves to radically rethink the 'degenerate workers' state' theory. Instead they adapted themselves to the unanticipated reality of the 'socialist camp'. Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel, Nahuel Moreno, Juan Posadas, Gerry Healy, James Robertson, Jack Barnes and Ted Grant not only normalised the abnormal situation in the Soviet Union. Eastern Europe, China, North Korea, North Vietnam, etc were given the title 'deformed workers' states' and likewise credited with being "in transition from capitalism to socialism". In 1951 Michel Pablo (Michel Raptis), then the leading figure in the Fourth International, argued that World War III was "unavoidable" and that the transition period would "probably" take "several centuries".²² True, he saw the "Stalinist or Stalinized leadership" as a temporary phenomenon, nevertheless, the fact of the matter was that Trotsky was convinced that Stalin's regime could survive no more than a few years. Now it had not only survived but spread.

The problem of how there could be a workers' state in the absence of a working class revolution remained. The solution lay in the theory of 'structural assimilation'. Georgia, the Baltic countries and eastern Poland had been absorbed into the Soviet Union both territorially ... and socially. Now eastern Europe, China, North Korea, etc were being absorbed - not territorially, but socially - through the "combined efforts of internal forces and the external role of the USSR".²³ A perfectly reasonable idea ... except, of course, that the Soviet Union remained wrongly categorised.

Either way, the unintended consequence of the theory, for its Fourth International advocates, was that the October Revolution went from being the model to a magnificent exception. The centrality of working class self-liberation, democracy and the Marxist programme had to become ever less central. Gradually, step by step, these principles morph into final aims, optional extras - or, with the most degraded fragments, antiquated relics. Stalin's T34s, Tito's partisans, 'official communist' parties, national liberation movements, Mao's cultural revolution, leftwing army officers, the CIA-financed *Solidarność*, oil-state bonapartes, formless protest movements, Iran's theocrats ... and eventually Nato's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine - all have been proclaimed as being in the vanguard of world progress.

The idea that there could be no return to capitalism without violent counterrevolution had long before been thoroughly internalised. We were endlessly told that the 'film of history' could not be run backwards. Such was the mantra into the late 1980s ... and, amazingly, well into the 1990s.

Yet, it is clear, a largely peaceful restoration of the "bourgeois order" was no chimera. Khrushchev's deStalinisation resulted in Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, not the revival of the socialist working class, as Isaac Deutscher and others in and around the Fourth International expected.²⁴ Despite the noticeable absence of a conscious working class, Gerry Healy - and, after him, Tariq Ali - hailed Gorbachev, then Yeltsin, as being the personification of Trotsky's political revolution.²⁵ To put it mildly, an error of judgement.

Under sustained criticism, Ernest Mandel abandoned the dogmatic claim that the Soviet Union was inherently superior to capitalism - a society destined to outcompete the advanced capitalist countries in one field after another. He was forced to admit the waste, the irrationality, the economic slowdown, the growing possibility of capitalist restoration. However, in terms of the system's "objective contradictions", Mandel stuck to the triad of bureaucratic (socialistic) property forms, bureaucratic (capitalistic) distribution, and bureaucratic parasitism. And, showing an enduring

inability to grasp the real movement of history, Mandel expressed his admiration for Gorbachev and the "modernist wing" of the apparatus: a social stratum which he still insisted on defining as a "faction" of the working class.²⁶

Again to put it mildly, another error of judgement ●

Notes

1. See J Diamond *Collapse: how societies chose to fail or survive* London 2006.
2. O Sanchez-Sibony *Red globalization: the political economy of the Soviet cold war from Stalin to Khrushchev* Cambridge 2016, pp5-6.
3. For my most recent articles, see 'First plan backgrounds' *Weekly Worker* June 15 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1447/first-plan-backgrounds); and 'First plan realities' *Weekly Worker* June 22 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1448/first-plan-realities).
4. L Trotsky *The revolution betrayed* New York 1980, p248.
5. See D Lazare, 'Serious problem', *Letters Weekly Worker* July 27 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1453/letters).
6. K Gray and SF Gray *Land law* Oxford 2011, p32.
7. EB Pashukanis *The general theory of law and Marxism* New Brunswick NJ 2003, p98n.
8. J Locke *Two treatises on government* London 1821, p208 - my emphasis.
9. A Smith *Wealth of nations* London 1937, p1.
10. *Ibid* p2.
11. See F Bastiat *The Bastiat collection* Auburn AL 2007; MN Rothbard *Man, economy and state* Auburn AL 2006; and his *Ethics of liberty* New York 2002; U Grapard and G Hewitson (eds) *Robinson Crusoe's economic man: a construction and deconstruction* Abingdon 2011.
12. S Hymer 'Robinson Crusoe and the secret of primitive accumulation' *Monthly Review* September 2011.
13. Thanks to Mike Macnair for giving me a steer on law during late antiquity and early feudalism.
14. A term popularised by the British jurist and constitutional expert, Albert Venn Dicey. He first used it in 1875. See FW Lawson *The Oxford law school: 1885-1965* Oxford 1968, p72.
15. PI Stučka, R Sharlet, PB Maggs and P Beirne *Selected writings on Soviet law and Marxism* London 1988, p9.
16. Article 6 *Constitution of the USSR* Moscow 1969, p13.
17. See AM Yakolev *Striving for law in a lawless land: memoirs of a Russian reformer* London 1996.
18. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 49, New York 2001, p35.
19. L Trotsky *The revolution betrayed* New York 1980, p82.
20. *Ibid* p55.
21. *Ibid* p254.
22. M Pablo, 'Where are we going?' January 1951 - www.marxists.org/archive/pablo/1951/01/where.html.
23. Apparently, the idea of 'structural assimilation' was originally coined by Ernest Mandel around about in 1950, but he then dropped it. Wohlforth redeveloped it in relation to Cuba, but kept his head down till his break with Healy. See 'The theory of structural assimilation' (1964) - www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/wohlforth/1962/communistsagainstrevelution.pdf.
24. I Deutscher, 'Russia in transition' *Universities and Left Review* spring 1957, Vol 1, No1. See banmarchive.org.uk/universities-left-review/spring-1957-vol-1-no-1/russia-in-transition.
25. See G Healy, 'Political revolution in the USSR - a process of contradiction' *Marxist Monthly* Vol 1, No7, September 1988; T Ali *Revolution from above: where is the Soviet Union going?* London 1988. Tariq Ali's gem was actually dedicated to Boris Yeltsin.
26. See E Mandel *Beyond perestroika: the future of Gorbachev's USSR* London 1991 ppxi-xii.

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IRELAND

Defending neutrality

What are so-called socialists doing upholding the foreign policy of their 'own' bourgeois state? **Anne McShane** upholds the principles of international socialism

Recently, in June 2023, the Irish Neutrality League completed a series of 'People's forums': Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway. Besides the veteran Bernadette McAliskey (appearing via Zoom), other speakers included Richard Boyd Barrett (People Before Profit TD), Catherine Connolly (independent TD), Mairead Farrell (Sinn Féin TD), Frances Black (independent senator), Carol Fox of the Peace and Neutrality League (PANA) and Dublin councillor Daithí Doolan (Sinn Féin). Amongst those hosting the events were Action for Ireland (Afri), Irish Anti-War Movement and the Irish Network for Non-Violent Action.

Formed in September 2022 the Irish Neutrality League is a "broad-based umbrella group" according to PBP. In other words, one of those unpopular popular fronts, where the left allows nationalist and pacifist forces to set the political agenda.

Let us take a look at the INL's main component parts. PBP, well, its dominant Socialist Worker Network, is aligned with the International Socialist Tendency headed by Alex Callinicos in London. Despite that, or because of that, PBP dreams of entering a Sinn Féin government as a junior partner. A well-trod path that sees leftwingers of yesterday become today's responsible statesmen.

Then there is PANA. Established in 1996 as a front for the 'official' Communist Party of Ireland it advocates "an independent Irish foreign policy, maintain Irish neutrality and promote a transformed United Nations as the organisation through which Ireland should pursue its security concerns". Indeed the CPI's latest political resolution declares that "CPI affirms the sovereign right of nations to self-determination without external interference and supports a broad, UN-based order of sovereign states underpinned by international law".¹ Afri similarly states that it is "guided by the primary goal of the UN Charter: 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'".²

And then to Sinn Féin. Its spokesperson on foreign affairs and defence, Matt Carthy TD, made a submission to a recent government forum on International Security Policy (held to provide a veneer of public engagement around its project of closer cooperation with Nato). In it he confirmed SF's commitment to an "independent foreign policy and military neutrality" and called for a referendum to enshrine military neutrality in the constitution. This, Carthy declared, is not isolationism;

On the contrary, as is rightly the case with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, our position as a neutral country provides a strong platform on which to identify breaches of international law, occupation, annexation and military aggression when they present. Nor does it mean that Ireland cannot take actions in response to such aggression and breaches of international law. Ireland can and should advocate for sanctions, diplomatic and economic, seek to amend trading relationships and provide non-lethal and humanitarian supports to states who are the victims of such actions.

So SF *does* support war. Sanctions are invariably the first weapons of



Nothing remotely progressive about neutrality

war, and impact the working class of that country, who lose jobs and see prices rocket, as capitalists relocate to safer pastures (witness the current flight of the Russian oligarchs on 'ghost planes' to Dubai). And SF has also pledged "non-lethal" backup to war efforts - exactly what the Irish government is currently providing to Ukraine.

The same Matt Carthy was reported in the *Irish Times* on May 13 as having stated that, if in government, SF would not automatically withdraw from any existing arrangements made with Nato, including involvement with Pesco and Partnership for Peace - two Nato fronts. He stated that "we will not withdraw Irish defence forces from pre-committed operations and exercises" and any future initiatives would be judged based on the principles and opportunities that neutrality provides.²

PBP responded with feigned alarm: "If this is not true, Sinn Féin should come out and strongly deny the *Irish Times* reports. If they do not, this is a grave retreat from genuine neutrality."³ But neither Carthy nor SF has resiled from this statement, which was clearly deliberately made to reassure the European Union and Nato that it presents no threat to the established order.

International

The INL, which styles itself on the organisation of the same name established in 1914, states in its pledge: "We define Irish neutrality as non-participation in wars and military alliances, as set out in the 1907 Hague Convention V, and as the positive engagement in the peaceful, non-military resolution of political conflicts."⁴ Therefore it is for the

peaceful coexistence of capitalist states. It follows that the majority explicitly espouse the virtues of the UN, which is presented as a force for good, acting in the interests of "international law" (itself code for peace).

But reality tells a very different story. The UN has a long and bloody history of voting for wars and sanctions. The first Iraq war was launched by UN resolution in 1991. A devastating attack, as so-called 'smart bombs' rained down on Baghdad and other Iraqi cities, resulting in a death toll of more than 50,000. Sanctions followed, including the deadly 1997 'Oil for food' programme. The UN 'peace missions', of which there are currently 12 in operation, are designed to ensure that the imperialist world order is sustained. The US has enormous power over the UN and its decision-making and global programmes, including the awarding of contracts, education programmes and women's rights. A cursory glance at its record will show it is a deeply partisan body, and certainly not a humanitarian one.

SF is clear that it wants Ireland to play a part on the world stage. "Military neutrality" means not sending soldiers to fight, but anything else is just fine - including being involved in the military training of Nato-approved armies.

But what of the so-called left? The CPI still pays lip service to Marxism. The same goes for SWN. One of its leaders, Kieran Allen, wrote a piece on the relevance of James Connolly's attitude to World War I in March 2022. He argued that:

James Connolly was aligned with a small number of revolutionaries

who argued that ending war could only be achieved by the overthrow of capitalist rule. Lenin argued for revolutionary defeatism, Karl Liebknecht that the "main enemy is at home", while Connolly put it more bluntly, writing that "The signal of war ought to have been the signal of rebellion ... when the bugle sounded the first note of actual war, their notes should have been taken as the tocsin for social revolution."⁵

This same Lenin also argued that there should be no concessions made to the myth concerning the 'neutrality' of small nations in such circumstances. In early 1917 he wrote opposing the Swiss social-patriot assertion that "We Swiss are defending our neutrality: we have stationed troops on our boundaries for the express purpose of avoiding participation in this robber war!"⁶ This, he argued, was perpetuating a deceit by presenting the Swiss bourgeoisie as genuinely independent from the rest of the capitalist world order and in some way democratic:

Swiss banking capital is intimately associated and intertwined with the banking capital of the great powers ... Moreover, Switzerland has reached a much higher level of capitalist development than Romania and Bulgaria. There can be no question whatever of a popular 'national' movement in Switzerland: that period in its historical development ended many centuries ago.⁷

In contrast to Lenin, Boyd Barrett very definitely adopted the position of the Swiss social patriots in an article in

March 2022. In it he argued strongly that Ireland had to remain neutral in the new circumstances of war - "the idea that the invasion of Ukraine, monstrous as it is, requires Ireland to reconsider its neutrality makes no sense".⁸ This was despite the fact that the Irish political establishment has "succeeded in ensuring that in terms of actual policy Ireland has always operated firmly in the camp of US imperialism". And now the government is trying to further undermine popular support for neutrality: "Opinion poll after opinion poll has shown big majorities in favour of neutrality and *not* subordinating Ireland to the Nato war machine."

Rebel

Boyd Barrett believes that "retaining a position of neutrality is vital", as "potentially it gives Ireland a platform to give a positive political lead in the world". He gives the expulsion of the Israeli and Russian ambassadors by a future left government as something which would "send an enormously powerful statement against imperialist occupation and oppression around the world". Those who question his strategy, who say that "Irish neutrality has already been so eroded that it is not worth defending any more", miss the point. For Boyd Barrett,

Even the fig leaf of neutrality that still exists does constrain our political establishment to some degree, which is why they would like to get rid of it. Moreover, a successful people power campaign to defend it would offer the potential to make the neutrality much more real.

The idea that Ireland has ever been neutral is blatant nonsense. Since its adoption as a political position by Éamon de Valera at the outset of World War II, it was never more than a masquerade. At the time it had a lot to do with the fact that blatant support for the British military might have stirred up republican opposition. But Ireland has always been politically in the pay of imperialism - British and US.

The the Irish state's participation in the Ukraine war and its ever-increasing involvement in Nato does need to be opposed. But not by calling for the government to comply with a policy of neutrality that has never existed. Or to create illusions in SF as a benign force, when it has made it clear that it supports international imperialism's current adventures.

This campaign for 'neutrality' is a form of small-nation patriotism. Internationalism is replaced by a nationalism founded on myths and lies. Those members of the PBP who still consider themselves Marxists should rebel ●

Notes

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2. www.irishtimes.com/politics/2023/05/13/sinn-fein-drops-pledges-to-withdraw-from-eu-and-nato-defence-arrangements.
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OUR HISTORY



Clean breaks and clear principles

Today's left largely misunderstands and therefore misrepresents Clara Zetkin's contribution to the politics of Marxism. **Ben Lewis** provides an excerpt from the introduction to a newly translated pamphlet

The *women's and women workers' question of our time* (1889) - translated into English in this pamphlet for the first time - marked the beginning of Clara Zetkin's meteoric rise in the German and international workers' movement. Her command of English, French, German and Italian facilitated her emergence as a highly respected leader, whose extraordinary career spanned almost four stormy decades of work and struggle in various countries.

Born in Saxony, she lived for several years in exile in Paris thanks to Otto von Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Law and spent most of her later life in the Soviet Union, where she eventually died in 1933, just months after the National Socialists had taken power in Germany.

Zetkin was a journalist, theoretician and editor of several significant Marxist women's publications, such as the Social Democratic Party's *Die Gleichheit* (1892-1917), the women's supplement to the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* (1917-19), the Communist Party of Germany's *Die Kommunistin* (1919-26) and the Communist International's *Die Kommunistische*

Fraueninternationale (1921-25). She was a leading member of the radical wing of the SPD, chair of the first meeting of socialist women anti-war activists in 1915, a member of the anti-war Independent Social Democracy (USPD), a communist Reichstag parliamentarian (1920-33), a pedagogue, historian, art and literature critic, a translator, member of the Communist International's executive committee, president of the proletarian solidarity group, *Rote Hilfe* (Red Aid), secretary of the Socialist Women's International (1907-17), co-organiser of the first International Women's Day in 1911 and a permanent feature of every SPD party congress of the Second International from 1889 until 1914.

Her wide-ranging activities earned her something akin to celebrity status within the international movement of her time, with even some of her fiercest political opponents holding her dedication, wide-ranging knowledge and political acumen in high esteem. And, although she amended, developed and deepened her ideas on the question of socialism and women's liberation in particular throughout her life, this pamphlet - her first - serves as a reliable compass

**Clara Zetkin was a
 journalist, theoretician,
 editor of several significant
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 member of the anti-war
 Independent Social
 Democracy and a
 communist Reichstag
 deputy**

for navigating the entirety of her subsequent political career. Until her last breath, this career was informed by the conviction that the historically conditioned oppression of women could only be consigned to the status of a footnote in human history by the overthrow of capitalism. Only this could dispense with production for production's sake and thereby transcend the alienated social relations between all human beings, by creating the conditions in which all could become fully-rounded individuals (*Vollmenschen*) for the first time.

Crucially, this required the working class as a whole - women alongside men - uniting in internationally coordinated revolutionary parties with the aim of overthrowing the political rule of the bourgeoisie and ushering in a new social order. As she puts it, "... we must not place the interests of male and female workers in hostile opposition to each other, but must unite them both into a unified mass that represents workers' interests in general, in opposition to the interests of capital." And it was this belief that explains her emphasis on the need to establish a distinct social democratic

women's movement, independent of pro-capitalist women's associations and clubs, to struggle against the rise of opportunism within the SPD and the Second International, and to uphold the erstwhile revolutionary spirit of the SPD and the International in the face of their collapse following the outbreak of war in 1914. In that sense, Zetkin is a powerful symbol, a representative of the hundreds of thousands of social democratic workers internationally who remained faithful to the axioms of *revolutionary social democracy*.

The fact that it has taken over 130 years for this pamphlet to be translated into English reveals something significant about the fate of Zetkin's legacy during the 20th century, which mirrors the decline of Marxist thought in the workers' movement in particular and in society more generally. And, while *formal* equality between men and women is a significant established fact in various countries across the world, the radical Marxist driving force and inspiration behind such key gains as female suffrage, reproductive rights, social and welfare provisions and even International Women's Day itself has largely been expunged from

OUR HISTORY

popular consciousness. Well-heeled representatives of the establishment in politics, media and academia pass off such hard-fought freedoms as somehow intrinsic to the capitalist mode of production. What is more, Zetkin's project of achieving the full socio-political equality of men and women is far from being realised even in countries where the struggle for women's emancipation has made the greatest inroads. Ongoing bigotry and prejudice, the gender pay gap, exploding childcare costs, attacks on women's reproductive rights, domestic, sexual and anti-trans violence - these are just some of the various ugly manifestations of sexual oppression.

Revisiting the life and work of Zetkin, one of the founders of the socialist women's movement, can help shed light on the nature of the exploitation of women and women's labour under capitalism, challenge the cosy pro-capitalist consensus dominant in today's mainstream women's movement and provide fresh impetus for the left in approaching a question that it has either misconstrued, unappreciated or simply ignored. Indeed, while Zetkin's life would suggest itself as an obvious point of reference for the left in seeking to reformulate a socialist politics of women's emancipation, it is only recently that we have witnessed something of a modest revival of interest in her legacy. But recent scholarship and translation efforts are only beginning to scratch the surface of her vast theoretical and journalistic output, which was highly controversial during her time and remains so to this day.

It is above all the contentious nature of Zetkin's personality and her ideas that makes her legacy as ambivalent as it is disputed, as complex as it is divisive, today. This is particularly evident when it comes to the thorny relationship and fierce theoretical, strategic and intellectual clashes between feminism and Marxism. Zetkin played a pioneering role in these disputes by calling for a clear line of political demarcation - a "clean break" - between the bourgeois movement of the "women's rightists" [*Frauenrechtlerinnen*] and the Marxist women's movement that she helped to establish and then lead as a movement of millions.¹ With some prescience, she warned of the futility of seeking equality without striving to transcend the capitalist mode of production:

The bourgeois women's movement raises the principal demand for the full legal and social equality of women and men. Its leaders claim that the realisation of this demand would have, indiscriminately, the same emancipatory significance for all women. This is wrong. The [bourgeois] women's rightists do not see, or do not wish to see, the fact - the decisive one when it comes to achieving a society based on full social human freedom or slavery - that an irreconcilable class antagonism splits bourgeois society, which is based on the capitalist mode of production, into the exploiters and rulers, on the one hand, and the exploited and ruled, on the other.

In the last instance, it is the class to which the woman belongs that determines her situation and lifestyle - not the community of the same sex, which, to varying degrees, is deprived of rights and oppressed in the interests of the dominant and privileged position of the man. Formal equality with the male sex in legal documents thus brings women of the exploited and oppressed class just as little actual social and human freedom as that enjoyed by the men of her class, despite the fact

that these men share the same sex as the men of the bourgeoisie.²

Women and men thus have to join forces within the framework of the workers' movement, and crucially within the revolutionary party, the duty of which is to "awaken the class-consciousness of the broad mass of proletarian women, to suffuse them with communist ideas and to rally them as fighters and collaborators for communism, who are determined for action, willing to make sacrifices and clear about their aims".³

Western distortion

Inter alia, Zetkin has been described as: "the most dangerous witch" of the second German empire (Kaiser Wilhelm II); "an anti-feminist and dogmatic communist";⁴ "an old witch" (Joseph Stalin); the "best friend of the Soviet Union and *babushka kommunizma* (grandmother of communism)";⁵ a woman who "sowed division and preached division" to the detriment of the women's movement and the socialist movement (Marilyn Boxer);⁶ a "marionette" of the Bolshevik leaders (Angelica Balabanova); a "museum figure who is hardly of interest to anybody" (the German weekly, *Die Zeit*); and as the embodiment of a "new woman" in Louis Aragon's *Bells of Basle*.

So how is it that somebody so admired by her contemporaries has largely been ignored by subsequent history? How is it that many militant and committed activists for women's rights who gather on International Women's Day every March 8 probably do not even know who Clara Zetkin was?

During the cold war, it was Zetkin's proximity to Lenin and Bolshevism in particular that made her *persona non grata* in the west and her former party, the SPD, ignored her to all intents and purposes. Florence Hervé notes that in the young Federal Republic of Germany after World War II, the March 8 demonstration - one of Zetkin's major achievements - was deemed "an event of the devil".⁷ Only the Communist Party of Germany (KPD, swiftly banned in 1952) and a small number of women's groups commemorated March 8 and "evoked the name of its founder".⁸

In the 1960s, in a slightly more relaxed political environment and with the rise of new social movements, there was a feminist rediscovery of Zetkin (of sorts) in West Germany - albeit one that was not exactly flattering to her. Why? Zetkin was, quite correctly, viewed as somebody who rejected notions of a cross-class 'universal sisterhood' of all women and who deployed much of her polemical skill in the struggle against this and similar feminist ideas. As such, Zetkin was posthumously held responsible for splitting the women's movement along class-political lines. For feminist thinkers, such an approach stunted and weakened the struggle for women's rights, but for Marxists this must surely count as one of her greatest theoretical and practical contributions to the cause of women's emancipation and to the history of Marxism.

According to Hervé, the first German 'socialist-feminist' groups of the 1960s did take a closer look at the (then barely available) writings of Zetkin on the emancipation of women, as well as those of August Bebel, Friedrich Engels and others. But what they mainly drew from these works was not the need for the organisational unity of men and women in a revolutionary party, but chiefly her arguments in favour of women's work (the importance of which Zetkin always stressed, as she does in this pamphlet) at a time when women were being portrayed

as destined for housewifery. In the 1980s, following two conferences dedicated to this issue, the German Communist Party (DKP) published a pamphlet with some of Zetkin's texts that made similar points.

And in 1980, the weighty German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB) decided not to take part in International Women's Day "for the sake of trade union unity" - after all, March 8 was "inspired by the resolution of the second International Women's Congress in Copenhagen in 1910" and is therefore a "political party day".⁹ Yet this line did not hold: more and more resolutions from individual trade unions and their branches demanded that March 8 be celebrated and eventually it was. True to opportunist form, a number of local SPD organisations would later have the temerity to produce posters for women's day that bear Zetkin's face and proclaim: "Our contribution to International Women's Day: International Women's Day!"

The fate of International Women's Day in a core state of the capitalist west is most telling: whereas it was once ignored as a marginal event of the loony left, the powers-that-be have taken it over in an attempt to reinvent themselves as consistent advocates of women's rights, thereby tearing March 8 from its roots within the revolutionary workers' movement. This went hand-in-hand with attempts to erase Zetkin from history altogether. In 1994, for instance, Helmut Kohl, then German chancellor, intervened to ensure that a street near the Reichstag in Berlin would not bear Zetkin's name. He claimed that Zetkin had played a part in the "destruction of the first German democracy, the Weimar Republic". Instead, the street name was changed to that of the supposed democrat and pioneer of women's liberation, princess Dorothea von Brandenburg.

Zetkin in the east

A rather different picture of Zetkin emerged in the German Democratic Republic, where she was idolised in typical 'official communist' fashion. She appeared on medals, stamps and banknotes and both she and March 8 were annually celebrated in a ritualistic manner.

In the early 1950s, Luise Dornemann wrote a biography of Zetkin under the watchful eye of the GDR's leaders, who were seeking to forge their own path of development following the turmoil of World War II.¹⁰ This work set the tone for the reception and dissemination of Zetkin's ideas in East Germany. The fact that a study of this kind was produced so early after the founding of the GDR in October 1949 underscores Zetkin's centrality to that state, with a carefully cultivated image of her life presented as a model to be dutifully emulated by its citizens. There was praise for Zetkin's outstanding achievements as a revolutionary and as a woman who was - in the title of another GDR study - "an epoch ahead"¹¹ of many of her contemporaries. There was also a recognition of the fact that her life spanned several key stages of the German workers' movement.

For the GDR historian and pedagogue, Gerd Hohendorf, Zetkin's life was "like a bridge that reaches from the founders of scientific socialism - she knew Friedrich Engels personally - to Lenin and those who began to build a new, human system in the Soviet Union".¹² Such an attempt to establish a lineage linking the leading lights of the pantheon is similar to the foundation myths of many states, religions and political organisations. But the notion that this "bridge" is at best wobbly - and at worst replete with faults and gaps - is not even entertained by any of the GDR historians writing

about her life and work. Ideological instrumentalisation is also obvious. For example, the early GDR state's perceived needs and self-image surely account for the fact that, on the occasion of Zetkin's 100th birthday in 1957, Inge Meyer, national secretary of the GDR's Democratic Women's League of Germany (DfD) amazingly referred to Zetkin as a "shining patriot" (my emphasis).¹³

What is striking about Zetkin's reception in the early GDR is that she was placed on a pedestal - not only when it came to the 'larger' questions of Marxist strategy, tactics and theory, but also in terms of her understanding of, and involvement in, what might be viewed as the more prosaic or 'everyday' issues: education, the upbringing of children, the training of young socialists, the theory of teaching and the teaching of theory.

At first sight, this portrayal of her life as a shining example to be emulated by younger socialists appears to be quite innocent, not least when it is accompanied by Dornemann's and Hohendorf's twee descriptions of her life as a talented young girl roaming the local countryside around her hometown of Wiederau, playing with the boys and developing her life-long passion for nature and discovery. But, given what we know about the GDR's practices of indoctrination and the significance of the notion that 'The party is always right' (Zetkin's political life revolved around demonstrating how the exact opposite was the case), we see a much darker side to this instrumentalisation of her legacy. This is particularly evident when it comes to the emphasis on her 'discipline', selflessness and (purportedly) uncritical devotion to the cause of socialism in the eastern bloc, where the claims of having ushered in the liberation of women did not match the harsh reality of women facing the 'triple burden' of work, family and party-political commitments.

Further, the concomitant of her Stalinist deification is that the controversies during the twilight years of her life - her fallings out with the KPD (not least over the

leftist 'third period' disaster and the condemnation of the social democrats as 'social fascists'),¹⁴ her annoyance at having her correspondence monitored, her frosty relationship with Uncle Joe Stalin and so forth - were simply buried by researchers in the east, where most of her private papers and correspondence were held under lock and key. This was standard practice for 'unreliable' historical figures. For example, it has only recently transpired that Zetkin's son, Maxim, compiled a complete, 34-volume collection of her "speeches and writings", which the ruling Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) in the GDR refused to publish and which has since gathered dust in the *Bundesarchiv* in Berlin alongside her correspondence.

The highly sanitised image of Zetkin in the GDR should come as no surprise, because in her letters in particular she did not pull any punches, when it came to the consequences of Stalin's policies for the KPD and for Germany. As she put it in a letter to Ossip Piatnitsky, "Developments are catastrophic. The 'line' [imposed by the Stalin leadership on the KPD] destroys everything that Marx's theory has taught us and what Lenin's practice has shown to be historically correct."¹⁵

That being said, it cannot be denied that some of Zetkin's weakest writings sometimes revolve around a rather desperate defence of 'Soviet democracy' - even after the collapse of the Left-Socialist Revolutionary/Bolshevik coalition government in 1918, the enormous strains of the civil war and the erosion of the soviets as organs of popular, democratic self-governance. And, while she was no fan of Stalin, she certainly threw her weight behind the campaign to marginalise sections of the opposition, including figures such as Leon Trotsky, Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev. In a private letter, she likened their political approach to that of "lunatics or criminals".¹⁶

Moreover, her internationalism was tainted by her continued attachment to the fallacious idea that socialism could be achieved within the boundaries of the Soviet

Fighting fund You did it!

Congratulations and thanks very much to everyone who chipped in to ensure we made our £2,250 fighting fund target for July. A total of £277 came our way in the last few days of the month, taking the total amount raised to £2,303. Well done, everyone!

Thanks in particular to comrade PM, who made a crucial bank transfer of £75 on the very last day of the month, while comrades JT and BK (£25 each), VP and MD (£10) used the same method - most of those payments being standing orders.

Then there were the comrades who used PayPal: DB with his monthly £50 and JM with his one-off payment of a rather unusual donation (£47), TB (£20) and AR (£5) - along with his monthly standing order for the same amount. Finally, comrade Hassan handed his usual cash contribution to one of our comrades, this time for a fiver. Not bad at all - and in sharp contrast to the previous three months, when we failed to reach our target.

Now let's see if we can do the necessary once again in August. As usual, the start of the month saw the usual flurry of transfers/standing orders - our thanks to

EW (£50), BK (£20), MT and BG (£15 each), TM (£13), GB and MM (£11), CP, AN, TM and DI (£10), and finally DC and JS (£6 each). That means we start the month with £187 in the kitty after just two days.

So now let's make sure we do the necessary once again - I can't stress enough how much we rely on our readers and supporters to ensure we keep up our consistent, principled call for a single, democratic, Marxist party.

But remember, this month you'll have a break from me nagging you - in a couple of weeks we're going to have our annual fortnight August break coinciding with the CPGB's Communist University. That means that next week will be the last issue until August 31 - so no *Weekly Worker* on the 17th or 24th.

I'll tell you what - help to ease my worries by sending me your donations in the next day or two, and hopefully I'll report the good news on how we're doing next week! ●

Robbie Rix

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

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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Union alone, albeit - as she always stressed - as a step on the road to the increasingly remote idea of world revolution. There is undoubtedly a tragic aspect to her powerlessness in the face of the Stalinist bureaucracy. But even as late as 1932 she wrote a letter to Maria Reese in Germany which was scathing about the Stalinist ideologues' distortion of the history of the left wing of the Second International. Such literature sought to claim that Lenin and the Bolsheviks had created a 'party of a new type', and that the SPD left should have split from the SPD before World War I and become a qualitatively different party. As she points out, this was certainly not Lenin's position, but rather was a reflection of a bureaucratized and authoritarian regime that was replacing historical inquiry with "hero worship" and quote-culling ... what she deems "obsequious cowardice" before Stalin and his acolytes.¹⁷

Not a feminist

As we alluded to above, a major factor in Zetkin's marginalisation is that her ideas were largely unpalatable to the feminist movement of the 1960s-70s. Zetkin was a trenchant and outspoken critic of bourgeois 'women's rights' or 'feminism' and upheld the need for independent working class politics throughout her life. This strident stance has led to a certain ambiguity in her reception: Marxist and feminist thinkers alike are divided on whether to call Zetkin a 'feminist' and over the extent to which her legacy can or should be appropriated by either movement today.

Zetkin's anti-feminism has not prevented modern-day authors on both sides of the dividing line from presenting her as a 'feminist', with some even attempting to unite the two interpretative strands by referring to her as a "socialist feminist", "Marxist feminist" or "red feminist". This attempt to 'red-wash' feminism is, of course, not restricted to Zetkin, but also applied to other pioneering communist women, such as Inessa Armand, Alexandra Kollontai and Nadezhda Krupskaya.¹⁸ Such approaches are completely misleading and reflect the current weakness of Marxist ideas and organisations.

For a start, Zetkin could not have been a "socialist feminist", because *sozialistischer Feminismus* did not exist as a political category in her time. The terms *Frauenrechtlerin* or *Frauenrechtlerinnen* are often misleadingly translated, by projecting

today's language back onto her times, as 'feminists' or 'feminism'. This seemingly minor historical-linguistic mistake has fed into the feminist distortion of Zetkin's life and legacy today. For, although in the Dutch and French literature of the time the term 'feminist' (*féministe*) is used to describe the activities of the bourgeois women's movement, this is not the case in the literature of the German proletarian women's movement. Here, the bourgeois women's movement is referred to in derogatory terms as "*Frauenrechtlerer*" in order to create political distance from its aims and activities.¹⁹ In fact, Zetkin had to argue for such organisational and political distance not only in the face of the opponents and enemies of the SPD, but also against some within the ranks of the party - not least Lily Braun and her supporters in its 'revisionist' wing - who accused Zetkin of "dogmatism" and who sought to blur the lines of demarcation between the proletarian women's movement and the bourgeois 'women's rights'.

Zetkin was forthright in her response: "The class-conscious proletariat cannot and must not tolerate the emergence of 'women's-rightist' views within its ranks that cloud and overrun the socialist point of view, nor can it tolerate the struggle between the sexes replacing the struggle between classes."²⁰ I have not encountered a single instance where Zetkin used the term, 'socialist feminism'. And only in the later years of her life did she use the term, 'feminism', which is referred to pejoratively. Describing the activity of the pro-capitalist, social democratic women's movement in 1928, for instance, she wrote:

The social democratic women's movement has been bourgeoisified. It differs from feminism in the contest for loyal members only in its *phraseology*, not its *essence*. It no longer takes the lead in the political parties and trade unions with which it is associated by clarifying the problems of the women's question, by stimulating and enriching practice. It is the docile handmaiden of these organisations in the service of the big bourgeoisie.²¹

These fundamental points must be kept in mind if we are to approach Zetkin's legacy with fresh eyes today, free from some of the distortions to which it has been subjected. Leftwing feminists such as Florence Hervé

and Jean Quataert, for instance, not only use the term *Feminismus* in an ahistorical fashion, but compound the confusion by painting Zetkin and her comrades as "reluctant feminists", whose political work "appears ... decidedly feminist".²² Why? Once again, they project categories and definitions backwards in time by spuriously claiming that the term, 'feminist', should apparently apply "to all those in the 19th century who supported express efforts to ameliorate the conditions of women through public *organised* activity, be it for educational, legal, political, economic or social purposes".²³

This ahistorical and homogenising approach effectively erases the key class and political divisions between the two women's movements and what was distinct about Zetkin's revolutionary, working class approach to women's liberation. From a feminist perspective, this is quite understandable, because Zetkin's project is, at best, of its time and, at worst, responsible for what is perceived as largely unnecessary and unhelpful divisions within the movement for women's liberation - a project that is supposed to "transcend class".²⁴

But it is far more problematic when self-declared revolutionary Marxists follow the lead of those like Hervé and Quataert in describing Zetkin as a "socialist feminist". In so doing, they give expression to a certain regression in Marxist thought and historical self-understanding. The Trotskyist historian, Nathaniel Flakin, for instance, correctly points out that, because of its wide-ranging revolutionary content, Zetkin's *Die Gleichheit* was no "women's magazine" in the "bourgeois sense". Further, he adds, it was

no feminist magazine, either. Zetkin always maintained that there were as many women's movements as there were classes in bourgeois society. The two main women's movements - the bourgeois and proletarian movements - were thus irreconcilably opposed.

This notwithstanding, Flakin takes the distortions of feminist historiography - consciously or otherwise - as good coin, describing Zetkin as "The Grande Dame of Feminism" and a "legendary socialist feminist".²⁵

Much ink has been spilled on the controversial relationship between feminism and socialism that goes well beyond the scope of this brief introduction. But it is striking that many on the left have come to accept feminism's claims that Marxism approaches women's emancipation as a kind of "secondary concern, overshadowed by the larger task of the class struggle and preparation for the new society".²⁶ But, for genuine Marxism, "the fight against women's oppression, 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".²⁷

In the continued absence of direct access to the entirety of Zetkin's work in English, those of us seeking to interrogate her ideas are not yet in a position to assess her political life *as a whole* - ie, to grasp the evolution of her ideas on questions like the party, imperialism and women's organisation across her entire career. Yet acquiring a fuller picture of the life of such a towering figure is essential. Although she was active in a different social and political context, at a time when the left was a real force to be reckoned with, many of the controversies that surround her name feed into the burning questions

of our movement today. Fully grasping both her significance and shortcomings as a revolutionary also necessitates confronting much of the misleading, anti-Marxist 'common sense' that abounds in the discussion of her life and times across the political spectrum ●

The women's and women workers' question of our time is available in paperback (£8) and on Kindle (£5) from rosapublishing.co.uk

Notes

1. C Zetkin, 'Reinliche Scheidung' *Die Gleichheit* Vol 4, No8, April 18 1894.
2. C Zetkin, *Zur Geschichte der proletarischen Frauenbewegung Deutschlands* (1928): www.projekt-gutenberg.org/zetkin/prolfrau/chap010.html.
3. C Zetkin, 'Guidelines for the communist women's movement': marxismtranslated.com/?p=838.
4. *Ibid*.
5. *Ibid* (p44).
6. MJ Boxer, 'Clara Zetkin and France: eight-year exile, eighty-year influence', in *ibid* (p21).
7. F Hervé, 'Defamed in the west, idealised in the east? On the reception of Clara Zetkin in Germany after 1945', *ibid* (p45).
8. *Ibid*.
9. *Ibid* (p47).
10. L Dornemann *Clara Zetkin: Leben und Wirken* Berlin 1955.
11. See Pädagogische Hochschule Clara Zetkin, Forschungsgemeinschaft Geschichte des Kampfes der Arbeiterklasse um die Befreiung der Frau (ed), *Clara Zetkin: um eine Epoche Voraus* Verlag für die Frau 1970.
12. G Hohendorf *Clara Zetkin, Lebensbilder großer Pädagogen* Berlin 1965.
13. 'Clara Zetkin zum 100 Geburtstag' *Lernen und Handeln. Funktionärorgan des Demokratischen Frauenbundes Deutschlands* June 1957, p4.
14. Hohendorf, for instance, alleges that the Reichstag elections of June 31 1932 saw the KPD pursue a line of "consistent anti-fascism", which supposedly led to it gaining 12 more parliamentary seats; G Hohendorf *Clara Zetkin, Lebensbilder großer Pädagogen* p120.
15. G Badia *Clara Zetkin: eine neue Biographie* Berlin 1994, p255. The original French title of Badia's biography misleadingly portrays Zetkin as a "feminist without borders": G Badia *Clara Zetkin, féministe sans frontières* Paris 1993.
16. G Badia *Clara Zetkin: eine neue Biographie* p258. Publicly, she praised the contribution that the three figures had made to the revolution, but nonetheless went along with their expulsion. See, for instance, Zetkin's article, 'Trotsky's "exile" and social democracy' (1928): www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/archive/zetkinrot.htm.
17. See B Lewis, 'Clara Zetkin's spicy letter on party history': marxismtranslated.com/2023/02/clara-zetkins-spicy-letter-on-party-history-1932.
18. See, *inter alia*, B Evans Clements *Bolshevik feminist: the life of Aleksandra Kollontai* Bloomington 1979; R Carter Elwood *Inessa Armand: revolutionary and feminist* Cambridge 1992; K Ghodsee *Red Valkyries: feminist lessons from five revolutionary women* London 2022. In his purple praise for *Red Valkyries*, Slavoj Žižek remarkably describes it as a book that will help "feminism to rejoin its radical past": www.versobooks.com/en-gb/products/2880-red-valkyries.
19. In German Marxist literature of the time, the noun suffix 'lerei' was often used for derogatory and polemical effects. Rosa Luxemburg, for instance, referred to Eduard Bernstein's revisionist politics as 'Bernsteinlerei'. Translating these terms as 'women's rightism' and 'Bernsteinism' respectively does not quite do justice to the derisive tone of the original German.
20. C Zetkin, 'Noch einmal "reinliche Scheidung"' *Die Gleichheit* Vol 4, No15, July 25 1894, p115.
21. C Zetkin, 'Zur Geschichte der proletarischen Frauenbewegung' (1928): www.projekt-gutenberg.org/zetkin/prolfrau/chap011.html (emphasis added). Many thanks to Daniel Gaido for bringing this late use of the term 'feminism' to my attention.
22. M J Boxer and JH Quataert, 'The class and sex connection: an introduction', in Boxer and Quataert (eds) *Socialist women: European socialist feminism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries* New York 1978, p6.
23. *Ibid* p6.
24. JH Quataert *Reluctant feminists in German social democracy, 1885-1917* Princeton 1979, p11.
25. www.exberliner.com/politics/clara-zetkin-berlin-history-the-grande-dame-of-socialist-feminism. This approach amounts to something akin to 'common sense' among today's far left.
26. JH Quataert *Reluctant feminists in German social democracy, 1885-1917* Princeton 1979, p13.
27. 'CPGB: what we fight for', communistparty.co.uk/what-we-fight-for.

Summer Offensive

Almost halfway!

As we move into the final month of the Summer Offensive, we are pleased to report that the flow of donations has remained steady and that we are now nearly halfway to achieving our total objective of £20,000. We always emphasise the importance of the small, regular donations of supporters who buy the paper and help to spread the word about our politics. This week is no exception, with a number of small regular donations which have helped us to reach our weekly total, including £5 from Justin C, £10 from Dave I, £25 from Jamie T, £30 from Jack McC, £30 from TH, £40 from Bob T, as well as larger regular donations from Sarah Mac (£90), LM (£100) and £110 from Anne S. We also

need to thank comrades who have made larger donations, including Ben L (£150), AK (£250), MM (£300) and JB (£650).

As always, thanks to everyone who has contributed, helping to bring the weekly total up to £2,260, with the overall total raised so far, now standing at £9,858. As I say, we're almost halfway, but we can't rest on our laurels if we're going to reach the £20,000 target by the end of August. We have one more week to go before Communist University, so now is a good time for us all to up our fundraising efforts with a view to doubling our money by the end of August.

Let's get the month off to a good start and keep the donations - large and small - rolling in ●
James Harvey

weekly worker

**Different vision
for cities and
urban areas
urgently needed**

Clean air as a right

Following the Uxbridge by-election, there has been a huge row over the extension of London's Ulez scheme. Both Rishi Sunak and Sir Keir Starmer are standing up for the right to pollute. **Eddie Ford** stands up for the right to breathe clean, unpolluted air

We are going through the strange fallout from the Uxbridge and South Ruislip by-election. Apparently, Labour 'lost' the seat, even though the 14 parliamentary elections in this constituency, and its predecessor, returned the Conservative candidate.

Yet, as everybody knows, the planned expansion of the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (Ulez) into outer London at the end of this month has been endlessly cited as the reason for the Tory victory - despite substantial swings against the Tories and polls indicating that a slim majority of Londoners are in favour of the scheme.

As part of the backlash against Ulez - if not "green crap" in general, to use the immortal words of David Cameron - Rishi Sunak popped up on the front page of *The Daily Telegraph* to reassure motorists that he was "on their side" (July 29). His given reason is that the vast majority of people "are dependent on their cars" and that "anti-motorist" policies fail to take account of how "families live their lives". In other words, he wants their votes and will therefore promote the cult of the car.

It is a race to the bottom. Team Sunak are attempting to paint Sir Keir Starmer as the enemy of car drivers and the friend of Just Stop Oil. Yet team Starmer, in their pursuit of triangulation, are just one step behind the Tories. Sir Keir is publicly still urging London mayor, Sadiq Khan, to scrap the Ulez extension.

Sunak has also ordered Department for Transport officials to investigate Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, which have been rolled out across the towns and cities of the country - as if they are something wicked and not an attempt to reduce pollution and the number of children run down by cars and lorries. Indeed LTN schemes have been funded by central government since 2020 as a way of encouraging people to walk, cycle or use public transport.

Downing Street sources said the prime minister was "concerned by the levels of congestion outside the roads in which they are implemented", amid worries that the measures simply *displace* traffic to neighbouring areas. Or, to put it another way, places that would otherwise be rat runs¹ get blocked off - which, of course, is true because the whole ethos of the car economy has gone unchallenged.

Instead 'nudge' planners go about deliberately creating diversions, blocking right-turn lanes and lowering speed limits. The resulting jams, tailbacks and frustrations are meant to punish people out of using their cars. Whether that works or not is an open question. But it does leave lots of fuming motorists and ... potential Tory voters.

Furthermore, we have had the successful - at least if you are Sadiq Khan - battle over the expansion of Ulez in the High Court against the Tory-led outer London boroughs



Great smog 1952: London's Piccadilly Circus

of Bexley, Bromley, Harrow and Hillingdon, along with Surrey county council.

Challenge dismissed

Their barristers argued that Khan had failed to adequately consult, overstepped his powers, and had provided a flawed £110 million scrappage scheme for the most polluting vehicles (of which £68 million is still available). But the court dismissed the challenge, saying the legal basis on which Khan made the decision to expand Ulez was sound and in line with previous decisions on charging within the capital. So, as from August 29, if you drive anywhere within the zone - and your vehicle does not meet the emissions standards - you face a daily charge of £12.50.

The victorious Khan confirmed he would go ahead as planned at the end of August, and extend the remit of the scrappage scheme to help more affected Londoners - including all those in receipt of child benefit

payments. He also said the current zone had already reduced nitrogen dioxide air pollution by almost half in central London and there is no reason to doubt his claim.

Too many Londoners have or are developing life-changing illnesses such as cancer, asthma and lung disease, and there is a higher risk of dementia in older people. Air pollution contributes to the premature death of thousands of Londoners every year ... and it is not just a central London problem. In fact, the greatest number of deaths related to air pollution occur in outer London areas. Hence the logic of expanding Ulez across all London boroughs.

Hypocritically, Keir Starmer has backed Sadiq Khan's call for the government to put money behind a more generous scrappage scheme. After all, this is the man who said - with completely topsy-turvy logic - that the Labour Party must be doing something "very wrong" in Uxbridge if its policies "end up on each and

every Tory leaflet". In other words, a classic case of having it both ways and actually avoiding taking on the Tories. No, Sir Keir's strategy is to cosy up to the Tories without quite becoming the Tories.

Victories

Obviously, the £12.50 Ulez charge will tend to affect the poorer drivers - the ones experiencing the most acute problems because of the cost-of-living crisis. What is £12.50 for somebody who can afford to buy a Ferrari or Porsche? Nothing. Yet, the fact that such a charge will disproportionately hit the car-owning working class and petty bourgeoisie is something that communists cannot ignore. There ought to be tax breaks and subsidies. Having said that, if you take those who on average are affected most by air pollution, they will tend to be working class. However, even people living in leafy suburbs suffer, especially the very young and very old.

Here it is worth mentioning Rosamund Adoo-Kissi-Debrah from Lewisham, who is now being widely quoted in the capitalist media. Making legal history, her nine-year daughter was the first person to have on her death certificate 'air pollution caused by traffic' - Philip Barlow, the deputy coroner, saying that Ella's death in February 2013 was caused by the cumulative effect of the toxic air she was breathing, living within 30 metres of the South Circular Road, triggering her final acute asthma attack. The coroner said Ella was "like a canary in a coalmine" - signalling the risk to other Londoners from the toxic mix of air pollutants such as nitrogen oxides. It took seven years of campaigning by Rosamund to get that verdict, which was indeed a victory. She is now calling on MPs to introduce the Clean Air (Human Rights) Bill - or "Ella's law".

We should not forget that the Ulez scheme was first mooted by Boris Johnson in 2015, even if the Tories post-Uxbridge now seem determined to row back from any green-friendly policies deemed to be unpopular with the Blue Wall electorate.

In the context of Ulez we should remember past victories when it comes to water and air pollution. Thanks to people like John Snow we in Britain drink relatively clean

water. He identified the source of the 1854 Soho cholera epidemic as a public well pump - and researchers later discovered that this well had been dug only three feet from an old cesspit, which had begun to leak faecal bacteria. Needless to say, at the time, Snow upset many - facing resistance from local bigwigs - when he managed to persuade the council to disable the well pump by removing its handle.

Nor should we forget the 1956 Clean Air Act, which mandated movement towards smokeless fuels. Before that act came into effect thousands of Londoners died every year from the notorious smogs - the so-called pea-soupers. In the famous 1952 great smog 4,000 immediately died and another 8,000 soon followed them. The smog was so thick police had to move in front of vehicles with flares. The Tory government was initially resistant to legislation but eventually succumbed to pressure - including, of course, from backbench Tory MPs. The 1956 act was a landmark, but we are still fighting for the right to breathe clean air.

Ulez can certainly be critically supported. But we must go much further. The CPGB, for example, envisages the radical reorganisation of cities - including the reorganisation of work. People should be encouraged and facilitated to live near their work. That means high-quality council houses; that means confiscating the empty mansions of the rich; that means converting the office spaces that dominate so much of the inner-cities. There must be provision for plenty of trees and public green spaces too. For example, Buckingham Palace's huge garden should be made into a public park. Crucially, we must wind down the car economy. Public transport should be massively upgraded and made free in all urban areas.

That would be a modest step in the direction of realising the right of everyone to breathe clean, unpolluted air ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.rac.co.uk/drive/advice/driving-advice/what-is-rat-running-and-should-cut-through-traffic-be-illegal.

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