

weekly **Worker**



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ESUS



**'No platforming' is a modern
madness. Mike Macnair makes
the case for free speech**

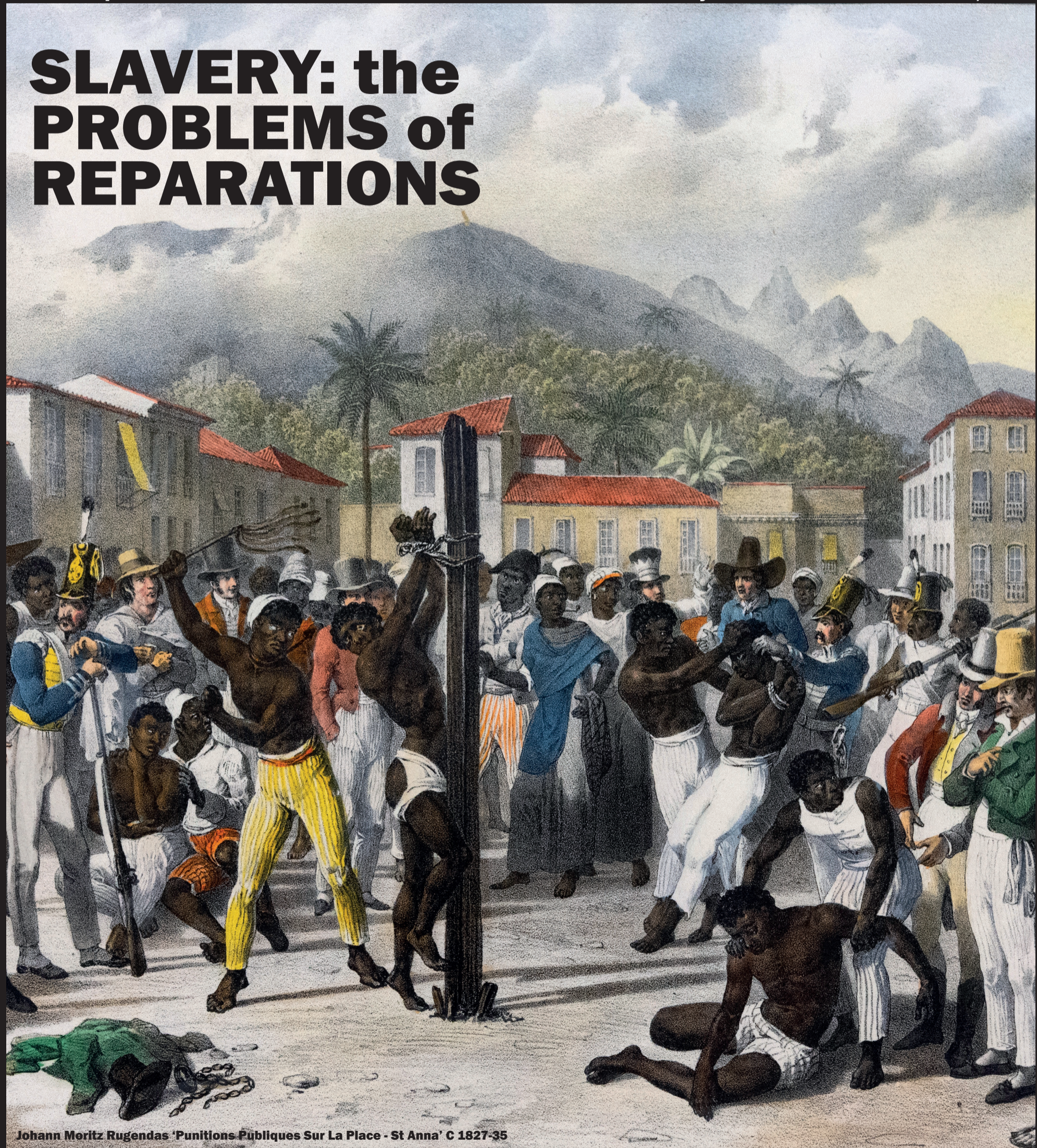
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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SLAVERY: the PROBLEMS of REPARATIONS



Johann Moritz Rugendas 'Punitions Publiques Sur La Place - St Anna' C 1827-35

LETTERS



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

Interested

I read the report on Communist University with interest and was pleased to see the questions raised by myself and others in Mike Macnair's session on Marxist unity given a mention ('Past, present and future', August 31). I think these are very important points to consider when thinking about how to advance the project of Marxist unity, so I write here to open up these points for others in an around the CPGB, who may be interested to discuss them. I would definitely be interested to hear the thoughts of others on this.

Mike made a clear case, as always, for the centrality of the project for unity amongst the Marxist left. It was in his concluding remarks though that I think exists the space for meaningful, critical discussion, and that relates to the question of how we best advance the project of Marxist unity - Mike's final points indicated that continuing with the approach of consistent ideological polemic against the rest of the left was the best strategy for the CPGB in this period.

The questions raised by myself and others related to how we can measure the success of this approach over this period? Do we have any specific examples of its success for the CPGB that we can use as a guide? If we can see no meaningful success in it as yet - specifically in terms of advancing the project of Marxist unity within the UK - then what is it that is required to make this approach successful? Is it the external development of objective circumstances that will give this approach traction? Or do we look at ways to develop the application of this approach and if so what might that look like?

The problem with the idea that the approach is correct in its application, and that what is instead required is for objective circumstances to ripen, is that this is also what almost every other group on the left would say about their own approaches too: ie, the strategy and approach is correct and what is required is to consistently work towards it until the time is ripe and then we will see its success. Of course, this is certainly true in some sense: the development of material conditions will quite clearly give particular approaches more or less traction in certain periods and neither is the strategy of a communist party able to see any meaningful advance outside of the development of material conditions. However, it is a weaker polemical position to suggest to other leftwing groups that the limited advance or the failure of their approaches over time requires reflection and development - whilst not then demanding the same of ourselves.

This also fits in with a more passive position. Mike indicated we might consider some success of this ideological polemic approach in the International Socialist Network split from the Socialist Workers Party, which was clearly informed by engagement with critical discussion in the *Weekly Worker* around democratic centralism and the history of Bolshevik organisation - but, whilst the CPGB had hopes for this group, Mike observed, they disappointingly dissolved

into movementism. As another contributor raised though, this idea of having 'hope' in the things we see developing on the left, only to then see our hopes unfulfilled - this suggests a kind of passivity and a distance from these developments.

My own thoughts would be that the approach of ideological polemic is absolutely fundamental to advancing Marxist unity - without this forming a core, the idea of unity easily becomes one of fudges and the illusion that if we all just got on and stopped focusing on our differences then we could come together as a whole. What, I think, there is space to explore though is the forms, methods and spheres in which ideological polemic takes shape - and further what the particular conditions are that make ideological polemic gain traction and to consider then what we can do to further those conditions.

If these questions are of interest to any other readers, then I would be very interested to hear people's thoughts and engage in some discussion around it here in the letters pages.

Caitriona Rylance
Bolton

Trotsky quoting

Eddie Ford in his article, 'Old enemies, new friends' (September 7), is quite right about the motivation for Biden's visit to Vietnam, but Ian Cowie gives us more details in his *Sunday Times* piece on September 10, 'Good morning, Vietnam': "Vietnam's competitive advantage is plain to see. It has factory wages that are less than half those of China ..." Paul Demarty's piece, 'Mr Griffiths goes to China' (September 7) misses a crucial part of the visit to China of Communist Party of Britain general secretary Robert Griffiths. It was illegal to force workers to do more than a 44-hour week, Griffiths assured us. But then there was the case of Jack Ma, China's richest billionaire as was, who publicly boasted that his workforce had a '9-9-6' week: that is, from 9 am to 9 pm, six days a week - an illegal 72-hour week, which is the norm in most of the workplaces in China.

However, while Ma's illegal 72-hour working week is treated with kid gloves, a courier for Ma's Alibaba, Chen Guojiang, was treated far more harshly. He fought against wage cuts and set up chat groups with some 15,000 drivers, posted videos, and encouraged his "takeaway brothers" to take collective action against injustices. Chen Guojiang, on being convicted of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble", was given a six-year sentence. Amazon's Jeff Bezos was reported to be extremely jealous of Ma's state-turn-a-blind-eye privileges in dealing with his workers. Chen posted a video on his WeChat account in 2022 in which he appeared to have been released, but he has stopped talking about strikes - no doubt as a condition for release. We cannot discover where he is today.

Paul Flowers' 'Cold war adumbration' article (September 7) manages to avoid mention of Trotsky and his fight against the Stalinist counterrevolution over the invasion of Finland in December 1939. Trotsky defended Stalin's invasion in the same way that consistent Marxists defend Putin's invasion of Ukraine today: "Under the conditions of world war, to

approach the question of the fate of small states from the standpoint of 'national independence', 'neutrality', etc is to remain in the sphere of imperialist mythology. The struggle involves world domination. The question of the existence of the USSR will be solved in passing. This problem, which today remains in the background, will at a certain moment come to the forefront. So far as the small and second-rate states are concerned, they are already today pawns in the hands of the great powers. The sole freedom they still retain - and this only to a limited extent - is the freedom of choosing between masters."

But in his letter to the *Weekly Worker* (August 31) Paul had overtly rejected world revolution in favour of the capitalist roaders in China and the USSR, regretting only they had not capitulated to US imperialism soon enough. A "non-capitalist form of development relatively soon reached its limits" and "The Soviet bureaucracy left this far too late: had it implemented market reforms in the 1960s, it may have avoided the stagnation of the 1970s and the fatal stasis of the 1980s. On the other hand, the Chinese bureaucracy, no doubt determined to avoid Moscow's sorry fate, timed its return to the market with considerable skill and good effect." Mao's capitalist roaders led by counterrevolutionaries Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping got it just right. Marxists/Trotskyists, eat your heart out!

Mike Macnair's 'National road to disaster' (September 7) also explicitly rejects the programme for world revolution. Whilst attacking "the SWP authors and Sauniois", he explicitly rejects the Marxist theory of the state as "abstract" and then rejects the Russian Revolution and its new form of workers' democracy. He cites Trotsky's warning against soviet fetishism, as if Trotsky had rejected soviets in general and was open to notions about the British and any other national roads to socialism. Salvador Allende was a reformist social democrat, who rejected the Marxist theory of the state as the instrument of class rule that must be overthrown, smashed - as Marx wrote in the only amendment he made to the *Communist manifesto* of 1848 in reassessing his views due to the massacre of the Paris Commune by that state in 1871. Believing he could reform that state led Allende to promote Pinochet, his executioner, into his own administration, thereby facilitating his own murder.

"Leon Trotsky's judgment in 1923 and again in 1931 of the fetishism of soviets" was not against soviets in general, but simply against expecting their development and prominence to exactly repeat the time line and role they played in the Russian Revolution. He wrote in 1923: "Yet, in spite of the enormous advantages of soviets as the organs of struggle for power, there may well be cases where the insurrection may unfold on the basis of other forms of organisation (factory committees, trade unions, etc) and soviets may spring up only during the insurrection itself, or even after it has achieved victory, as organs of state power."

And in 1931 he wrote: "On the basis of factory committees we can develop the Soviet organisation

without referring to them by name ... to renounce workers' control merely because the reformists are for it - in words - would be an enormous stupidity. On the contrary, it is precisely for this reason that we should seize upon this slogan all the more eagerly and compel the reformist workers to put it into practice by means of a united front with us; and on the basis of this experience to push them into opposition to Caballero and other fakers."

So Trotsky was against having a dogmatic approach on to how to institute those soviets, which he and all serious Marxists understand are the only form of real, workers' and therefore universal democracy, as opposed to bogus bourgeois parliamentary democracy - or the CPGB's "extreme democracy" (whatever that means).

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Blah, blah, blah

Tony Clark in his latest letter (September 7), just like most of his previous ones, fails to acknowledge any of the points made by numerous responders to his letters, and just parrots again his core assertions, unsubstantiated by any evidence and disproved time and again by his responders.

The vast majority of people in the genuine communist tradition are most certainly in favour of what Tony describes as "democratic socialism". But, in contrast to Tony, as well as being in favour of much greater democracy and more democratic and civil rights as a principle, Marxists and communists also analyse and understand this from a class perspective.

Under capitalism, where a small minority capitalist class owns the means of production and distribution and dominates the state apparatus, "democracy, although a great historical advance in comparison with medievalism - always remains, and under capitalism is bound to remain - restricted, truncated, false and hypocritical: a paradise for the rich and a snare and deception for the exploited, for the poor". This is a quote from Lenin, but very similar could be extensively quoted from Marx, Engels, Stalin, etc. If Tony disagrees with the basic content of the quote, he must be the only reader of this paper who does.

All those in the communist tradition from *The communist manifesto* onwards have consistently argued that *true democracy* for the working class can only really come about when *political and economic power is placed in the hands of the working class*: ie, the rule of the majority class. True democracy. True socialism. True socialist democracy.

I and others have tried to explain to Tony that the use of the word 'dictatorship', as in "dictatorship of the proletariat", when used by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, etc, was explicitly in the sense of "class rule" and not in the sense of a police state or an absence of basic democratic rights and freedoms. There are numerous quotes available from Lenin and Stalin, where they made absolutely clear they *only* used the term, "dictatorship of the proletariat", in the former sense: ie, class rule. (Of course, it may be argued that Lenin and Stalin did not always 'practice what they preach', but that is a different matter).

It is true the actual term, "dictatorship of the proletariat", is not often used by Marx and Engels, but they did use it and in the sense of 'class rule', not totalitarianism. That specific phrase is not used in *The communist manifesto*, but in that seminal document Marx and Engels were really clear they were aiming at 'class rule' by the proletariat ("raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class"): ie, the "dictatorship of the proletariat". So, no hijacking by Blanqui nor any 'Damascene conversion' of Marx and Engels away from "democratic socialism".

Tony patronisingly and arrogantly tells communists "what they need to do". Well, actually, communists have been analysing and understanding the nature of the Soviet Union for very many decades, its shortcomings as well as its very many positive features and achievements - in full solidarity with the world's first socialist state, but critical sometimes nonetheless.

Many communist parties, including the British, developed visions of socialism for their own countries which were very different from the 'Soviet model' - including pluralism in economics and politics, many and varied direct forms to complement representative democracy, high levels of mass participation, very many individual as well as collective rights, etc.

Tony refers to the Communist Party of Britain and part of that party's core analysis is that the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989-91 was the long-term outcome of a fundamental lack of democracy in key areas: ie, that the Soviet working class in their millions did not in practice exercise genuine control over their society or economy.

Nonetheless, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union always tried to act in the interests of its working people: eg, "by 1961... housing, food consumption and general living standards were noticeably better too. So was healthcare. Life expectancy for newborns rose significantly - from 44.4 years in 1926-27 to 68.6 years in 1958-59. What had been a largely illiterate population now completed secondary education as a matter of routine and increasingly went on to higher education" (Jack Conrad, 'The Soviet Union in history', August 31). If the CPSU were a 'ruling class', it was the most democratic ruling class in history, recruiting the best from all walks of life and economic and social activity.

It is in fact core to Marxism-Leninism throughout the world (not just in the 'advanced' capitalist west) that the establishment of working class power is a *necessary*, but not a *sufficient*, condition in order to achieve a fully democratic socialist society. The former had been achieved in the USSR with the October 1917 Revolution and through the massive economic and social developments of the 1920s and 30s, but full democratic norms and procedures had yet to be fully established - indeed some elements were suspended during the civil war and Stalin periods.

Interestingly, the 1961 programme of the CPSU not only recognised all this, but set out a detailed, 20-year programme for a fully developed socialist society in the USSR, including full socialist democracy across state, economy, party and the whole of society

- but, of course, that was never implemented.

But Tony, I know, will just parrot again: 'dictatorship [as in "of the proletariat"] equals totalitarianism'; the DoP wasn't in the manifesto; Marx was diverted by Blanqui; capitalism couldn't have arisen without oil and will collapse without it; 'democratic socialism' counterposed to Marxism-Leninism; blah, blah, blah ... - but, of course, with no analysis, strategy or plan to actually achieve the former.

As for challenging "being determining consciousness", is Tony really suggesting that "consciousness determines being"?! Perhaps that is the 'grand plan' for "democratic socialism" - just imagine or wish it into existence. Or discover new oil?!

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Anti-Semitism

The letters in the September 7 *Weekly Worker* attacking Mike Macnair and defending anti-Semitic comments by the disgraced academic, David Miller, are a mess. So is 'Placing anti-Semitism in context', Tony Greenstein's article in the same issue, which aims to do the same.

Let's begin with Pete Gregson. His statement, "There is anti-Semitism in the UK because, I think, the Jews have so much leverage here", is outrageous. Rather than the ultra-right, the problem, it seems, is that Jews have done too well for themselves - they've risen too high in the world, they should know their place, etc. But is this why there was anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany - because German Jews were also uppity? Gregson asks in his letter why it's OK to make fun of Scots, Irish, English, etc, yet, "if an observation is made about Jews that contradicts their claim to be perpetual victims, excluded from power and endlessly discriminated against, all hell breaks loose". But who makes such a claim - some Jews or all of them? It's enough to point to Salo Wittmayer Baron, the eminent Jewish historian who devoted his entire career to combatting the "lachrymose conception of Jewish history" - ie, the view of Jews as eternal victims - to know that's not the case. A flat-out generalisation of this sort is indeed racist, which is why it has no place on the left.

Moving on to Ian Donovan, his description of the CPGB as "driven by racist philo-Semitism" reflects the same impoverished, racially-driven viewpoint. If the CPGB dares to oppose his arguments, then the only possible explanation is that the party is also in the pocket of the Jews. It's of a piece with Donovan's 'Draft theses on the Jews and modern imperialism' - the document that got him expelled from the CPGB's Communist Platform back in 2014 and which his letter proudly trots out once again. "The Jews are not a nation," the document says, "but they have a pan-national bourgeoisie" and thus "constitute a semi-nation ... under the hegemony of their own bourgeoisie." Hence: "There is a common ethnocentric project between the ruling class of Israel and the various hegemonic pro-Israel bourgeois Jewish organisations in a number of imperialist countries, centrally the United States."

Or so the theses maintain. But what is this other than an updated version of the *Elders of Zion*, the international Jewish cabal that supposedly controls the world?

Donovan asks why Norman Finkelstein can get away with pointing out that "Jews comprise only 0.5% of the population, but fully 20% of the 100 richest Brits", whereas he gets in trouble when he does the same. His conclusion: the process is "racialised. Non-Jews are not allowed to cite these socio-economic facts: Jews are so tolerated." But this is nonsense. What's important about such rich Jewish Brits is not so much the money at their command, but their power in a world ruled by vast capitalist forces. The answer is that it's nil. Where they have billions, US capitalism has hundreds of trillions. Where they control individual corporations, the US can make or break entire nations and is also capable of incinerating the world in a flash.

Comrade Macnair is thus correct. Keir Starmer did not purge leftwing anti-Zionists because a handful of wealthy Jews made him do it. He purged them, rather, to demonstrate that Labour will be a loyal ally, when it comes to US imperialism's drive to control the vast energy resources of the Middle East.

As for Tony Greenstein, his article gives new meaning to the term, 'vulgar Marxism'. Rather than ideology, his sole concern is facts, facts, facts. He says that Macnair doesn't understand "the connections between race and class", because he fails to recognise that "the reflective racism of the oppressed is *not* the same as the racism of the ruling class" (his emphasis). But they *are* the same, in that they are composed of the same ideas and political-ideological forces. If heavily-armed black and white militias have both taken to the streets in America in recent years, it's because capitalism is making use of both sides in a combined assault on what little is left of US political democracy. Both are rightwing, both are racist, and both are products of the same political breakdown - which is what makes *both* so politically explosive. But Greenstein can't see this, because he lives in an ideology-free world, in which lower-class racism is perfectly excusable to the degree it exists at all.

As for Greenstein's defence of Miller's remark about Jews being "overrepresented in Europe, North America and Latin America in positions of cultural, economic and political power", it's absurd. Due to some lingering Bolshevik loyalty, he says the comment would be bad if applied to the Russian Revolution, in which the Jewish presence was indeed heavy. But as a lower-class *enragé*, he says it's totally OK in terms of a despised media establishment, in which "Jews are prominent ... out of all proportion to their numbers in the population".

But "overrepresented" doesn't mean that that there are many Jews in high places. It means that there are *too* many and that their numbers should therefore be reduced. This is anti-Semitism plain and simple. Greenstein's refusal to see this is what makes him such an unreliable ally in the socialist fight against Zionism.

Daniel Lazare
New York

Cultivate meat

I'm not an academic, so my understanding of the details of Marxist theory are shaky. Still, I wonder if the concepts of base and superstructure might be useful in making the case for the priority I urge other animal activists to adopt.

That would be agitating for increased public funding for cultivated meat research (for those who don't know, cultivated meat is grown from animal cells, without slaughter). The technology faces a number of hurdles. Perhaps the most significant of these is achieving price parity with slaughtered options. This is crucial for widespread adoption, which could save countless creatures.

Within Marxism, base refers to the productive forces of society, like tools, materials and factories. Superstructure refers to a society's ideological system, such as laws, religion and art. Marxists generally believe base influences superstructure to a far greater degree than superstructure influences base.

"Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces," Karl Marx wrote. "In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist."

An overly-determinative view of the relationship between base and superstructure is typically dismissed as vulgar Marxism. After all, if superstructure couldn't influence base, why would Marx dedicate so much time to constructing an elaborate ideology, which now bears his name? However, the point stands.

So what does this have to do with my belief that animal activists should prioritise increased public funding for cultivated-meat research? Because in accelerating the development of cellular agriculture, we are potentially changing society's base, which in turn impacts law, religion, art and so much else.

Just as Marx said "the hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord", one could convincingly argue the advent of cultivated meat that is cheaper than but indistinguishable in taste to slaughtered options creates the preconditions for animal liberation. I should make clear we're still a long way off from price parity and undoubtedly taste needs further work as well.

As a further example, I recently read a beautifully illustrated non-fiction work called *Thing: inside the struggle for non-human personhood*. It's a collaborative effort by artists Cynthia Sousa Machado and Sam Machado, and lawyer Steven M Wise, founder of the Nonhuman Rights Project. The book explains NhRP's work to win legal personhood for animals.

To be clear, I'm not opposed to this work. If Wise manages to convince a court to recognise an animal here or there as a legal person, or perhaps even a whole category of animals, it would be an immense milestone I'd celebrate. But I believe base influences superstructure far more than superstructure influences base.

In order to achieve widespread legal personhood for animals of the kind that would necessitate the end of animal agriculture, the base of our current society must change. I believe cellular agriculture has the potential to do this in the long run. That's why I think accelerating its development should be animal activists' top priority.

Jon Hochschartner
Animal Liberation Front

ACTION

From Sylhet to Spitalfields

Friday September 15, 6.30pm: Book event, Bookmarks, 1 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1. Author Shabna Begum explores the hidden history of the Bengali East London squatters' movement in the 1970s, which took over entire streets and estates. Free registration. Organised by Bookmarks, the socialist bookshop: www.facebook.com/events/943871050046594.

Stop the War Coalition AGM

Saturday September 16, 10.30am: Members' meeting, Mander Hall, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Discuss and decide the policy and priorities of the coalition, and elect the steering committee and officers. All members are entitled to attend and vote. Speakers include Irish MEPs Clare Daly and Mick Wallace. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/stop-the-war-coalition-agm-2023.

Scrap the prison barge now!

Saturday September 16, 12 noon: Demonstration. Assemble Gateway Pillars, Victoria Square, Portland DT1. Safe passage for refugees; stop scapegoating and division; blame the government, not refugees. Organised by Stand Up to Racism Dorset: www.facebook.com/SUTRDorset.

March in the global fight to end fossil fuels

Saturday September 16, 12 noon: Demonstration. Assemble Grosvenor Gardens, Victoria, London SW1. As world leaders gather at the UN in New York, join millions around the world taking to the streets to demand a rapid, just and equitable end to fossil fuels. Organised by Extinction Rebellion UK: www.facebook.com/events/2003909896628949.

What it means to be human

Tuesday September 19, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology. Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1 and online. This meeting: 'Can indigenous and western perspectives see eye-to-eye? The value of two-eyed seeing'. Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/1910619279319847.

Barclays: don't bank on apartheid

Saturday September 23: Day of action outside Barclays Bank branches nationwide. Demand the bank stops investing in companies that supply Israel with weapons and military technology used to assault Palestinians. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.facebook.com/events/9714385958636351.

Stop US nukes coming to Britain

Saturday September 23: Day of action across Britain to condemn the return of US nuclear weapons to RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk. These warheads will make Britain a target in any nuclear war. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: cnduk.org/events/stop-us-nukes-coming-to-britain-day-of-action.

March to end food poverty

Saturday September 23, 12 noon: Demonstration. Assemble outside Tottenham Hotspur stadium, High Road, London N17. March to Tottenham Green for festival of resistance. Demand good-quality, affordable food for everyone and an end to foodbanks. Organised by Haringey Right to Food: haringey.org.uk/haringey-residents-to-march-for-end-to-food-poverty.

Workers' summit

Saturday September 23, 2pm: Conference, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Discuss key issues facing unions, including how to reject bad deals that fall short of demands. Devise plans for joint working and growing grassroots networks. Registration £11.55 (£6.13). Organised by Strike Map: www.facebook.com/events/1948514978839160.

Cramlington train wreckers

Friday September 29, 7.30pm: Illustrated talk, Harton and Westoe Miners' Welfare, Low Lane, South Shields NE34. During the 1926 general strike, miners who derailed a passenger train were jailed for eight years. Narrated by Ed Waugh, with songs by Jamie Brown. Tickets £2. Organised by Harton and Westoe Miners' Banner Group: eventbrite.com/e/the-cramlington-train-wreckers-tickets-686461864917.

Protest at Tory Party conference

Sunday October 1, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble near Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester M13. Oppose this vile, vicious and corrupt government. Resist the Tory austerity, privatisation, profiteering, deregulation and attacks on democratic rights. Then prepare to hold the next government to account. Organised by the People's Assembly Against Austerity: www.facebook.com/events/772136577575237.

The World Transformed

Saturday October 7 to Tuesday October 10: Left festival - over 100 events in parallel with the Labour Party conference in Liverpool. Training sessions, debates and workshops on all the critical issues. Ticket for all events £45 (£25); with basic accommodation £85. Organised by The World Transformed: theworldtransformed.org/twt23.

Bargain books

Saturday October 14, 11am: Book sale, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Get your hands on Marxist classics, socialist histories and rare pamphlets. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/440.

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.

REPARATIONS

Beyond our repair

Chattel slavery's damage is done, argues Paul Demarty, so communists should fight for a better future, not redress for past injuries

It seems barely a week passes before there is some news story concerning reparations for slavery.

Most recently, it was confirmed by Arley Gill, chair of Grenada's national reparations commission, that it and several other equivalent bodies in the Caribbean would be submitting letters to the British royal family seeking reparations from slavery. Various researchers over the years have succeeded in tying parts of the royals' vast fortune to the triangle trade, to nobody's surprise (but to much pearl-clutching in the press gallery).

While we expect Charles *et al* to reply with a polite 'fuck off', some other descendants of slavery's beneficiaries have been more conciliatory. William Gladstone, the great 19th century Liberal statesman, inherited a stupendous fortune from his father's many slave plantations; the extant scions of this clan agreed to fund some worthy projects in Guyana by way of recompense (although the Jamaicans are not happy at being left out).

And in July the American state of California published a report recommending payouts to descendants of African slaves living within its borders: a peculiar initiative, perhaps, seeing as how California was never a slave state (though some indigenous people were subjected to quasi-slave labour on church missions, when the Spanish initially spread into the territory, these are not the targets of the state's reparations).

As will become clear, my argument is that the reparations campaign - both in its home territory of the United States, and in its missionary outposts in Britain and elsewhere - is misconceived. It has played a salutary role, admittedly, in refreshing society's memory of the crimes of empire (and, in the States, the crime of plantation slavery itself). In its focus on "following the money", it has done a great pedagogical service in tracing how 'sticky' wealth is down the generations, and dramatising the sordid origins of such wealth. Marxists tend to point in the direction of the chapter of *Capital* on primitive accumulation - but, the more illustrations of the point, the better.

To that solution, however, we cannot concur. The problem can be posed by breaking things down into three subordinate questions: *what* is owed, *by whom*, and *to whom*?

Art of the deal

The first question seems easiest to solve *in practice* - the relevant parties agree a sum, after a more or less protracted period of haggling, and then the sum is paid.

That we have the traditional means of low commerce - the 'art of the deal' - to take the sting out of this process ought not to blind us to a *prima facie* moral absurdity. The sorts of questions seriously considered a matter for reparations are not trivial ones as a rule. In the case of American slavery, for example, we are dealing with a centuries-long process whereby millions of people were imprisoned, worked to death, separated from their children (or parents), subjected to routine torture and rape, and so on (and that is to leave aside the betrayals even after emancipation).

What is the *cash value* of such a mountain of horrors, exactly? To ask the question seriously is to lapse into bourgeois stupidity at its most Laputan. Of course, most advocates



Millions were captured in Africa and millions died

of reparations would *not* seriously ask that question. Reparations become instead tokens of repentance; and *some* kind of cash value is not nothing. (Giving a beggar a pound in the street will not get him a house, never mind solve the housing crisis; but he could probably use the money anyway.) Yet to take the question off the table is to accept that reparations are *not* a matter of justice. No sum could be equal to the injustice.

The onus is therefore on advocates to produce a serious argument for this campaign's adequacy; it cannot be taken as ever more liberal shibboleths are these days. If the point is to improve people's lives, or to expose the sordid history of slavery and colonialism, or whatever: *will it work*, and is it the best way of doing so?

Who owes the reparations, and to whom? Sometimes this is fairly straightforward: Ronald Reagan, on behalf of the American government, apologised to Japanese Americans who had been interned during World War II and paid out reparations. In this case, the money is clearly owed to the victims of this earlier crime; there is perhaps *some* debate to be had about whether the state itself is continuously responsible or the government of the day, but plainly it is part of the game of bourgeois constitutional government that governments take responsibility for past crimes like this, and if they do not it is because they *choose* not to.

In the case of plantation slavery in the US or the British triangle trade, things are a little fuzzier. The very last surviving American slave-owners - at least according to the pre-1860 institution of chattel slavery - presumably died some three generations ago; that number would be four or five for British owners of colonial plantations, although, of course, the empire continued its bloody course until very recently. So there are a few candidates to be made

into reparators: principally, the direct descendants of known slave-owners, like the Gladstones; corporations that descend from those who profited from slave labour (for example, the British textile industry, which was fed to a great extent by cotton from slave plantations, or universities that benefit from endowments by slave traders); and the state regimes who favoured the institution.

The advantage of the first one is that it fits best the quasi-tort-law framework of reparations. If you have enough money to be worth going after for reparations, and your ancestors had a finger in the slave trade or slave labour, then the chances are these two facts are connected. However, presumably, in principle, you owe the money to the descendants of the specific slaves your ancestors were exploiting; but this is invariably difficult to determine, since even in countries with good census data for the relevant period (ie, the USA), record-keeping fastidiousness did not typically extend to slaves, who were barely treated as human at all. Hence the rather 'institutional' character of the Gladstones' Guyanan philanthropy - funding research into slavery, and so on. What else could they do, exactly, except give everyone a handout that was merely trivial?

The case for laying it at the door of the state is rather stronger; it at least gets to the *social* character of the institution of slavery. Even this has some uncomfortable implications, however. Reparations would inevitably be paid out of general taxation, and thus ultimately by the ordinary taxpayer: that is, the descendant of the English peasant, hurled into the cities by enclosures; or of the Irish farmer, starved out of his homeland by the famine; or (alas!) the migrant from Jamaica, herself a descendant of slaves. This unfairness is obvious, and therefore easily exploited by Tories,

the Republican right, and other cynics to divide the general population. Reparations politics is therefore *inherently* minoritarian, and can only work if, and so long as, your minority is in charge.

We will say less about the problems deciding *to whom* payment is due. Deciding on individual eligibility is difficult for the same reasons that individual *liability* is. So more typically the money is to go, Gladstone-style, to institutions: governments of former slave colonies, or NGOs with a focus on 'racial justice'. In neither case can we be confident that reparations will benefit the average descendant of slaves: the governments suffer from all the usual corruptions of bourgeois governments, and we need only remind readers of the Black Lives Matter founders' habit of spending donations on substantial property empires in southern California.

Future-bound

So the movement for reparations is unable to plausibly determine what is owed, by whom, or to whom. We need to think radically differently about the importance of the historical crimes at issue - those of empire and slavery.

To do this, we should first zoom out, and take a very different example of a historical crime. The Norman conquest of England in 1066 involved extensive bloodshed, scorched-earth tactics, and no doubt the usual depredations of war (rape, pillage and so forth). Reparations have been paid out over less. Why do today's English not demand satisfaction from the modern inhabitants of western France? The answer is straightforward - because nobody cares.

Why does nobody care? Because there is no *present* relation of disadvantage between the English and French (or Normans). Since that unhappy time, the Norman elite has

been Anglicised, and the power of England has waxed to become the greatest territorial empire in history (before waning somewhat, of course, but at no fault of the French). English is the *de facto* world language. To complain about missing generational wealth or other such stuff would be obviously absurd; so nobody does.

Reparations are represented as redress for past wrongs, but this is ultimately a kind of presentism - the redress sought is for *present* wrongs, and the genealogy of those present wrongs, their source in vile historical crimes, serves as raw material for *rhetoric* addressed to those present problems.

Normans

The real motivation is that, in 2023, former exploitation colonies are unlikely to be in the first rank of world powers, thanks to their historic subordination by colonial powers and ongoing relations of semi-dependence in the contemporary world system; and black people in the States are vastly more likely to be poor, or to be imprisoned, among other dysfunctions. It is *this* that we are actually trying to address; if we were not, nobody would bother with the historical redress, as the English do not bother today's Normans over the harrying of the north.

The reparations movement is thus a kind of 'hack': we know world capitalism cannot in fact deliver equality between poor nations and rich ones, after half a century of 'developmentalism' failed to do so; and American capitalism cannot actually deliver equality between African and European (or for that matter Asian) Americans, because it *fairly* reliably transmits social status from one generation to the next, and those who start at the bottom of the pile will tend to stay there - and you cannot get much further down the pile than the status of slave. Reparations presents this *ongoing* injustice in a form that *appears* to impose obligations by a purely bourgeois logic on bourgeois society, or sections of the bourgeoisie perhaps. Yet it cannot in the end do so coherently and, if it did, the benefits would - by the usual bourgeois logic - accrue to the people at the *top end* of the generational wealth curve.

Marxism proposes to destroy altogether the automatic machine that transfers wealth from one generation of the ruling class to the next. This is a policy for the present, in service of a future in which - at no doubt very great length - *all* the hideous crimes committed in the name of exploitation will reach the status of William's bloody escapades in the late 11th century (spent convictions, as it were).

This does not involve *forgetting* the past; indeed, in a healthy socialist or communist world, some way must be found to keep the historical memory going, as a warning against a return to such barbarism. (As we said above, the reparations movement plays at least the role of forbidding Tory nostalgists and neoconfederates from the forgetfulness necessary to sustain their ideologies.) It means not confusing present injustices with those of the past, or collapsing them into one; it means treating politics *as politics*, not as an enormous class-action lawsuit ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

CLIMATE

Dog days of summer

Yet more climate records fall, but the Tory government is criminally ‘maxing out’ fossil fuels and sabotaging the expansion of offshore wind capacity, writes Eddie Ford

In London it was a real scorcher at the weekend, with Britain recording its hottest day of the year so far on Saturday September 9. Provisional data showed a high of 33.2°C at London’s Kew Gardens, beating the previous high of 32.6°C recorded a few days earlier in Wisley, Surrey.

According to the Met Office, Saturday was also the sixth day in a row that the country has recorded a temperature above 30°C - well above average for the time of year. The week before, the Met Office said that Britain had experienced its eighth warmest summer since 1884, with June the hottest month ever since records began. So far, the record for the hottest day ever still stands at 40.3°C - set last year on July 19 at Coningsby in Lincolnshire, but for how long?

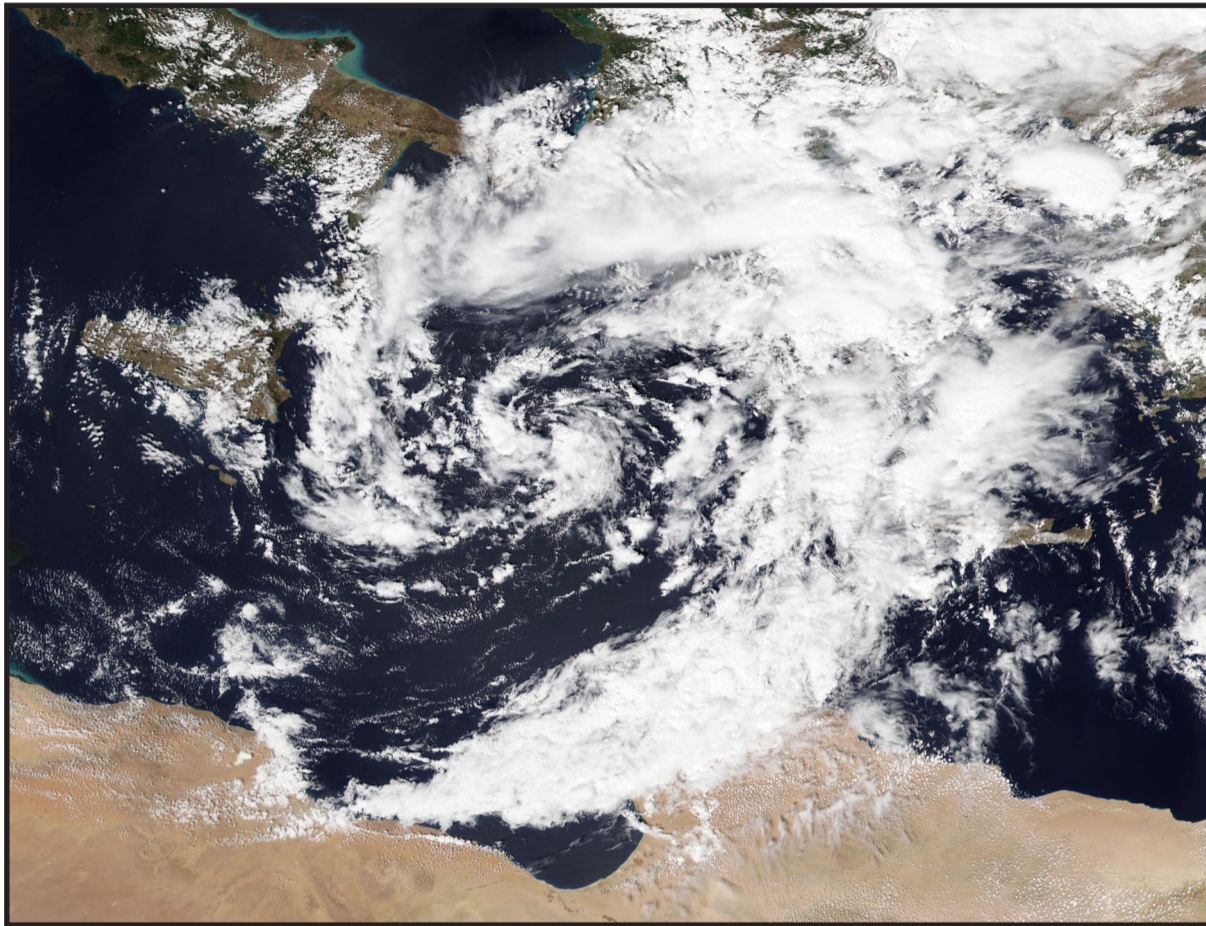
Yes, almost every week this summer we have had a record broken - whether in Britain, or globally. In June, July and August - the northern hemisphere summer - the global average temperature reached 16.77°C, which was 0.66°C above the 1991 to 2020 average. The new high is 0.29°C above the previous record set in 2019 - a big jump. Data from the European Union’s Copernicus Climate Change Service showed that August was about 1.5°C warmer than the average for 1850-1900 (although technically the goal to keep global heating below 1.5°C will be considered broken only when this temperature is *sustained* over months and years). Antarctic sea ice extent has also been extremely low for the time of year, which is deeply worrying.

Report

Meanwhile, storms, heatwaves, fires and floods - not to mention torrential rain and ferocious winds - have destroyed lives and livelihoods across the globe, from North and South America, to Europe, India, Japan, the Philippines and China. More and more extreme weather. Just in the last few days, we have had whole neighbourhoods being washed away in the port city of Derna in Libya after two dams burst following a hurricane. The death toll is expected to rise above 10,000.

Now we have yet another gloomy United Nations climate report that is meant to serve as the first “global stocktake” under the 2015 Paris agreement - with one climate scientist describing it as “a moment of truth”. This is a process that is meant to track countries’ efforts - or not - to meet the goals of the treaty and will form the basis of negotiations at the next UN climate summit, Cop28, to be held in the petro-state of Dubai in November. Not exactly the ideal venue, you might think, but what the hell - maybe it is an attempt at irony.

Originally due to come out this week, the 47-page report was actually published hurriedly in draft form last week on September 8, so might possibly not be the finished version. However, the chasm between climate action and scientific warnings is laid bare in the UN stocktake - saying that governments are failing to cut greenhouse gas emissions fast enough to meet the goals of the Paris agreement and to stave off climate disaster. Indeed, in quite blunt language for the UN, the rise in global emissions must be halted within *two years* to “avoid the worst” - though what that means exactly is a matter of conjecture. Mass



Storm Daniel smashes into the north African coast

species extinction? Mass migration of human populations? The end of human civilisation?

Anyhow, as it stands, countries will still belch out about 22 billion tonnes more carbon dioxide in 2030 than the climate can cope with, if global warming - as laid out in the Paris agreement - is to be limited to 1.5°C or under by that date. To give you some idea of the scale of the problem, the 22 billion tonnes that needs to be eliminated is roughly equivalent to the combined emissions of the top five polluters today: China, USA, India, Russia and Japan. Therefore, the report recommends “phasing out all unabated fossil fuels” (even if it is something buried in a short paragraph midway through the summary, suggesting it is a last-minute addition after exhausting talks).

Achieving net zero, states the report, “requires systems transformations across all sectors and contexts” - which includes “scaling up renewable energy”, “ending deforestation” and “implementing both supply and demand side measures”. Furthermore, the UN says, “it is essential to unlock and redeploy trillions of dollars to meet global investment needs” - which by anyone’s definition can only mean the reengineering of the entire global economic system. At the very least, it requires the immediate stopping of all fossil fuel investments and the vast subsidies that are throwing fuel on the climate fire.

Thus global finance for climate action reached about \$803 billion annually for 2019-20, the report states, but this is less than a fifth of the estimated \$4 trillion annual investment in clean energy technology needed to limit temperature rises even to 2°C. By contrast, about \$892 billion a year was invested in fossil fuels, and a further annual \$450 billion was on average provided as subsidies for fossil fuels in 2019-20. Urgewald, a German-based campaign group that tracks global fossil fuel finance, found that the World Bank supplied

about \$3.7 billion in “trade finance” in 2022 that was likely to have ended up funding oil and gas developments.

Of course, the question of “phasing out” fossil fuels has been at the heart of endless UN global climate debates. For years, oil-producing countries have prevented the UN from adopting language that would explicitly require a phasing out of fossil fuels. Last year, an effort to get that included in the outcome of Cop27 in Egypt failed. Up until now, hardly surprisingly, the United Arab Emirates has resisted using any language on phasing out fossil fuel emissions in any official communications on Cop28. When asked recently by journalists, the Cop28 president-designate and oil executive, Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, would refer only to “phasing down” fossil fuels. So the inclusion of “phasing out” in the draft report could prove to be controversial.

The report does not set out in detail which countries are falling behind, nor does it contain specific recommendations directed at particular countries or regions - hence ultimately it is still a diplomatic document that does not want to ruffle too many feathers. If we are all at fault, then nobody is at fault.

Subordination

When it comes to global temperatures, the reality is bleak. In the colourful words of UN secretary-general António Guterres, “the dog days of summer are not just barking: they are biting” - warning that “climate breakdown has begun”.¹ Unless you are an idiot this cannot be denied.

When you look at the graphs, we do not see a plateau - let alone a steep decline. As the UN and other data shows, in order to have any chance of reaching the 1.5°C target you have to *immediately* stop all emissions of CO₂ - which is obviously impossible, as that is effectively asking all the countries of the world to cease production. In other words, 1.5°C will

be reached - quite feasible it could be the year after next. Of course, the very fact that emissions continue to *rise* indicates that there is a great danger of 1.5°C above preindustrial levels becoming the *new norm* - with the UN having to issue regular warnings about the world hitting 1.6, 1.7, 1.8 ... Indeed, some climate experts have warned that the world is on track for up to 2.6°C temperature rise by 2100, if not higher.

Most of us know, after all we are all being forced to become self-taught climatologists, you have a built-in momentum - things like the melting of the icesheets just continues for another 100 years or so. It is like the proverbial oil tanker: it takes a long time to turn it around. Climate systems are extremely complex - humans do not have the ability to switch them on or off as we please. As Engels reminded us, we do not rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, even if some self-described Marxists stubbornly hang on to that pernicious notion. Clearly then, though it is not pleasing to have to say this, things are going to get worse and worse. What we have is a lot of rhetoric, spiced with a little action - but totally inadequate given what is required.

In fact, we have a system guaranteed to make things worse: a system predicated on ‘growth’ - not meeting needs - and attempting to realise surplus value to make a profit. This precisely brings us to the whole question of development. Both the Indian and Chinese governments, for example, are committed to the rhetoric of growth. Of course, what they actually mean by that is selling some sort of dream to the masses - but the actual driver is the unquenchable thirst for surplus value. The consequence is the subordination of those countries to the extraction of surplus value by US imperialism and others at the top of the global pecking order. Contrary to how it is often put across, development is not a ladder where you eventually reach the top rung and

somehow achieve a state of equality - almost the opposite, if anything. To get to a higher position you have to kick someone down to a lower rung!

Anyway, the UN report tells us that we have the technology and “sufficient cost-effective opportunities” to address the 2030 emissions gap - “yet significant challenges, including access to and availability of support, remain in harnessing these opportunities at the required pace and scale”. We see that perfectly in Tory Britain. Recently, Rishi Sunak announced 100-plus new North Sea oil and gas drilling licences as part of a “maxing out” policy when it comes to the extraction of fossil fuels, while bizarrely claiming that the move was “entirely consistent with our plan to get to net zero”, as domestic supplies are apparently more efficient than shipping gas and oil from other countries - nonsense on stilts, of course. Yet only weeks later when they auctioned the latest tranche of offshore wind farms, they got no takers - nobody was interested, potentially creating a disastrous shortfall in future renewable energy.

Uxbridge

Recklessly, the government ignored repeated warnings that offshore schemes were no longer economically viable under the current system, as the price for energy offered to developers had not taken account of rampant inflation in their costs. Rather, they insisted on setting a maximum price of £44 per megawatt hour based on 2012 prices, similar to the price offered in the previous auction - with predictable results. It almost looks like sabotage.

In many ways, this is a fitting description of where Britain is going at the moment, when it comes to the climate crisis - Rishi Sunak telling the G20 summit in India that he will resist the “hair shirt” policies that involve “giving everything up and your bills going up”. Following the Uxbridge by-election and the row over the expansion of London’s Ulez scheme, there appears to be a growing sentiment against “green crap” in sections of the Tory Party - even if the centrist or liberal wing believes that abandoning green credentials would spell political disaster with younger voters.

At least with Boris Johnson you got the rhetoric of net zero and climate action, after stupidly telling LBC Radio in 2013 that wind farms “failed to pull the skin off a rice pudding”. Well, when a sinner repents, heaven rejoices - though it is doubtful whether that applies to Boris. When you get a good windy day in Britain - preferably not a storm - half or more of the country’s electricity needs are catered for by these power sources.²

The UK has over 11,000 wind turbines with a total installed capacity of 28 gigawatts - the sixth largest capacity of any country. But the disastrous auction could hamper efforts to massively expand that capacity, which would be criminal, given that Britain is the best location for wind power in Europe and one of the best in the world ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21926.doc.htm.
2. theguardian.com/environment/2022/jan/30/uk-windfarms-generate-record-electricity-storm-malik.

REPLY

Forms of popular frontism

Repeating calls for 'no platforming', calls to line up behind reactionary nationalists are, argues Mike Macnair, modern forms of madness. We favour free speech

Last week's polemic from Tony Greenstein, 'Placing anti-Semitism in context', and the letters from Pete Gregson and Ian Donovan, all have the character of the leftwing equivalent of the traditional Tory letter-writer, 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells' - outraged and frothing at the mouth at the latest unacceptable break with dogma.

In this case the outrage is in response to my article, 'Anti-Semitism of useful idiots' (August 31). Gerry Downing's letter in the same edition is not frothing at the mouth. But in its second half, it is still - as comrades Greenstein, Gregson and Donovan are - within the frame of the definition of 'insanity' commonly (falsely) attributed to Albert Einstein: "Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results".

What is being done over and over, with the same results (a series of defeats, more or less disastrous) is two forms of popular frontism: 'no platform for fascists' and obligatory political support for the 'nationalism of the oppressed'.

It is perfectly understandable that the left should keep trying this recipe in spite of endless disastrous failures. In the first place, the global people's front between the USSR and the 'democratic' allies against fascism was the banner under which World War II was fought by the Allies from 1941 to 1945. The people's front was then the banner under which 'bureaucratic socialist' regimes were created across eastern Europe, in China, North Korea and North Vietnam. Then during the cold war more such regimes followed: Cuba, South Yemen, the fall of South Vietnam; Laos and Cambodia. And alongside these, a series of left-nationalist regimes which identified as 'socialist' and their ruling parties as people's fronts, and so on.

This was always only one side of the picture. The people's front policy had been disastrous between 1935 and 1940 - most acutely in Spain, but also in France (where the demoralisation produced by the Popular Front government prepared the ground for the elite sabotage of 1940 and the Vichy regime). Alliances with left nationalists produced disasters for communists and workers' movements in several countries in the post-war period. In the mid-1970s, moreover, the USA shifted from a policy of "containment" of communism to "rollback", deploying 'human rights' and 'national self-determination' rhetoric, together with financial engineering and the promotion of "efficient markets" ideologies. Under the new conditions, the policies of the people's front, national roads to socialism and party monolithism - the core elements of post-war 'official communist' strategy, apart from the attachment to the USSR - became consistent recipes for defeat.

Meanwhile, however, the self-identified anti-Stalinist left had begun to adapt itself to the people's front, national roads and party monolithism. The route was essentially via the 'revolutionary' character of the anti-colonial nationalist movements, meaning by this these movements' involvement in forms of direct confrontation with the state; and the fact that the idea of 'national roads to socialism' led these movements to play up (and in some cases, like Cuba, exaggerate) their independence from the USSR. Celebrating, and then tailing, the left nationalists influenced by the ideas of Moscow and/or Beijing led to internalising the fundamental ideas of 'official communism' *apart*



Nation of Islam at Speaker's Corner: we are not obliged to give any kind of political support

from pro-Sovietism. Hence, "doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results".

The case of no-platforming as a form of popular frontism is both simpler and raises more fundamental issues. That of the 'nationalism of the oppressed' involves the early Comintern conception of the 'anti-imperialist front' being read through Dimitrov's interpretation of the 'united front' from the 7th congress of Comintern, so as to enforce tailing the nationalists. The empirical points raised by comrades Greenstein and Gregson are wholly secondary to the fundamental political commitments to keep "doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results".

Racist speech

'No platform for fascists' began as 'official communist' activity before the far left had any political significance.¹ It *inherently* entails popular frontism, because it denies the right of racist (etc) speech to a specific group which is politically-rhetorically identified with the World War II enemy - while ignoring the much more effective racist incitement operations of the Conservative Party and its press, and of the Home Office (and of the equivalents in other countries). That is, it inherently asserts a 'broad democratic alliance' against 'fascism'.

For Trotskyist advocates of 'no platform' the tactic is conflated with Trotsky's arguments in 1930-33 for the policy of the workers' united front against fascism.² But this is utterly misleading. Trotsky's arguments were for the workers' united front (of the Communist Party, Social Democratic Party, smaller left groups and the trade unions) both for physical-force self-defence against fascist organised attacks and to pose an alternative potential government coalition against the idea of a fascist government. The idea of 'crushing fascism in the egg' by denying fascists freedom of speech where there was not a significant immediate physical-force threat to the workers' movement was absolutely not part of Trotsky's agenda.

It must be added that for the Stalinists 'no platform' also meant 'no platform for Trotskyite-fascists'. The relationship of forces in Britain did not allow much implementation of this idea, but it was certainly applied by stronger 'official communist' parties elsewhere. In fact, 'official communism's rejection of freedom of speech in general grew outwards from the rejection of freedom of speech

within the movement in the form of the 1921 ban on factions and the police coups against the left and right in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1927-29.

The working class as a class practically needs decision-making for collective action. To make usable decisions, it needs the information about alternatives to be available to it. That requires freedom of communication. The result of censorship regimes is to vest control of what can be said in some element of the state, or of the labour bureaucracy. At best the result is cover-your-arse decision-making by bureaucrats, leading to 'garbage in, garbage out' and 'planning failure'. More commonly, the censorship regime is used for the benefit of the capitalist class. Comrade Greenstein is unwilling to recognise that the Corbynite left was unable to fight back against the 'anti-Semitism' defamation campaign *because the left had sold the pass on freedom of speech and poisoned the minds of a generation of student union and trade union activists with 'no platform' policies.*

Moreover, what has been the positive effect of 'no platform' policies? The answer is - zero. The left has been pursuing 'no platform' policies in a systematic way since 1974, approximately 50 years ago. Of course, outright Nazi groups remain marginal in the UK: you would hardly expect mass German nationalism in this country. But far-right policies as such have become mainstream, and not just in the UK but globally. The policy no-platforming was supposed to serve - crushing fascism in the egg - proves to be a complete delusion. That implies that the *moral* case for no-platforming as protecting the vulnerable against hate speech also fails. Hate speech and attacks are *not* prevented by no-platforming operations. Hence, it would be just as useful (and have fewer disadvantages) to summon an exorcist to get rid of the far-right demons.

Nationalism

Comrade Greenstein says:

Like Lenin I make a distinction between the nationalism of the oppressed and the oppressor. I do not equate Irish republicanism and unionism, nor do I equate Palestinian nationalism with Zionism. One is fighting oppression; the other is perpetrating it.

Ian Donovan similarly, but more

extremely, says that the CPGB

refuses to defend the resistance of Muslim people in Iraq, Iran and Palestine against imperialist and Zionist invasions and terror. During the Iraq war, they made a polemical point of honour of refusing to defend Iraqi resistance against the US/UK invasion. Likewise, they refuse to defend Iran against imperialism.

In both cases, if in different forms, what is involved is a vulgarised form of the early Comintern concept of the 'anti-imperialist united front' (AIUF), which called for communists to support national movements in the colonial countries. It is vulgarised for two reasons. The first is that it incorporates Georgi Dimitrov's conception of the united front, from the 1935 Seventh Congress of Comintern:

'The communists attack us,' say others. But listen, we have repeatedly declared: We shall not attack anyone, whether persons, organisations or parties, standing for the united front of the working class against the class enemy. But at the same time it is our duty, in the interests of the proletariat and its cause, to criticise those persons, organisations and parties that hinder unity of action by the workers.³

Contra comrade Greenstein, this was not Lenin's view. The theses and discussions of the Second and Fourth Congresses of Comintern make clear that the AIUF required common action of the communists with the national movement so far as possible, but combined with open criticism of the leaderships of the national movement.⁴ The "refusal to defend" "the resistance" of Iran, of which comrade Donovan accuses the CPGB, consists of our perfectly clear, open opposition to the imperialists' war operations and sanctions, together with open political opposition to the reactionary anti-worker regime in Tehran and to the various sectarian groups which claimed to lead 'the resistance' in Iraq.

The second reason that the approach is vulgarised is that the early Comintern's AIUF was a strategic line which saw the world revolution as immediately posed, so that the national movements against imperialism could combine with the revolutionary movement in the imperialist and middle-rank countries, and with the

USSR, to immediately break the back of imperialism and enter a global worker-peasant alliance. Stripped of this context, what is left is a bare moral claim. But, while there is a clear moral case for *opposing imperialism and colonialism*, this moral claim does not imply "defending" the politics of national movements or regimes which happen from time to time to be in conflict with imperialism.

Three reasons

Why the context of the strategic line of the early Comintern has to be stripped out is that, in the first place, the USSR has fallen, and with it the spinal core of any idea of successively adding left-nationalist regimes to the 'socialist camp'. Secondly, the particular dynamics of formal colonialism were largely, though not completely, disposed of in the cold war 'decolonisations', leaving behind semi-colonial forms (like those the UK had already employed in 19th century Latin America). Thirdly, already by the late 1970s the USA had successfully performed a ju-jitsu trick of turning the strengths of the ideas of the people's front and national roads into weaknesses for the international communist movement: particularly with Richard Nixon in Beijing exploiting the national contradictions between the USSR and China.

Under the new circumstances, nationalism as such seeks not general emancipation, but to raise the ranking of one's own nation-state, while leaving the global hierarchy intact. Zionism is already an example of what began as 'nationalism of the oppressed' turning into 'nationalism of the oppressor'. But there are many others. And - for example - the Islamic Republic of Iran is *both* an oppressed country *vis-à-vis* the USA and an oppressor state *vis-à-vis* its own population and minority national groups.

The argument that Jewish wealth and power explains US support for Israel is part of the same politics. It *dodges* the issue of the interests of US imperialism as such. It is not merely non-explanatory of the Kennedy administration's decision to back Israel.⁵ Equally, and on the other side, it is non-explanatory of the late appearance of 'no platform for anti-Zionists' in the UK. Arabism remained an important tendency in the UK state core down to the debate around the Iraq war. It was after the shock of the anti-war movement - and especially after Jeremy Corbyn was elected Labour leader - that UK state resources and the mass media began to back seriously the no-platforming campaigns of the Zionist movement.

Our correspondents, then, *demand that we must* stick to the popular-frontist strategy, "doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results". Clearly we should reject this view ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. E Smith *No platform: a history of anti-fascism, universities and their limits of free speech* Abingdon 2020, chapter 2.
2. Articles collected in L Trotsky *The struggle against fascism in Germany* New York, NY, 1971.
3. www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm#7.
4. Available at www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/index.htm.
5. I refer again to VP Shannon *Balancing act: US foreign policy and the Arab-Israeli conflict* Aldershot 2003, chapter 2, text at notes 45-49. Shannon may be wrong on the date, but comrades have not given me reasons to suppose so.

USSR

Once more unto the breach

Workers did not rule and suffered terrible oppression, but, sticking to the provisional assessment made by Trotsky in the 1930s, the Soviet Union was still a workers' state, insists Daniel Lazare

Apparently in response to a letter I wrote defending Trotsky's theory of a degenerated workers' state,¹ comrade Jack Conrad has fired off a three-part series totalling an astonishing 13,000 words on the class nature of the Soviet Union.²

The series is nothing if not far-ranging, with everything from the Visigoths, the Big Bang and the history of western property relations coming under the Conradian gaze. He rounds up the usual suspects with regard to the question of class: Tony Cliff of 'state-capitalist' fame; Bruno Rizzi, Max Shachtman, James Burnham and other advocates of 'bureaucratic collectivism'; Karl Wittfogel, who preferred the label, 'Oriental despotism', and Moshé Machover and John Fantham, who argued that Stalinism represented a not-unsuccessful road to economic development that third-world nationalists might well emulate.

Conrad disposes of them with ease - except for Trotsky, that is. Yet, when it comes to advancing his own viewpoint, the results are oddly anti-climactic. He concludes part 1 by criticising Ernest Mandel for his view of Mikhail Gorbachev as a potential Soviet saviour - a view that could not have been more inaccurate. He winds up part 2 by describing the USSR as an "ectopic social formation ... a freak society which had a past, but no future". He ends part 3 with a view of Soviet Russia as "something new, something entirely unexpected, something that has to be studied in its own right". If 90-plus years of analysis and debate have not resolved the issue to Conrad's satisfaction, perhaps another 90 will.

Ectopic

The term 'ectopic' is particularly unfortunate. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, it means "in an abnormal place or position" (an ectopic pregnancy is thus one that takes place outside the uterus, most often in the fallopian tubes, while an ectopic thymus is one that is also outside its normal location in the middle of the chest cavity). The implication in terms of Russia is that the Bolshevik revolution was also outside the normal flow of history - an event that was distorted from the start due to its location on the semi-industrial periphery rather than, as Marx and Engels expected, in the capitalist core. Studying the Soviet experiment "in its own right" thus suggests that it should be seen not as the culmination of historical processes to date, but as a stand-alone event.

Needless to say, this is a head-scratcher for those who have long viewed the Russian Revolution as "Ten days that shook the world" - an epic explosion that transformed global politics, elevated the international class struggle to a new pitch of intensity, and eventually brought 30% of the world population under its sway. The Soviet experiment can be called many things, according to this perspective, but 'ectopic' is not one of them.

Conrad's treatment of Trotsky is also unproductive. For all his immense verbiage, his treatment of Trotsky's theory of a degenerated workers' state seems cursory and incomplete. He gets key elements wrong and fails to appreciate its significance for socialism in general.

Take the concept of a workers' state itself. For Conrad, the meaning is straightforward: a state in which



Trotsky. People's Commissar, as guard of October Revolution (May 1923)

workers are the "dominating class" - an assertion that he regards as "a complete and utter absurdity", since Soviet workers "faced coercion in every sphere of life" following the implementation of the first five-year plan in 1929. Strikes were crushed, strike leaders arrested, and speed-ups instituted - anti-working-class measures that were even more extreme than those seen in advanced capitalist countries like Britain or the US. How can Trotsky describe the Soviet Union as a workers' state when workers were at the receiving end of so many kicks and blows?

The answer is that Trotsky was incapable of anything so crude or simplistic. To the degree the Soviet Union remained a workers' state, he argued, it did so only at the core: "The proletariat is the spine of the Soviet state," he wrote in October 1933, yet it was part of a larger organism that was "sick" due to the ravages of "an irresponsible bureaucracy" that had taken over the state power.³ Where Conrad assumes that this proletarian core should have mitigated Stalinism's worst effects, the result were the opposite: the contradiction drove repression to new heights. Rather than condemning the Soviet Union in simple-minded moralistic terms, Trotsky was a scientific diagnostician trying to work out how a bureaucratic caste had managed to take a workers' revolution and turn it inside-out.

His prescription was the opposite to that of the Cliffites. Instead of declaring socialism defunct and calling for the overthrow of the Soviet Union *in toto*, his goal was to rescue the proletarian dictatorship by cleansing the state from within: "Merciless criticism of the Stalinist bureaucracy, training the cadres of the new International, resurrecting the fighting capacity of the world

proletarian vanguard - this is the essence of the 'cure'," Trotsky wrote. It is noteworthy that, while bourgeois commentators like "George Bernard Shaw, Margaret Cole and the Webbs enthused over the Union of Socialist Fabian Republics", as Conrad puts it, Trotsky's approach could not have been more unsparing. He condemned Stalin for the disaster of collectivisation - this when *The New York Times* was excusing it as historically justified - for the growth of economic privilege, for economic mismanagement in general and for the absolute destruction of any semblance of freedom and democracy.

It is interesting that, when Trotsky accused the regime of anti-Semitism during the Moscow show trials, he met with widespread scepticism.⁴ Stalin was guilty of many things, but surely anti-Semitism was too much. Even Orwell, writing a decade later in his 1984, described his mock-Stalinist Oceania as incapable of racism. ("Nor is there any racial discrimination, or any marked domination of one province by another. Jews, negroes, South Americans of pure Indian blood are to be found in the highest ranks of the party....") Yet with Stalinism plunging into deepest anti-Semitism by the late 1940s, it was Trotsky who wound up vindicated, and *bien-pensant* progressives who were proven wrong.

The analogy that Trotsky favoured was that of a corrupt labour union. With thugs eliminating any and all dissent, such organisations can be as repressive as any non-union shop, if not more. If so, how should workers proceed - by overthrowing the union and admitting that the bosses were right all along? Or by recognising that it is still a union and proceeding collectively to purge it of its rightwing mafia leadership?

The answer is clearly the latter. The key to the Stalinist bureaucracy, Trotsky wrote, was its dual nature: "... today, when there is no longer a Marxist leadership and none forthcoming as yet, it defends the proletarian dictatorship with its own methods; but these methods are such as [to] facilitate the victory of the enemy tomorrow." He went on:

... the bureaucracy in all its manifestations is pulling apart the moral tie rods of Soviet society, engendering an acute and a lawful dissatisfaction among the masses, and preparing the ground for great dangers. Nevertheless, the privileges of the bureaucracy by themselves do not change the bases of the Soviet society, because the bureaucracy derives its privileges not from any special property relations peculiar to it as a 'class', but from those property relations that have been created by the October Revolution and that are fundamentally adequate for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The bureaucracy is parasitic on the workers' dictatorship. But, while a "tumour can grow to tremendous size and even strangle the living organism", Trotsky wrote, it "can never become an independent organism". Fifty-plus years later, this is what it ended up doing - weakening, demoralising and atomising Soviet society to the point where it finally disintegrated in 1989-91. But, when the Soviet Union finally did collapse, the bureaucracy collapsed with it - its place taken by a very different robber-baron class emerging from the rubble.

Trotsky's theory makes sense because it is more supple and dialectical than the simplistic moralism that holds that, if Stalin is bad, he must be a capitalist. But, despite the Stalinist dictatorship, the Soviet political structure remained fundamentally unchanged, at least in its outward aspects. It was still the same state, the same flag and the same federal system, even though repression was spiralling out of control. Counterrevolution in any meaningful sense was nowhere to be found; indeed, Stalinism cooked up the myth of a Nazi-Trotskyist conspiracy solely to justify ever-increasing repression. "Squandering unproductively a tremendous portion of the national income," Trotsky added in 1933, "the Soviet bureaucracy is interested at the same time, by its very function, in the economic and cultural growth of the country, [since] the higher the national income, the more copious its funds of privileges." This is why industrialisation continued leaping ahead, even as Stalinist terror grew ever more nightmarish.

Breaking point

The dual nature of the Soviet bureaucracy explains much else: the ferocious resistance of Soviet workers and peasants during World War II; stepped-up, but increasingly imbalanced, industrial growth after 1945; the growing antagonism between a crude and benighted leadership and a population that was increasingly educated, cultured and urbanised; and so on.

"The fundamental condition for the only rock-bottom reform of the Soviet state," Trotsky wrote, "is the victorious spread of the world revolution." This viewpoint was confirmed both positively and negatively with the emergence of deformed Stalinist states

in eastern Europe and the far east. Quasi-revolutionary expansionism gave the Soviet system a new lease on life, while simultaneously pushing the contradictions to breaking point. Economic advancement was such that Nikita Khrushchev's 1961 prediction that industrial production would quintuple over the next 20 years, while agriculture output and per-capita income would both rise 250%, did not seem implausible. Yet, with the collapse of the Virgin Lands programme just two years later, the Soviet Union entered into an irreversible economic decline. Although the process took far longer than Trotsky expected, the parasite wound up destroying the host, just as he had predicted.

Civil war

Conrad argues that the Soviet Union's relatively pacific transition to capitalism proves that Trotsky was wrong, because he had argued that the proletarian dictatorship could not be toppled other than by civil war. As Conrad notes,

The supposed lack of violent counterrevolution [between 1929 and 1940] 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, [this is] a proposition that has demonstrably been disproven.

Score one for Conrad? Not quite. Obviously, Trotsky could not foresee the depths of depoliticisation, decay and failure that would lead to ignominious collapse. Neither could he have predicted the concomitant growth of a liberal intelligentsia with an increasingly starry-eyed view of western capitalism. But the transition to capitalism has hardly been as smooth as Conrad maintains. By 2017, dozens of civil wars had erupted along the former Soviet Union's southern rim, killing an estimated 130,000 people and displacing thousands more.⁵ Since February 2022, a similar border war has added thousands more deaths in the post-Soviet Ukraine. Admittedly, such wars were not in response to the overthrow of a federal structure that nationalised property relations *per se*. But they were in response to the overthrow of a federal structure that nationalised property relations helped produce. Just as Stalinism undermined economic socialisation, it also undermined democratic national policies that flowed from the same source.

"He who asserts that the Soviet government has been gradually changed from proletarian to bourgeois is only, so to speak, running backwards the film of reformism," Trotsky observed. That is a judgment that still holds true. Conrad is not only wrong about the nature of the Soviet state, but wrong about the nationalist warfare that has been part and parcel of its destruction. ●

Notes

1. 'Serious problem', Letters, July 27 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1453/letters).
2. See 'Not a workers' state' *Weekly Worker* August 3 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1454/not-a-workers-state); 'Other theories, other labels', August 10 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1455/other-theories-other-labels); and 'The Soviet Union in history', August 31 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1456/the-soviet-union-in-history).
3. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1933/10/sovstate.htm.
4. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/02/therm.htm.
5. www.fpri.org/article/2017/12/post-soviet-wars-part-i.

ECONOMY**Marxism still the most compelling**

Decline of US dominance, the rise of China and a lot of hype. Michael Roberts reports on a recent conference of left economists

The annual conference of the International Initiative for the Promotion of Political Economy took place last week in Madrid. The IIPPE brings together leftist economists - mainly post-Keynesians and Marxists - from around the world to present papers and panels on a range of subjects. Most of this year's near 400 attendees are academics, students, researchers or lecturers. Given that the conference was in Madrid, there was a large turnout of Spanish and Portuguese speakers, as well as papers on issues in Latin America.

I was unable to attend at the last minute. Nevertheless, I did participate by Zoom in a session and have compiled a number of papers that looked interesting and important to me. So I think there is much that I can convey from the debates on many subjects of interest to readers.

Let me start first with the subject and debate in the session that I participated in. The session was called 'Imperialism, hegemony and the next war' - a grand and ambitious title. I was first in with a short slide presentation, entitled 'Profitability and waves of globalisation'.¹

I argued that globalisation - defined as the expansion of trade and capital flows globally - took place in waves: ie, periods of fast-expanding trade and capital globally and then periods where trade and capital flows fall off and countries revert to trade and capital barriers. I reckoned that we could distinguish three waves of globalisation, from about 1850-80; then around 1944-70; and the largest from the mid-1980s to end of the 20th century.

What drives these waves? I argued that they could be tied to a change in the profitability of capital. In each of the periods *before* these waves, the profitability of capital in the major economies fell significantly. In order to counteract this fall in national profit rates, the leading capitalist economies looked to expand foreign trade and capital exports in order to gain extra profit from the less technologically developed and cheaper labour economies of what we now call, in shorthand, the 'global south'.

Marx had included foreign trade as one of the counteracting factors to his law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in capitalist production. And, as Henryk Grossman accurately showed,² the fall in profitability during the late 19th century depression was one reason why the major capitalist economies began a significant expansion of capital exports. This boosted the rate of profit, but only for a while, because Marx's law would eventually override the counteracting factors (as Al Campbell at the session prompted me to explain). So, in the decades leading up to World War I, inter-imperialist rivalry hotbed up.

This is also the situation in the late 20th century. The wave of globalisation from the mid-1980s was in response to the big fall in the profitability of capital in the major economies from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. Globalisation (among other factors) boosted profitability through the decades of the 1980s and 1990s. But (especially after the great recession of 2008-09), the globalisation wave eventually petered out, as profitability fell back. Now we have entered a period of trade barriers, protectionism and dangerous rivalry between the major economic powers, especially the US and China.



New York Stock Exchange: biggest in the world by far

And the decline of the hegemonic US economy relative to the rising economies of China, India and east Asia has increased.³ This relative decline was taken up in the next paper by Maria Ivanova (Goldsmiths University). She pointed out that the US runs a significant and long-lasting trade deficit with the rest of the world. It is only able to pay for this because of its monopoly issuance of the US dollar, which is the major transaction and reserve currency in the world. However, the dollar's hegemony is gradually weakening and now there are attempts by other economic powers, like the Brics group (increasing in size), to reduce their reliance on the dollar and replace it with alternatives.⁴

Sergio Camera from the Metropolitan Autonomous University

in Mexico presented us with a battery of data and analysis to show that the US economy is in a structural crisis - still gradual maybe, but nevertheless showing clear signs that US capital's ability to expand the productive resources and to sustain profitability is declining. This explains its intensified effort to strangle and contain China's rising economic strength and so maintain its hegemony in the world economic order.

Golden age

Sergio's data showed "a prolonged stagnation" of the US rate of profit in the 21st century. The general rate was 19.3% in the 'golden age' of US supremacy in the 1950s and 1960s, but then fell to an average 15.4% in the 1970s; the neoliberal recovery

(coinciding with a new globalisation wave), pushed that rate back up to 16.2% in the 1990s. But in the two decades of this century the average rate dropped to just 14.3% - an historic low. That has led to lower investment and productivity growth (especially in the decade of what I have called the long depression of the 2010s⁵) so that, to use Sergio's words, the US "economic base has been seriously debilitated". This is weakening the hegemonic position of US capitalism in the world.

Sean Starrs from Kings College, London then provided a refreshing counter-balance to the hype that both US imperialism and the dollar are about to lose their dominance in the world economy. In his presentation, he pointed out that most of China's key exports were made by foreign

companies (70%), not Chinese companies; and that most of the profits from China's exports were realised in the imperialist bloc, not in China (this is something that Guglielmo Carchedi and I also found in our work on the economics of modern imperialism⁶).

Moreover, China is not yet a serious contender to the US in the technology industries globally, despite the hype. The US remains the dominant techno power and also holds most of the personal wealth in the world (45% - unchanged in the last two decades).

The discussion in the session revolved round how to balance these trends. Is the US losing its hegemonic power or not? Are the Brics+ in a position to replace US hegemony in the next decade or so?

Will these rivalries lead to major military conflicts?

In my view, while there has been a relative decline in US economic and political hegemony since the golden days of the 1950s and 60s, from the 1970s onwards that decline has been gradual and possible challenges to US hegemony - eg, Japan in the 1970s, Europe in the 1990s and now China (plus Brics) - have not and will not succeed in replacing it.

I used the analogy of the decline and collapse of the ancient Roman empire in the third century CE. Some scholars argue that it collapsed because of outside forces - ie, invasions and rising contender states (like Brics today?) - but others contend, rightly in my view, that the real cause was the economic disintegration of the dominant slave economy within Rome. Roman conquests had ended in the late second century and there were not enough slaves to sustain the economy, so that productivity dropped off and eventually weakened financial support for the military. Rising and extreme inequality in Rome was a symptom of this decline and eventual collapse.

In the 21st century, globalisation has fallen away and regionalisation is emerging. Inequality of wealth and income in the US and the G7 is extreme. But, above all, the profitability of capital in the imperialist bloc is near all-time lows. The collapse of the Roman empire also ended the dominance of the slave-owning mode of production, to be eventually replaced by a feudal system. The increased internal disintegration of the US economy could not only end its global hegemony, but also usher in a new mode of production.

China

Let us now turn to other sessions I found interesting, including papers where I was able to obtain the presentations from the authors.

Firstly, there was China. Before the conference proper, the China Working Group within IIPPE organised a special series of sessions on China. Professor Dic Lo of SOAS University in London reflected on how China coped with the Covid pandemic and what lessons could be

drawn from that.⁷

Elias Jabbour - once an advisor to the former president of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, who is now head of the New Development Bank in Beijing - discussed the possibilities of greater trade and investment integration between Brazil and China. Then Salam Alshareef from the University of Grenoble discussed whether China's Belt and Road initiative to fund and build projects in countries across the globe has been successful: whether it increased alternatives to traditional western funding sources like the World Bank; and whether it represented a shift in the global balance of power from the US to 'contender states'.

In the main IIPPE conference there were other presentations on China - I will single out just two. The first was again by professor Dic Lo, called 'The political economy of China's "new normal"'. This dealt with a key question being posed in the western media - namely is China's recent economic slowdown permanent or - even worse - is it a signal of China's imminent demise? Prof Lo considers whether the slowdown is due to a lack of domestic demand, as many Keynesian experts on China like Michael Pettis claim,⁸ or is it due to falling profitability of capital in China, as Marxists might suggest? Lo tends to argue for the latter as the main cause. Indeed I find the same in my own study of this.⁹

But Lo points out that industrial-sector profitability remains high; it is the profitability of unproductive sectors like real estate and the stock market that has fallen back - and we know that China is facing a real-estate crisis. Also profitability has fallen because of a rising share of wages in value added (unlike in the west) and a rise in the organic composition of capital, following Marxist theory.

For me, Lo's paper poses the major contradiction in China's weird, hybrid economy. If the profitability of capital falls, that reduces investment and productivity growth in the capitalist sector. For me, that increases the need for China to expand its state sector to make the economy not so dependent on profitability, particularly in technology, education and housing.

In another session, Grzegorz Kwiatkowski and David Luebeck of the Berlin School of Economics looked at the degree of state control over companies in China. Of the 100 largest Chinese enterprises, there are 78 state-owned companies. The dominance of these is much greater than in most other countries, reflecting the unique role they play in China's economic system.

Again, this is something that I have outlined in my own work.¹⁰ Using the International Monetary Fund data on the size of the public sector for all countries, I found that, in 2017, China had a 'public investment to GDP' ratio more than three times that of any other comparable economy, with the others averaging around 3% of GDP. China had a 'public capital stock to GDP' ratio that was 30% higher than Japan and close to three times more than the others. And it had a public/private stock ratio nearly double that of India and Japan and three times that of the UK and US. But the private sector had been getting larger in China up to 2017 - which, in my view, if continued, was a risk to China's state-run economy (indeed as the recent real-estate crisis shows).

Profitability

You can see that I often revert to considering movements in the profitability of capital as a key indicator of trends in an economy - even in one like China, where state investment dominates. There were two papers at the IIPPE that provide support for the validity of Marx's law of profitability and its relevance to crises in capitalist economies. The first is a ground-breaking analysis by Tomas Rotta of Goldsmiths, London and Rishi Kumar from University of Massachusetts, called 'Was Marx right?'

Rotta and Kumar analyse the profitability of capital in 43 countries from 2000-14 using the World Input-Output Database for defined productive and unproductive sectors. They show the high ratio of productive capital stock in China compared to other countries and conversely the high ratio of unproductive capital in the US. And they compile a world profit rate, which declined over the period, mainly because the organic composition of capital rose faster than the rise in the rate of surplus value - as forecast by Marx's law. Profit rates declined at the aggregate global level, between countries and within countries. They found that rich countries have lower profit rates because of the rise in the capital stock tied up in unproductive activity.

The problem with this data is that it only covers a short period in the 21st century and also is based on input-output tables which are not dynamic, but 'snapshots' of economic categories. Even so, their analysis gives further support to Marx's law (and there is more to come on this from the authors).

The question of what constitutes productive and unproductive labour and sectors in capitalist economies is continually debated among Marxists. Costas Passas, senior fellow at the Centre of Planning and Economic Research (KEPE) in Greece, provided a clear explanation in his presentation.

According to Adam Smith, productive labour produces a profit and produces just tangible commodities. For Marx, the first part of this definition, the production of a profit, is correct, whereas the second is wrong. Marx "explicitly criticises Smith for mixing up a definition of productive labour based on [surplus] value with a definition based on the physical attributes of the commodity," contended Passas. Servants are unproductive because they are not employed by capital, not because they do not produce

external objects. And labour that supervises workers is unproductive. Unproductive sectors are those that do not produce new value, but instead get value and surplus value from new value-creating sectors. The former includes finance, real estate and government. As you might expect, in mature, advanced capitalist economies, the share of value going to unproductive sectors rises. Passas found this was the case in Greece.

The other paper on profitability was by Carlos Alberto and Duque Garcia (also from the AUM in Mexico) on the Distribution of profit rates in Colombia. The authors had already done great work on that, but their new paper estimated the distribution of profit rates among and within industries in Colombia by employing firm-level data. This is very technical, but they found that there was a significant dispersion in the firm-level profit rates, as well as in the average profit rates across industries. And around 15% of companies did not achieve a profit rate above the average cost of debt - in effect they were zombie firms.

Alberto and Garcia point out that the dispersion of profit rates is in line with Marx's law of the tendency of profit rates to equalise due to competition. If you take a snapshot of profit rates in sectors and firms and find a wide range, it should not be concluded that the tendency of profit rates to equalise is not taking place, as some Marxists have argued.¹¹ As Marx put it, the equalisation tendency of average profit rates across industries is, in itself, a dynamic, turbulent and stochastic process. As Marx put it, "with the whole of capitalist production, it is always only in a very intricate and approximate way, as an average of perpetual fluctuations which can never be firmly fixed, that the general law prevails as the dominant tendency."¹²

Despite increasing evidence that Marx's law of profitability is valid both theoretically and empirically¹³ and very relevant to explaining regular and recurring crises under capitalism, this is still denied by many. Indeed, the post-Keynesians thesis of financial crises continues to hold sway among many. The 'financialisation hypothesis' is that the cause of modern capitalist crises is to be found in the 'financialisation' of what used to be industrial capitalism; and this has caused rising inequality and capitalist crises, not falling profitability or increased exploitation in investment and production.

At the IIPPE we had one paper that lent further doubt to this view. Niall Reddy of the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa argued that the evidence did not show that that non-financial firms were engaged increasingly in financial investment over productive investment. Increases in cash holdings by such firms were more driven by tax advantages and the need to build funds for research. "Neither of these implies a substitution of financial for real investment, which calls into question an important mechanism thought to connect financialisation to secular stagnation and rising inequality," he said.

I have written extensively on the financialisation thesis.¹⁴ But the most devastating refutation of the financialisation hypothesis (FH), both theoretically and empirically comes from a new paper not presented at the IIPPE, by Stavros Mavroudeas and Turan Subastas.¹⁵

On the theory, the authors say:

The Marxisant versions of the FH ultimately concur with the mainstreamers and the post-Keynesians that the unproductive capital dominates productive

capital, and that the former acquires autonomous (from surplus value) sources of profit. Consequently, they converge to a great extent with the Keynesian theory of classes and consider industrialists and financiers as separate classes. For Keynesian analysis, this is not a problem, as it posits that different factors affect savings and investment. However, Marxism conceives interest is part of surplus value and financial profits depend upon the general rate of profit. Marxism does not elevate the distinctiveness of money-capital and productive capital to the point of being separate classes.

Finally, the Marxisant FH currents have a problematic crisis theory. Instead of a general theory of capitalist crisis, they opt for a conjunctural one ... the FH eventually ascribes to a Keynesian possibility theory of the crisis which has well-known shortcomings. In conclusion, the FH variants fail to offer a realistic account of the rise of fictitious-capital activities during the recent period of weak profitability and increased overaccumulation of capital. Marxist theory "does so by realistically keeping the primacy of the production sphere over circulation and also the notion that interest is part of surplus-value extraction."

And empirically: first, the claim that most of the largest multinational companies are financial is not true. Over the last 30 years the financial sector share in GDP has declined by 51.2% and the financial sector share in services declined by 65.9% of the countries in our study. "Although the rapid expansion in the financial sector observed in some countries before the 2008 crisis suggests that the financial sector may have played an important role in deindustrialisation, this situation seems to be cyclical when it comes to a wider time frame."

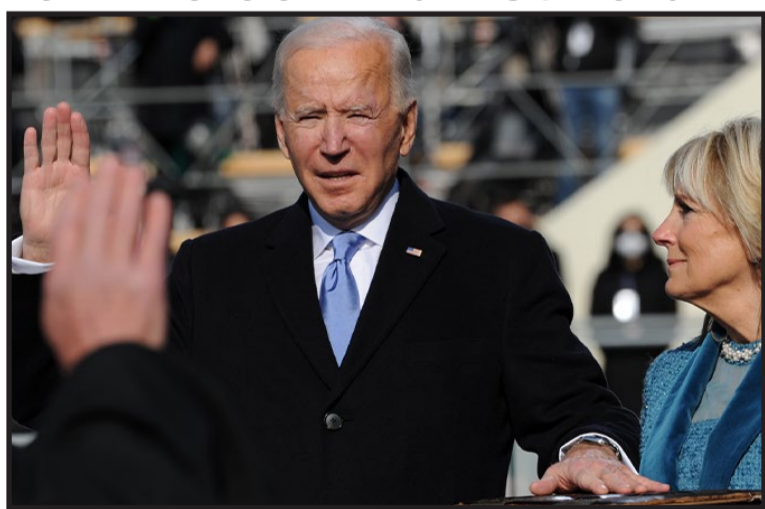
Rather than look for crises based on too much debt, financial recklessness or Minsky-type financial instability,¹⁶ Marx's law of profitability is still the most compelling explanation of crises ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com.

Notes

1. See thenextrecession.files.wordpress.com/2023/09/globalisation-waves-and-profitability-iippe-2023.pdf.
2. www.marxists.org/archive/grossman/1929/breakdown/ch03.htm.
3. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2021/08/17/the-relative-decline-of-us-imperialism.
4. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/08/24/brics-getting-bigger-but-is-it-any-stronger.
5. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/08/02/the-long-depression-an-interview.
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7. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2019/11/14/hm2-the-economics-of-modern-imperialism.
8. carnegieendowment.org/chinafinancialmarkets/89466.
9. See M Roberts and G Carchedi *Capitalism in the 21st century* London 2022, pp213-14.
10. *Ibid* p214.
11. See E Farjoun and M Machover, 'Profitability, economics and the labour theory of value': newleftreview.org/issues/i152/articles/emmanuel-farjoun-moshe-machover-probability-economics-and-the-labour-theory-of-value.
12. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3.
13. See M Roberts and G Carchedi (eds) *World in crisis: a global analysis of Marx's law of profitability* Chicago 2018.
14. See, for example, thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2018/11/27/financialisation-or-profitability.
15. www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.13169/worlevipoliceon.14.2.0204.
16. www.academia.edu/40529541/The_Great_Recession_a_Marx_not_a_Minsky_moment.

Online Communist Forum



Sunday September 17 5pm
Impeachment inquiry, problem son and memory loss - 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

LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Expect nothing from Sir Keir

Birmingham city's declaration of bankruptcy comes after a decade and more of austerity and the systematic erosion of local government. **Kevin Bean** calls for a return to democracy but on a much higher level

The news that Birmingham city council, the largest local authority in the country, has effectively declared itself bankrupt - after issuing a section 114 notice, indicating that it does not have the finances to balance its budget - produced the predictable political reactions.

Announcing the notice, which restricts spending to statutory obligations on essential local services, the Labour leader of the council, John Cotton, blamed three things for the current deficit of £87 million: a £760 million bill to settle historical equal pay claims; overrunning budgets and problems with installing a new IT system; and £1 billion cuts in central government grants since 2010. The government swept aside the substance of these criticisms, arguing that it had stepped in to provide support for local authorities in the 2023-24 budget, which amounted to an increase of 9% for Birmingham.

Instead of acknowledging the long-term impact of austerity cuts since 2010, the Tories shifted the focus onto 'governance arrangements' in the council and the responsibility of local authority leaders to secure the "best use of taxpayers' money", by reminding Birmingham (and other authorities in the same boat) that "clearly it's for locally elected councils to manage their own budgets".

The inevitable media reaction also followed a wearisomely predictable path, with the Tory press highlighting alleged examples of municipal extravagance, mismanagement and incompetence. As ever, the *Daily Mail* was in the vanguard, with tales of waste and political dysfunction, while the *Daily Telegraph's* coverage highlighted the council leader's holiday and trips abroad. Other commentators broadened the attack to criticise Birmingham's 'over-ambitious plans' and the impact of the city's hosting of the Commonwealth Games in 2022 on the council's finances. Along with

comments by local Tory MPs and councillors, these media attacks feed into the developing pre-general election campaign designed to show that Labour, and Sir Keir in particular, are incapable of responsible government and cannot be trusted to balance the books.¹

The response of the Labour leadership, both nationally and locally, was similarly predictable. Its main defence was the accurate assessment of the impact of Tory austerity policies and cuts in local government funding since 2010, especially given the growing demands placed on local services. Arguing that Birmingham's position was by no means unique - Hackney, Slough, Croydon, Northamptonshire, Thurrock, and Woking had all filed similar notices in recent years - Labour turned their fire on the Tories. This line of attack was given added weight in the days that followed by reports that over 20 councils were facing a similar financial crisis, including Tory and Liberal Democrat local authorities.²

Attacking Tory austerity is easy, but, as Angela Rayner reminded us in her speech to the TUC, Labour was a financially responsible party and local authorities could not expect an incoming Starmer government to loosen the purse strings and to make up for the lost years of austerity and cuts. So, as has been the case with Sir Keir's leadership in general, Labour offers plenty of tea and sympathy to local authorities, but 'responsibly' dampens down any expectations of real change. It explicitly rules out restoring local services to even the inadequate levels of 2010.

Municipal socialism

The ramifications of the crisis in local government go far beyond the rather stale and uninspiring politicking that passes for bourgeois politics in contemporary Britain. Of course, the provision of good local services is vital for people, especially amongst the poorest sections of the working class. The

disproportionate impact of austerity on the poorest local authorities and the grossly unequal nature of local government finance, business rates, council tax bands, assessments and central government grants has been well-documented from the 1980s onwards and provides much of the framework of the common sense of the labour movement's politics of local government.

The defence of those services, along with the autonomy of local institutions, became key battlegrounds from the 1970s and greatly intensified in the 1980s, when the Tories imposed central government control over local government finance and forms of block grant, business rates and the nature of local taxation, such as the poll tax. In the wider context Margaret Thatcher's approach to local government policies were part of a successful campaign to increase the share of wealth in the hands of the ruling class.

These attacks also struck at an important historical element in Labourist politics, 'municipal socialism', which in its turn had been built on the reforming and radical traditions of 19th century local government - as developed in Birmingham by Joseph Chamberlain and the Progressives in the London County Council. This 'gas and water socialism', in its own way, also drew on the civic traditions of bourgeois Britain and the evident local pride and often ostentatious displays of wealth, progress and prosperity embodied in magnificent public buildings and civic amenities. Visit any of the great industrial and commercial cities and towns that came into their own during the 19th century, such as Birmingham, Manchester or Liverpool, and you can still see the self-confidence of that period in the architecture and cityscapes they created. The contrast between that era of British capitalism's triumph and its present-day position could not be more starkly posed than in the crisis now facing local government

and the highly symbolic example of Birmingham. *Sic transit gloria civitatis*.

Despite some recent attempts to revive the rhetoric of municipal socialism in the form of the 'Preston model' or the grandstanding appeals of metro-mayors, such as Andy Burnham in Greater Manchester, given the degree of control central government exerts over local authorities, these options are extremely limited. In practice the power of local councils are circumscribed by diktat from Whitehall; the room for manoeuvre and local initiative is non-existent.

Defend services

Although Labour councillors still talk of acting to defend services and mitigating the worst effects of the Tory austerity programme, in practice this dented-shield approach is mere rhetoric. Labour councils sell off assets to buy some time and space to maintain budgets, or they try to hold down wages to 'protect' overall budgets at the expense of the living standards of council workers. Plenty of dents here, but no effective shield to protect vital services.

Moreover, should any Labour councillor oppose these strategies and vote against such budgets, they face losing the whip. Labour has completely bought into the presidential-style politics of local mayors and the centralisation of power in a few hands at cabinet and senior-officer level. In accepting the bidding culture and partnership politics initiated by George Osborne, metro-mayors like Andy Burnham and Steve Rotherham are essentially running the larger conurbations as agents on behalf of central government, and thus further eroding local democracy and any real accountability.

Of course, that is only to be expected of capitalism's second eleven, the Labour leadership, but those claiming to be on left have also failed to present any real political alternative or analysis of the significance the local government

crisis. The 'official communist' *Morning Star* presents a similar critique of Tory austerity to the Labour leadership, albeit with calls for the next Labour government to make up the losses suffered by local authorities since 2010.³ Such plaintive cries for expansion and extra spending are likely to fall on deaf ears, so what then? *Socialist Worker* has the answer: more protests and building resistance to protect local services. All valid and necessary in themselves, but where is the politics and the alternative to the attacks on local government which have intensified over the last 40 years?⁴

That is why the communist minimum programme links the defence of local government services to the wider battle for republican democracy - from the top to the bottom of British society. Abolish the metro and city mayors, and the powerful cliques of senior officers and unelected officials, who currently shape policy in the town halls. Replace them with a real local democracy that radically devolves service provision, planning, tax raising, law enforcement and funding allocation as far down as possible, and appropriate to ward, borough, city and county levels.

By bringing together the political battle for local democracy and the demands for the economic resources to make them a reality, we expose both the political bankruptcy of those Labourites trying to make the current system work and show how mass mobilisation around the communist programme is the only real alternative to the crises in local government ●

Notes

1. www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2023/09/05/birmingham-is-paying-the-price-for-labour-rule.
2. www.lgcplus.com/finance/moodys-warns-of-more-council-failures-in-the-near-term-13-09-2023.
3. moringstaronline.co.uk/article/e/labour-right-demand-new-settlement-council-funding.
4. socialistworker.co.uk/features/who-is-to-blame-for-birmingham-council-crisis.

LAW

Man's grim justice

Gaby Rubin travelled to Wolverhampton to show solidarity with Tony Greenstein and four other Palestine Action activists

Several times I have supported students and friends accused of illegal action as a witness and have been a juror too, and I have always found courtrooms intimidating. However, I have never heard a judge pretend he was a prosecutor and display his bias so clearly as the one I saw in Wolverhampton on September 6.

The details and history of their case are covered by Tony Greenstein, the most well-known defendant, in his blog. Suffice to say that several people were stopped by the police in a van going up north. They never reached their target, which was a factory owned by Elbit Systems - a business that makes drones and other materiel for dodgy governments, including Israel, of course. I was a rather horrified observer at the sentencing procedure, which followed by some months the actual trial.

Most judges try to maintain the appearance of indifference. Not this one. The first person whose case was called believed that "there was a real possibility that the tribunal [in the previous trial] was biased". The judge, Michael Chambers - who was also in that position at the tribunal - gave a lengthy rendition of what had gone before. He ruled that he would not recuse himself because he had reviewed all of his transcripts and was convinced that he had shown no bias. I should have been forewarned.

Mitigation

In a sentencing hearing, each defence barrister must come up with arguments in mitigation of their client's possible sentence. (Given that all five defendants believed they probably would be sentenced to prison, they had all brought their 'prison suitcases' with them.) The sentencing followed what I began to see was a well travelled path.

The judge summed up the details of the trial and was particularly strenuous in talking about his belief, which was that "each and every



Palestine Action in action

defendant" had an intention to use the crowbars and sledgehammers found in the van they were in when they were stopped and arrested. He recited previous occasions on which Elbit had been targeted, outlining especially the amount of damage caused, which he then used to indict each defendant verbally to show how much similar damage they might have done in this case. Chambers said that he believed that the defendants gave false accounts during their trial. He used the phrase "I don't believe you" half a dozen times for each defendant.

The judge summed up his approach to sentencing. He used what sounded to me like an algorithm to decide what a sentence would be (so much for culpability in intending to cause damage, or carrying out an action where damage could be foreseen - without allowing for the fact that they never got there). "After all, this was a revenge attack." This statement was never challenged and was repeated, but revenge against whom and for what was never explained. The maximum

sentence was 10 years and the offence "crossed the custody threshold", said the judge, who referred to the defendants as "so-called protestors".

Chambers cited the amount of time the police had to spend dealing with cases like this (not just this one, you understand) and felt this had to be taken into account. He repeated several times that the public was becoming fed up with protests like this and that there were "plenty of democratic means of protesting" instead.

The defendants did not speak - they sat enclosed in a glass-fronted room (which had opaque stripes, looking much like cell bars). The entire conversation was between the judge and the barristers, including two who were online.

Each defendant had had to go through visits by various court-appointed organisations to see how much of a 'danger' they posed as to reoffending, and whether they had been arrested/charged with any offence before. These were read out by their barristers.

Tony Greenstein's barrister was particularly good. She was polite, but feisty, answering each of the judge's objections and explaining with clarity why Tony should not be incarcerated. Nor did she let the judge get away with any disparagement. For those who know Tony, it was slightly amusing to hear a discussion about whether he would be suitable for community service, because after all, even with his disabilities, he could always work in a shop.

Another defendant was a 26-year-old Palestinian, Ibrahim Samadi, and his barrister was also very good in trying to convince the judge that people with his background would always be committed to pro-Palestine action, "but not necessarily this type". Chambers stated that the evidence this young man had given was not credible, and that he was "manipulative and devious". The judge would not take into account a previous decision that young people between 18 and 25 should be treated with leniency, given that he had been arrested at the age of 23.

The last defendant, Jeremy Parker, had had two previous convictions for similar activities. The judge believed he was the one most responsible for the organisation, the recruitment and in taking orders for the damage to be done ("If he wasn't the general, he certainly was a lieutenant colonel"). The barrister attempted to argue that conscientious motivation should be a factor, but the judge dismissed

that with the statement, "This was a factor, but others are more important".

Chambers then summed up by repeating that each defendant intended to cause damage - each was prepared to use those sledgehammers - and there was a high degree of forethought and organisation, because, after all, this was a "revenge attack". He then went on to say that 18 months for someone with no previous prison sentence seemed correct (allowing for some reduction due to the fact that they never reached their destination). At this point, I am sure that every person in the court was convinced that the defendants would be going to prison.

Glass room

Each was asked to stand in the glass room, Tony Greenstein first. The judge said he was not convinced that Tony did not intend to reoffend, but sentenced him to nine months, suspended for two years (if he reoffended during those two years he would immediately be jailed). He was told he would also have to do 80 hours of 'community service'. The other defendants were then also given suspended sentences, along with community service. Most had nine months suspended. After yet another diatribe, the "lieutenant colonel" received 18 months of a suspended sentence. But they were all going home!

A large number of those in the courtroom and, seconds later, all the people waiting outside the courtroom, erupted with joy. Everyone was hugging, laughing, talking, waving flags and one person (not a defendant) was crying with relief.

I was both bemused and angry by the end of the process - although also very pleased, of course. I say 'bemused', because after three and a half hours of disparaging each defendant, the judge then backed away from sending them to prison - I can only assume that he decided that the publicity he would have gotten from such sentencing would have outweighed any satisfaction he might have felt. But I was 'angry', because the actual process was so bound up with the judge's clearly stated prejudices.

Oscar Wilde once said that military music is to music as military justice is to justice. After this example I would amend it a little, with apologies to musicians: 'Military music is to music as English justice is to justice' ●

Fighting fund

Rally to the cause!

Unfortunately, my appeal last week for some immediate donations to the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund seems to have fallen on deaf ears. My logic was that the second week of the month is always the worst in terms of incoming cash, mainly because that's when we have the fewest standing orders.

And September has been no exception - we received just £290 over the last seven days towards our £2,250 target, taking the running total up to a rather meagre £685 after (as I write) 13 days. In other words, with just short of half the month gone, we're not even a third of the way there!

That's not to say that the contributions we did receive aren't appreciated - of course they are! Thanks go to those regular PayPal donors RL and US comrade PM, who both came up with their usual £50, as well as the eight comrades who did contribute via standing order or bank transfer. They are: BD (£35), NH (£30), GD, DV and

SB (£25 each), plus AM, LG and CC (£10 each). Finally comrade LM donated her usual £20 note.

But the question now is: will we be able to make up for lost ground or was August a one-off, in that we reached the target after three successive failures? Let's hope not - that would be disastrous for the only paper that fights for a single, democratic Marxist party which alone can unite the working class in the struggle to put an end to this rotten capitalist system and begin the transition to classless, stateless communism.

True, the next 10 days is when we get that usual batch of three-figure standing orders, but, on its own, that won't be enough to make up for lost ground. We need you, our readers and supporters, to rally to the cause! Please help us out ●

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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weekly worker

**Don't trust
Wes Streeting
... he has form**



Doctors step up action

BMA members have returned huge majorities for strike action. While the Tory government remains intransigent, there does seem to be some movement on Labour's front bench, **Richard Galen** reports

At the end of August came the welcome announcement that the British Medical Association will be conducting the first round of coordinated industrial action, involving both junior doctors and consultants. Clearly an escalation, coming straight off the back of the recent rebalot results that saw junior doctors in England extend their mandate for strikes until the start of 2024.

At the heart of the dispute is, of course, the demand for "full pay restoration", bringing doctors' salaries back to 2008 levels. Taking inflation into account, that means a 35% increase is needed to take us back to where we were 15 years ago!

The rebalot - a requirement of the Tories' oppressive anti-strike legislation, which must be carried out every six months to ensure that industrial action is legal - far from demonstrating strike fatigue among members, actually resulted in a slight increase in the percentage voting 'yes' to continued action (up to 98.4%). True, there was a slight decline in turnout (down to 71.3%) - mainly attributable to the large number of new members that have joined the BMA since the last ballot - still easily cleared the 50% threshold.

As readers will know, two rounds of strikes have been announced for September and October, including four days where both consultants and junior doctors will be picketing together, with a 'Christmas Day' level of emergency cover remaining to ensure acute care needs are met. There are also a further three days of action, where either juniors or consultants are on strike (with consultants again providing emergency cover only).

Although morale remains high, some posts on social media have questioned the decision to 'de-escalate' the strike protocol for juniors, given that previous rounds saw a complete walkout for the

entirety of the strike action. The level of 'Christmas Day' cover has not been fully defined, and unscrupulous managers have employed tactics, including redefining normal shifts as 'on-call' at short notice in order to prevent doctors from joining the picket line.

Induction

The October round of strikes also coincides with the date that many junior doctors rotate between NHS trusts and hospitals, and thus many will not be attending their 'medical induction', often carried out on the first day of a new rotation in order to familiarise new starters with IT and security systems, as well as the layout of their new work environment. Again, social media posts indicate that managers are using the induction process to try to intimidate staff into attending on strike days, with some citing patient safety concerns.

What cannot be denied, however, is the fact that, as costs from missed elective work continue to mount (with some estimates putting the cost of strikes at over £1 billion so far) and waiting lists continue to increase, the pressure on the government is not letting up.

Interestingly, where this pressure does seem to have had an impact is on the opposition benches. Labour's

shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, has softened his rhetoric regarding pay restoration. Previously he had refused his support - if not expressing outright opposition - for the strikes. But in a recent interview on LBC radio he decried the government's lack of willingness to get round the negotiating table and stated that meeting the BMA would be "top of [his] list". He also cited the last Labour government's success in delivering fair pay to doctors, giving hope to some union activists that discussions with the BMA would be much more forthcoming if Labour wins the next election, even under the current rightwing leadership.

Elsewhere in the UK though, the Labour-led Senedd in Wales faces further healthcare disruption, as the Welsh BMA has decided to ballot its members working in hospital medicine, including consultants, for a mandate to strike, which if achieved would commence with a 72-hour walkout by junior doctors. This comes after they soundly rejected a well-below-inflation pay offer of between 1.5% and 5%, the lowest in the UK. This was despite Labour's commitment back in April to the principle of pay restoration. Whether this has anything to do with Streeting's climbdown remains to be seen.

Ongoing detrimental changes to pay and conditions remain a major concern for the future of the NHS, with a recent item in the *British Medical Journal* reporting that a third of current medical students plan to leave the NHS entirely within two years of graduating. Coupled with the current exodus of doctors from the UK for better pay and better treatment, the deficit in staffing does not show any signs of improving.

Debt

It is not hard to see why these future doctors are planning in this way. Once qualified, they are often saddled with over £100,000 in student debt, eroding their wages for decades, and on a starting salary as low as £14.09 per hour. With reforms to the Foundation Training programme (effectively the first two years as a qualified doctor), they can now be sent far across the country from their homes and families, entirely at the mercy of a sorting algorithm deciding which NHS trust they are allocated to. This is then followed by years of rotational training, having to move hospitals as often as every four months, causing huge issues with family life and childcare - not to mention the long hours, night shifts and weekend working.

Despite being recently released to

the public with great fanfare, the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan does little to address these issues, with serious concerns being raised about making up the shortfall in doctor staffing: less qualified and lower-paid healthcare professionals, such as physician associates (formerly assistants), undergo far shorter medical training and still require a supervising consultant in order to practise safely. Proposed 'medical apprenticeships' also shorten the length of a medical degree (it has, of course, not been stated which current parts of the university course could be safely dropped). This will leave graduates of such programmes locked into the NHS and at the mercy of its managers for the rest of their careers, as other countries will not accept the qualification.

All in all, this summer has seen both positives and negatives for the BMA's campaign for full pay restoration. The continuing mandate for strike action shows the membership is fully engaged to carry on with the fight, and more engagement from a possible future Labour government evidences the effectiveness of coordinated action. But the union needs to be guided more effectively by its members' interests and not falter in its resolve, as the battle is far from over ●

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