

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



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SEX, LIES AND CELEBRITY



LETTERS



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

Learn lessons

It is helpful to have Ian Birchall's response (Letters, September 21) to my article on the anniversary of the 1973 Chilean coup ('National roads to disaster', September 7). The open discussion of disagreements has some chance of making progress in understanding and playing an educational role. I suppose that what comrade Birchall's first two paragraphs ask of us is the common culture of the early 21st century left: that minorities should be deferential to majorities for the sake of unity and displaying appropriate humility for the fact that we are a minority.

But the deference of minorities to majorities in the name of unity, if it goes beyond agreement to majority decision-making in common actions, and is taken to require deference in stating disagreements, can neither produce progress in understanding nor education. And the culture of deference results at the end of the day in the sort of political culture which produces on a small scale affairs like the 'Delta case' in the Socialist Workers Party; on a larger scale the inability of the Labour left to actually fight the right (as in the Corbyn period); and on an even larger scale 'Lysenkoism' and all the rest of the 'planning irrationalities' of the Soviet regime.

I should say that my piece was not intended to be an in-depth engagement with the SWP's analysis of Chile, but a superficial look at what the left were saying in their papers about the anniversary of the coup - with some reference to older material, because articles marking the anniversary weren't all out at the time that I wrote. I am happy to accept that Mike Gonzalez took the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR) seriously in 1984. The argument that the MIR was poisoned by its guerrillaism was, in fact, already in comrade Birchall's own 1973 article together with Chris Harman, which I did cite. I don't disagree with this point.

That said, though the 'Cliffite tradition' rejects guerrillaism, Alex Callinicos continues to polemicise against opponents on the basis that Russia, Chile, etc show the need for the militarised "Leninist combat party" (James P Cannon's formula; Callinicos has various diplomatic versions). An example not long ago was in his debating comrade Birchall in 2013. I commented not long after that the logic of Callinicos's argument was that only the guerrillaist 'prolonged people's war' strategy could work ('Left Unity's contradictory aspirations', November 28 2013).

However, guerrillaism is not, I think, a complete explanation of the MIR's failure. Gonzalez - and before him comrade Birchall and Chris Harman - made the point that the MIR wound up giving critical support to the Popular Unity government. This transition from anti-parliamentarism to critical support was one already commented on by Trotsky in 1931, on Spain:

"Parliamentary cretinism is a revolting sickness, but anti-parliamentary cretinism is not much better. We see this most clearly in the fate of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists. The revolution poses political questions directly and at the present stage gives them a parliamentary form. The attention of the working class cannot but be concentrated on the Cortes, and the anarcho-syndicalists will secretly vote for the socialists or perhaps the republicans. To fight

against parliamentary illusions without fighting simultaneously against the anti-parliamentary metaphysics of the anarchists is less possible in Spain than anywhere else." ('The Spanish revolution', May 1931).

I cite this passage partly because, though comrade Birchall refers to my citation of *Lessons of October*, he does not refer to that in the same note to Trotsky's 1931 'Spain: on the slogan of Soviets' (September 1931), which is part of the same discussion as that I have just quoted. And Trotsky's material on Spain is, in fact, much more pertinent to Chile (and to modern politics more generally) than *Lessons of October*.

The Spanish anarcho-syndicalist CNT union confederation and the Chilean MIR are not the only examples of the political helplessness of parties affected by anti-parliamentary cretinism, when actual pre-revolutionary crisis develops. There are numerous examples: a recent one is the extraordinary zigzag course of the SWP's co-thinkers, the Revolutionary Socialists, in the political crisis in Egypt in 2011-13.

The problem underlying this failure is that revolutionary crisis poses the question of central coordinating authority, to substitute for the failure and/or sabotage of capitalist coordination. Local institutions, like the Russian soviets, German or Austrian *Räte* of 1918-19, or Chilean *cordones industriales*, cannot solve this national-level coordination problem.

The emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself. So far, so good. But the act of the working class itself is not only strikes, shop stewards committees and so on. It is also, and just as necessarily, the creation of permanent workers' organisations - trade unions, cooperatives, collectivist political parties.

And this, in turn, is not only a matter of "specific historical circumstances - in particular the level of class struggle and the self-activity of the working class". It is also a matter of the conscious voluntary choices of the existing left. In 1967-76 the "level of class struggle and the self-activity of the working class" were high: but the left chose either to cling to the old ideas of social democracy and 'official communism', or to build a series of sects.

We have to commit to choosing otherwise under less propitious conditions if we are not going to just repeat the mistakes we made 50 years ago.

Mike Macnair
Oxford

Reparations

Paul Demarty's article on reparations was right on many points ('Beyond our repair', September 14). In particular, his argument that reparations are intended to correct *present* wrongs, rather than past ones, seems to me irrefutable.

The fact is that distance, both in time and place, has a profound influence on our moral psychology. In the same way that modern Britons cannot muster outrage at the atrocities of the Normans, no sane person weeps at the thought that the world will end in millions of years. Since reparations are intended to correct present wrongs, and are much less suited to that purpose than socialism, I agree with Demarty in that I oppose reparations on strategic grounds.

On the other hand, I do not think the strategically sensible choice is perfectly just; and this ought to be frankly acknowledged. Our moral psychology might be fixed, but this does not entail that we should follow our sentiments to the detriment of our reason. We may feel more strongly about the poverty

we see in Britain than the extreme poverty of developing countries, but that does not nullify our obligation to liberate the world's poorest people. Similarly, we may struggle to feel concerned by historical crimes when their effects seem to have disappeared with time, but I am not convinced we are right to do so.

The morals of reparations may present an unsolvable philosophical problem. Fortunately, the politics of reparations are much easier to handle.

Talal Hangari
London

Five phases

In reply to Jack Conrad, who asserts that the USSR collapsed into state capitalism in 1929 due to the adoption of the first five-year plan, we hold that there were five successive phases of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the USSR from October 1917.

1. The rule of the soviets led by the Bolsheviks, from October 1917 to the period just prior to the death of Lenin (January 1924) and the Fifth Congress of the Comintern (June-July 1924). Then the soviets/workers' councils ruled, presaged by the Paris Commune of 1871. This was real workers' democracy. There is a separation of the executive; the central committee of the Communist Party, the legislature; the party congress decisions, which are carried out by the central committee and a relatively independent judiciary. Due process and soviet legality obtains.

It must be stressed, however that this is still a real dictatorship: the executive is obliged to prevent the degree of separation between the three arms of the state that a free bourgeois democracy has. The capitalist class is suppressed, they cannot vote and their parties are not allowed to operate: 'For or against the revolution' is the criterion for all legality and freedom of speech, etc. But inner-party democracy still operated - albeit restricted by the unfortunate decision of the 10th Party Congress 'ban on factions' in 1921.

2. The interregnum, 1924-28 - still relatively democratic in inner-party democracy to begin with, but an increasingly repressive period of political struggle between Zinoviev, Stalin, Bukharin, Kamenev and Trotsky. Zinoviev was dominant initially, the Right Opposition of Bukharin was in alliance with Stalin from the mid-1920s, and Stalin emerged at the top in 1928.

3. The consolidation of the rule of the bureaucracy, with Stalin as its central representative (1928-34), and the end of the original Bolshevik Party as a political entity. Some non-Bolshevik opposition still exists, but is increasingly repressed. The working class is now totally politically expropriated by the bureaucracy, yet that same bureaucracy still rules on its behalf - as shown in the universal free welfare, health and education systems, the total absence of unemployment and homelessness, paid holidays for all, etc. Production is according to the central state plan (albeit hideously undemocratic and bureaucratically distorted) and not for profit. No inheritance, no private ownership and no last testaments/wills are allowed; Stalin's daughter, Svetlana, inherited nothing on his death.

4. The Great Purges etc, December 1934 (Stalin's assassination of Kirov) to March 1953 (death of Stalin) and execution of Beria in December 1953. The secret police mass-executed and assassinated all real and imagined opponents unchecked, on Stalin's instructions.

5. Return of the rule of bureaucracy, 1953-91. Nikita Khrushchev, with help from former marshal of the Soviet Union Georgy Zhukov,

smashed the rule of the NKVD secret police in a coup in June 1953; the secret police then became an arm of the bureaucracy again, as in 1928-34.

The distorted dictatorship of the proletariat still remained in the economy and in the welfare state up to the destruction of the degenerated workers' state by Boris Yeltsin in August 1991.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Gerry-built

Sometimes I do not know what to make of our Gerry Downing. A nice enough guy, but is he stupid, dishonest or both?

One week he blithely characterises my approach to the post-1928-29 Soviet Union as "state-capitalist"; the next he admits that this was a blunder (Letters, September 21 2023). But to excuse himself he says the 1928-29 date is the same as Tony Cliff's: therefore, so he reasons, Jack Conrad must agree with Cliffite state capitalism.

As far as I know, Robert Conquest and other cold war warriors date the overthrow of the Provisional government to October 1917. So does Jack Conrad. What conclusion should one draw from this? Presumably that Jack Conrad is a cold war warrior.

Instead of engaging with my series of recent articles on the Soviet Union, which included a critique of state capitalism, comrade Downing turns a blind eye and just makes things up. Silly.

It is the same with his bogus claim about the "fusion attempt" between the CPGB and the AWL "in the early 2000s". There were talks, true. Not about fusion, though.

Myself and Mark Fischer met Sean Matgamna, Martin Thomas and a whole string of leading AWLers over the course of a few months. They thought they had all the answers when it came to Israel-Palestine, the 'official' CPGB, the minimum-maximum programme, the Labour Party, the Soviet Union, etc. We quickly, thoroughly and almost effortlessly disabused them. Everything was written up in the *Weekly Worker*. It is easy to check the archives.

Jack Conrad
London

Marxist inability

Prompted by Jack Conrad's recent epic series on the Soviet Union and despite Daniel Lazare's unfettered (not to say *blood-splattering*) critique of that "Conradian gaze" ('Once more unto the breach', September 14), it occurred to me to attempt an equivalent take on things. I am doing so, even though most of the observations and suggestions below have been previously aired in the letters pages of the *Weekly Worker* - all courtesy of its policies for democratically centralist openness of debate.

The outcome of that attempt forms what could be called a *finite culmination* of my personal engagement with the paper over the past nine years or so, hopefully having done so in a healthy fresh-spirited manner, style and tone, whilst shaking off the dust from earlier encounters with Marxism-Leninism/Trotskyism (most substantially the Workers Revolutionary Party of the early to mid-1970s). This coincides with a seemingly *eternally dragged-out* realisation that to combine nascent working class consciousness with the building of a party that *genuinely* represents its interests is like trying to combine a diamond with a pearl.

But where the devil to begin with that "gaze" of mine? Well, maybe with how and where Marxism could be typified as having a tendency to foster both over-intellectualisation and an associated over-complication of

matters, even to the point of generating meltdown between its exponents. In contrast, Daniel Lazare's latest article presented matters in a more straightforward, clear-cut mode by highlighting that rather simple, but generally unacknowledged, fact of how the far right seems to know almost at a gut level how to take political advantage by promoting 'obvious truth', and thereby getting a free ride on the back of it ('Investigations drag on and on', September 21). All of which is actually pretty unsurprising - although it seems to escape the grasp of most of our 21st-century Marxist left! This despite the fact that what's required in this context is not exactly rocket science: on the one hand, it's all just a reflection and, on the other, simply an integral part of what lies at the heart of being human.

Deviously calculating and indeed very dangerously opportunist far-right organisations are managing to prosper right now because an at least *apparently honest* presentation of objective reality by them is naturally attractive - most notably when part of an 'emotional' appeal to underlying social and economic resentment from those who know deep down they're being routinely manipulated and lied to. These are the disillusioned, disaffected, distrustful and also profoundly disoriented sections of society - the proverbially 'lost and neglected' individuals amongst any of capitalism's populations around the world. So surely that aspect must be regarded as one of the more important - a particularly powerful one in play in our current period. It arises whilst our largely discredited Marxist/communist so-called 'movement' offers nothing much by way of an appealing alternative, let alone an inspiring one.

All in all, who can really dispute that, whilst we sink, what thrives are those perfectly well-known dangers of the prospering of the far right in its all but predestined journey towards fascism. Quite disgracefully, we are failing, while in their reactionary, 'primitivist' and very crude form, they are gaining ground largely because they understand how higher, less purely rational, but more 'spiritually' oriented ideas are required in order to secure engagement with the working class. As already said (but its absolute centrality makes it worth repeating), where those purist elements of 21st-century Marxism stick to their starkly more traditionalist guns - attitudes and accompanying policies that only offer a single wavelength of messaging and enlightenment (and consequently of that potential inspiration) to the population - in actual fact human beings are designed to be more organic, more deeply attuned and so more complete.

There is, of course, another side to things - a darker side, to which Marxism must be sensitively attuned: how human beings, obviously including the working class, have a huge propensity for operating within a cognitive dissonance - arguably straightforward hypocrisy and outright selfishness. A good example of this is where populism and extreme rightism currently paint risks of climate change and global warming as threats to our 'way of life' in the sense of the resulting mass migration will threaten the stability of our economy and standard of living.

According to the world view of the far right, that threat arises from 'illegal' immigration from the global south in multiple millions (rather than in those tens of thousands, as currently is the case). In their version the currently comfortable will need to 'protect' what they've got against that future horde of alien, state-benefits-sucking and often also 'rapist' insurgents - all part of a covert and calculated 'replacement'

of our western civilisation by diluting the bloodline of our precious nation-states! And, goddamnit, many elements within the western working class readily opt to go along with that abominably self-centred, purely self-preservatory narrative. (This, of course, is also explained by how imprisoned and poisoned they have become by living under a capitalistic paradigm.)

My own family were victims of the last main period in history where a development of far-right politics, progressing into rabid fascist cunning, *outplayed* revolutionary leftwing abilities and sensibility (albeit most specifically in its aberrational Stalinist manifestation). My father, grandfather and uncles were targeted and forced to flee - or chucked into the Buchenwald concentration camp - for being members of the German Communist Party (not Jews, which they weren't). The primary objective of Nazism, of course, was the elimination of Bolshevism rather than exclusively of Jews - all of which nowadays has become largely airbrushed out of our history books, and incidentally about which maybe a certain Tony Greenstein plus his ilk might like to take note. (A distinctly monomaniacal - bordering upon straight obsessive - mood seems to best describe their preoccupations with the state of Israel, lock-stepped sub-fascistic Zionist machinations, *et al*).

Equally we could ask whether all other comrades will accept that life is not a series of silos; whether we'll ever learn not to think in compartments, where our enemy of capitalism is that 'oneness'. In that same vein - but also in a more *freewheeling* manner and mood - maybe this should be expressed: stop bickering, comrades. Stop all that nit-picking and back-biting and finding of intensely detailed fault, where a family-bond type 'loyalty' both to each other and to shared ambitions and widest horizons seems to be almost absent.

A suspicion might well pop into mind that our current isolation and associated social, cultural and political impotence leaves too much time on our hands - so much so that things can drift into zones of the self-indulgent. As a result, unproductive, static or otherwise relentlessly cyclical analyses can pretty readily appear to be more a matter of clinical-grade psychological 'displacement' for those immense frustrations we suffer - resulting in an ability to put into action our core ideas and programmes.

But maybe that's just another 'obvious truth'.

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Dictatorship again

I am not sure who Andrew Northall is referring to when he implies that the points I am making have been refuted by unnamed individuals (Letters, September 14). I certainly haven't seen any refutation, so it would help if Andrew could point out one or even two to me. Those who have responded to me don't seem to get the simple point I am making.

The first I ever made was that Marxism is a flawed doctrine. At the political level Marx misrepresented the meaning of the term, 'dictatorship', and then claims, under the influence of Blanqui, that dictatorship is necessary to defend socialism. Andrew says that Marx meant working class rule when he used the term, 'dictatorship of the proletariat', as if I don't understand what he meant. So let me make it perfectly clear: the argument is not about what Marx meant, or whether working class rule is necessary: rather it is about whether the term 'dictatorship' is scientifically correct terminology for working class rule.

Some people may be upset when I point out that Marx misled the communist movement by

misrepresenting the meaning of 'dictatorship' in relation to working class rule, but it has to be said. I have also pointed out that 'dictatorship' when necessary should be limited to emergencies, in the way it was used under the Roman republic, from where the term actually derives.

Before his transition to totalitarianism, Lenin was, of course, right to castigate the limitation and distortion of bourgeois democracy. He was also correct to point out that bourgeois democracy was an advance on feudalism, the medieval 'totalitarianism' practised by the Catholic church and the feudal monarchs, whose methods can be described as Stalinist before Stalin. The problem for Lenin is that bourgeois democracy is more progressive than totalitarianism, whether medieval or modern. Andrew, like most communists, failed to grasp the contradiction within Lenin relating to his transition from democratic socialism to totalitarianism, following the suppression of factions in the Communist Party in 1921. These communists only see the positive side of Leninism, while not being aware of its negative side. Trotsky was aware of the negative aspects, but supported Leninist totalitarianism, which he later named 'Stalinism' after he lost power.

I have pointed out that dictatorship, Marxist or otherwise, outside of an emergency situation, is a reversion to feudal type of rule and worse. Hence the killing of people like Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Trotsky, etc. When he was making the transition from democratic socialism to totalitarianism, Lenin himself pointed out the meaning of the term 'dictatorship' as 'rule untrammelled by any law'. This is a perfect definition, which cannot be improved upon. How can this lead to socialism? Most communists who have been miseducated by Marx on this question and don't understand what the term 'dictatorship' means usually refer to all forms of bourgeois rule as a dictatorship, which contributes to ultra-leftism in the struggle against fascism. Trotskyist opposition to the popular front, after the ultra-left phase in the Comintern, is a good example. So this issue isn't of academic interest only.

According to Andrew, the vast majority of communists believe in what "Tony calls democratic socialism". But the idea of democratic socialism came, if I am not mistaken, from the British working class movement, and the vast majority of communists, rather than supporting democratic socialism, ended up supporting Marxist dictatorship theory and Leninist totalitarianism. Although Marx meant working class rule when he used the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat', this doesn't change the fact that it was an incorrect use of the term, which has had serious consequences for the communist movement.

Andrew argues that the vast majority of communists, while supporting democratic socialism, differ from me because they have a class understanding of democracy. But it should be clear to Andrew and other communists that the two terms combined - ie, democratic socialism - view democracy from a clear class perspective.

One thing is clear though: a regime based on democratic socialism would not have communists executed because they disagreed with the leadership of the party. So where were all these communists who Andrew tells us agree with democratic socialism, but who went along with this type of thing in the past (until Khrushchev blew the whistle at the 20th Party Congress back in 1956)? I am not saying there wasn't a positive side to Stalin. Without the crash programme of industrialisation, the Soviet Union wouldn't have survived the Nazi onslaught. But many

communists have a one-sided view of Stalin, only seeing the positive side.

What is clear is that the Leninist totalitarianism that comrades like Andrew seems to adhere to, and which is referred to as 'Stalinism' by the Trotskyists, collapsed with the Soviet Union back in 1991. How did the CPSU lose power so easily, when there was no mass uprising against communism? These are questions that communists, including Andrew, need to address.

Focusing only on the positive achievements of the Soviet Union, while mostly ignoring the negative side, isn't going to get the communist movement anywhere. It wasn't the positive aspects of the Soviet Union which led to its collapse, but the negative aspects. Andrew says that communists have been analysing both the positive and negative side for decades, but the point is, that never saved it from collapse. Why? Because Leninist totalitarianism can't cope with open democratic debate.

What was it about Leninism which led to Gorbachev failing to achieve the goal he was aiming at: ie, democratic socialism? When Trotsky lost power in the Stalin period he referred to Leninist totalitarianism as 'Stalinism', but at least Trotsky began to return to democratic socialism, even though his transitional programme still referred to the dictatorship of the proletariat like the Stalin constitution of 1936 and the CPB's *Britain's road to socialism*.

Andrew tells us that the 1961 programme of the CPSU outlined a programme for a democratic socialist society, but that this programme was never implemented, but he doesn't ask why it wasn't implemented. My reply is Leninist totalitarianism. Like Andrew, I defend the positive side of the Soviet experience, but we need to remember that it was the negative side which led to its collapse - not to mention that Leninist totalitarianism has undermined support for socialism all over eastern Europe, which can only be won back by democratic socialism. Trotskyists need to come clean and stop blaming Leninist totalitarianism on Stalin alone, while ignoring the role Trotsky played in its establishment.

By the way, I have never argued that dictatorship equals totalitarianism. For instance, Franco's Spain was a dictatorship, but it would be inappropriate to call it totalitarian, but a dictatorship certainly opens the gates to totalitarianism.

Andrew obviously hasn't grasped the point I have been making but I can't hold it against him. We communists have all been miseducated on a simple issue by Marx - the meaning of 'dictatorship' - although Lenin made it clear what the term means when he was making the transition to totalitarianism.

Another point about Andrew's reply to me is that he appears to dismiss the creeping energy crisis, which is now being expressed in rising prices, - what you would expect if world oil production has peaked, while demand for oil continues to grow. If Andrew can't see that the energy crisis is potentially the greatest challenge facing modern society, this again is down to Marxism, which views industrial capitalism as arising from the circulation of money, rather than cheap, abundant energy. Some people view the climate crisis as more urgent, but the point is that emissions of greenhouse gases from the burning of fossil fuels will obviously decline, as these fuels become more expensive to use.

Finally, I have argued that being does not determine consciousness, but influences it, so the Marxist position, which gives the greater power to being, is wrong. There is no quantum physicist that I know of who would disagree with me on this point.

Tony Clark
For Democratic Socialism

ACTION

Festival of resistance

Saturday September 30 to Tuesday October 3: Four days of events to fight back against the Tory Party during their conference in Manchester. Organised by the People's Assembly Against Austerity: www.facebook.com/ThePeoplesAssembly.

Protest at Tory Party conference

Sunday October 1, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble All Saints Park, 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.

What it means to be human

Tuesday October 3, 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: 'Mature human nature: the evolved nest'. Speaker: Darcia Narvaez. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/665316102208877.

Lies, propaganda and the war in Ukraine

Thursday October 5, 6.30 pm: Online pamphlet launch. Chris Nineham introduces his pamphlet about the west's war in Ukraine, which shows how governments are deceiving the public about the nature of the war and why they are backing it. Registration free. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

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/programme.

Latin America in the front line

Saturday October 7, 9.45am: Day school, Quaker Meeting House, 10 St James Street, Sheffield S1. Speakers include Dr Emily Morris (Institute of Americas) and Aymee Diaz Negrin (Cuban embassy), plus workshops on Peru, Argentina and Brazil. Organised by Sheffield Cuba Solidarity Campaign: www.facebook.com/events/866133211524440.

Defend the right to boycott

Saturday October 7: Day of action across Britain to oppose the government's pernicious anti-boycott bill. The main target is the campaign for Palestinian rights, but the bill will also erode local democracy, restrict freedom of speech and undermine public campaigning. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org/events/right-to-boycott-day-of-action.

Tommy Hepburn memorial lecture

Saturday October 7, 5.30pm: Public meeting, Tyneside Irish Centre, Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1. David J Douglass will speak on the Colliers United Association of Northumberland and Durham 1825 and the great strike movements of 1831 and 1832. Organised by Follonsby Wardley Miners Lodge Banner Association: www.facebook.com/FollonsbyBanner.

Trade unionists preparing for battles ahead

Sunday October 8, 2pm: Public meeting, The Guildford Institute, Ward Street, Guilford GU1. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1994733120884151.

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.

Support strikes, fight anti-trade union laws

Saturday October 14, 1pm: March and rally. Assemble Forbury Gardens, Forbury Road, Reading RG1. March to The Butler, 85-91 Chatham Street, Reading RG1 for rally. Speakers from PCS, FBU, NEU and Aslef. Organised by Reading Trades Union Council: www.facebook.com/events/975734263713831.

Abortion doesn't belong in court

Wednesday October 18, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Houses of Parliament, Westminster, London SW1. The case for decriminalisation and the removal of abortion from the courtroom. Registration free. Organised by Abortion Rights: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=716236250534215.

Resisting the rise of racism and fascism

Saturday October 21, 11am: Conference, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1, and online. Discuss how to mobilise against racism from the government and a resurgent far right. Registration £5. Organised by Stand Up To Racism: www.facebook.com/events/1335514390724342.

The current stage of the capitalist crisis

Wednesday October 25, 7pm: Online and onsite lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker Michael Roberts will analyse the current phase of the world capitalist crisis and Britain's place within it. Admission £5 (£3). Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/439.

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.

MEDIA



Street art in London's Hackney

Sex, lies and celebrity

Sexual misconduct is inseparable from celebrity culture and the capitalist media apparatus. But, asks **Paul Demarty**, can Russell Brand ever get a fair trial?

Ours is a country proud of its disgraceful libel laws, so we must necessarily start this article with the routine disclaimer: Russell Brand has not been convicted of any sexual offences connected with the recent allegations against him. Indeed, as I write, he has not been charged with anything either, although the Metropolitan Police have confirmed they are investigating (with their usual scrupulous attention to detail and sympathy for potential rape victims, no doubt).

Of course, at this point it is difficult to see - even if sufficient evidence were found to charge him - how a fair trial would be possible. Could a jury be assembled of grown British adults who have not read the disturbing testimony of those women interviewed by Channel 4 and the *Sunday Times*, who were not alerted to his confessedly insatiable priapism?

The question of whether justice can be done, or seen to be done, rather haunts bourgeois-liberal opinion in what we call the 'post #MeToo era', and in this country further back to the Jimmy Savile scandal a decade ago. Inevitably, a connection between Brand and Savile was found by the investigators - an email exchange, in which Brand seems to offer Savile a naked massage from his PA. All a bit of a joke, he will no doubt say now - but, as the saying has it, jokes never sound funny in court.

When Savile's crimes started to dominate the news cycle, and allegations surfaced against many other dinosaurs of light entertainment, there was a certain undercurrent in the coverage that seemed to blame the 1970s. The recent past seemed the most foreign country of all. The sheer level of access Savile enjoyed in a credulous establishment; the extravagance of his crimes: we were unnerved that it had all happened so recently. I cannot have been the only fan of David Peace's neo-modernist ultra-noir *Red Riding* novels to suddenly have the sense that the hallucinatory cruelty of the fiction had been superseded by reality.

So pronounced was this historical dimension that it appeared, in inverted form, in the output of *Spiked* - then still merely contrarian, and not yet the publication of the world's most insufferable *Orbánista* try-hards.

Former editor Mick Hume called the various police investigations "a strange exercise in putting the past on trial". But he was just as wrong as everyone else. The "past" being put on trial, we know from subsequent revelations about the likes of Harvey Weinstein, was still ongoing.

Endemic

Whatever the truth of *specific* allegations against Brand, we have seen and heard enough to confirm the suspicion that this problem is endemic to celebrity culture, and to the role celebrities play in the success and failure of capitalist media organisations. Its dominant cultural forms - light entertainment and news, for all practical purposes - are heavily driven by personality. Loyalty is built up by allowing the fantasy of friendship to be projected onto the celebrity. From the screaming crowds of early pubescents at the boy-band concert, to the death threats sent to pro-wrestling heels and soap opera villains, everything depends on this fantasy, that the performance of love (or hatred) towards the audience is real. As the Hollywood cliché has it, sincerity is everything: if you can fake that, you've got it made.

It is this that grants celebrities their leverage. They must be laden down with money, no appetites left unsated. Brand himself described his sudden fame as like being "thrown into a washing machine of tits and money". Periodically, this country gets in a lather about the salaries of prominent BBC employees, as if the BBC was an outlier in its generosity to the 'talent'. In reality, this remains fairly universal. The internet, it is true, has created a layer of celebrities relatively independent of legacy media and its vast temptations. Primarily, however, its results have been fairly superficial at the very greatest heights of fame. Taylor Swift's fans have more ways to get their revenge on haters and unsuitable boyfriends than Britney Spears's fans did; little else has changed.

This need to coddle the star ensures that - in the case of the usually male performers who demand constant sexual satisfaction - many rapes are permitted, and many 'grey-area' encounters swept under the rug. Those *professionally* engaged by the

celebrity or organisation who may be eligible for his predations have no recourse but to watch themselves. Laws against sexual harassment offer no protection in practice, because a thousand others will happily take your place; the labour market at the top of these media companies is just far too competitive to risk it.

It is thus unsurprising that there is such a tendency for vast *delay* in allegations emerging; we did, after all, have to wait for Jimmy Savile's death to find out what 'everyone knew' about him. The delay makes criminal justice all but impossible, even if it was not up to Wayne Couzens' old colleagues to investigate; though the production-line aspect of celebrity sexual misconduct tends to leave behind more witnesses than typical stranger rapes, thanks to the coterie of flunkies and hangers-on involved, there is always the fear of self-incrimination. Complicity is built into the system. Nobody wants to be the next Ghislaine Maxwell.

Politics

We did not, of course, have to wait for Brand's death for these allegations to emerge. Here we may as well discuss some of the political context. After 2013, Brand re'branded' himself as a sort of sub-anarchist political guru. He was rather taken with various mass protests of the day; he went around telling people not to vote, but, after meeting Ed Miliband, urged his followers to vote Labour in 2015 (it did not seem to make much difference). He slowly drifted into the 'wellness' world, where his faintly Jesus-like presentation and flightiness in the face of cold, hard facts was always an advantage.

In recent years, his political profile has become more ... ambiguous. The turning point was the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic; Brand joined those expressing scepticism about the virus's origins, about its effects, the usefulness of lockdowns, the safety of vaccines, and above all the motivations of those deciding on the world's pandemic response. This is often described as a shift to the far right, but that is something of a simplification. To take anti-vax sentiment as an example: it was not too long ago that its main vectors were greenish leftwing types - 'crunchy

liberals', as they used to call them in the US, though there has always been a fringe religious right element as well. Brand could not fit the profile better - from the veganism to the hippie hair.

In lieu of an effective pandemic response, however, governments were all too keen to merely suppress voices of dissent. I do not mean to say that this conspiracy-theorising was anything other than ridiculous: merely that its expression was a fitting response to what, in retrospect, was almost the worst of all possible worlds - sweeping restrictions on ordinary life in return for which we got ... a virus ripping its bloody path through the world regardless. Those who had the 'hippie' left version of such ideas were aggressively marginalised, then, and the only people who would listen to or platform them were on the radical, 'populist' right.

But if the media needs celebrities, celebrities need their audiences; and sooner or later the tail wags the dog. Taylor Swift, after all, caved in to her deranged fans and dumped Matty Healy. Brand's brand, so to speak, is a rather smaller and more valuable thing than hers. There is a feedback loop here: the more Brand was ostracised as a far-right conspiracist, the more dependent he became on support from the far right, and then the more he was ostracised ...

In any case, his audience - such as it is - contains many people, who, true to form, believe this all to be a put-up job. There is a *small* element of truth here. After all, we take it as read - according to our account of celebrity culture above - that very many famous men are guilty of the same kind of rampant sexual exploitation as those alleged against Brand (and cheerfully boasted of in the rock 'n' roll memoirs of an earlier era, for that matter). The people who get caught are the people we *choose to see*; and Brand has put himself in the crosshairs more than once. It is undeniable that there is a concerted effort to drive him offline, seemingly backed by the government; and many involved in this 'cancellation' will not only be concerned by his alleged crimes of 2008-13, but his present-day impertinences.

Brand is, in short, a soft target. He does not have the backing any more of a powerful media organisation that

actually *needs* him. (It is notable that all the allegations in the reporting date from the time *before* that was true.)

Yet we have the allegations we have. These allegations are, at the very least, credible. They are, furthermore, congruent with the observable data of capitalist celebrity culture. Indeed, though Brand of course denies that any sexual encounter he has had was non-consensual, there is surely some justice to conservative writer Mary Harrington's observation that, given his claim to have slept with thousands of women, "at that rate of throughput it's hard to see how he could remember every detail of each incident" (especially since, by his own admission, he was taking an awful lot of drugs at the time).

Jimmy

In short, they deserve *on their own merits* to be investigated seriously and, if substantiated, put before a jury of his peers. Just because you are paranoid, it does not mean they are not out to get you; but equally, just because they are out to get you, it does not mean you did not actually do it. No amount of incoherent babble about the World Economic Forum will change that.

Yet now we are back where we started: the sheer difficulty of obtaining justice in practice in these cases. Weinstein was jailed; many others walked. Savile died peacefully and at liberty - perhaps he might have been hauled up on some charge or another, in an ideal world, but the spate of police investigations after his death produced instead fiasco after fiasco.

Celebrities will abuse their privileges so long as they are backed by vast capitalist concerns. Capitalism backs such peculiar privileges because it needs, in its innermost essence, to circulate lies about itself, to endlessly coopt all cultural expression into its falsity, to distract and to divert. (For all the silliness of Brand's YouTube output, it was at least a step up from *Big brother's little brother*.) Without a vastly more egalitarian culture, sex pests will be discovered in the heights of celebrity. But no such culture is possible on the basis of our current, intrinsically inegalitarian, social relations ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

CLIMATE

Driving the green wedge

Rishi Sunak's sudden U-turn is the result of desperation ... and a leak, writes Eddie Ford. Meanwhile, yet another authoritative report shows that yet another climate record is in danger of being broken

Rishi Sunak's celebration of the go-ahead given to the Rosebank North Sea oilfield by the laughably named 'Transition Authority' and the string of announcements watering down climate targets can only be described as a U-turn. Of course, none of it was prompted by grand planning. Rather, the result of blind panic. The BBC got hold of a leak which revealed some of the details of what was being prepared for the Tory Manchester conference as some sort of anti-woke relaunch in the run-up to next year's general election.

Instead, the prime minister was forced to call an emergency cabinet meeting to sign off the plan and bring forward his announcements on petrol vehicles, boilers, and so on. It has to be said that Sunak really takes the biscuit when he says that his backtracking had nothing to do with politics! Apparently, it was about "the long-term interests of the country" and "putting country before the short-term political needs of the moment". In truth, it is the exact opposite, of course - it is clearly about putting the short-term (desperate) needs of the Tory Party before that of the country, let alone the planet.

Still, if you are desperate, you have to do desperate things. Having just managed to hold on to Boris Johnson's old seat in Uxbridge by a populist turn against Ulez and so-called 'green issues', and discarding a lot of the former prime minister's policy aims, Sunak's government has decided that only by going the whole hog will they stand any chance of preventing Sir Keir Starmer from choosing the No10 wallpaper. We do not know what the conversations were like in Downing Street, but they could have gone something like when David Cameron - ushering in the age of austerity - issued instructions to civil servants to get rid of the "green crap".

Delay

What we have is still a commitment to net zero by 2050, but to do it slower. The most significant rollback announced by Sunak is a delay to the deadline for phasing out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030 to 2035, with those vehicles allowed to be sold second-hand after that date - a move that will presumably require a vote in parliament. There is a similar delay for boilers, now aiming for only an 80% phase-out of gas boilers by 2035, not 100% - and under the new policy, homeowners will only have to switch to electric heat pumps when they are actually replacing their boilers.

To much ridicule, the prime minister pledged some sort of government intervention to prevent poor old householders being confronted with seven different bins, including for different forms of recycling - something that was never a reality in the first place! This writer does not know what the system is like where Rishi Sunak lives, but in my area we definitely do not have anything like seven bins! Either way, what on earth is the government doing interfering with local councils if they happen to insist that residents should have a certain number of bins - surely that is a local decision, not one for central government.

Anyhow, what we are obviously dealing with is a shift to the right, when it comes to climate - part of the anti-Ulez backlash that is pandering to the likes of the *Daily Mail*, *Sun*, *Telegraph*, etc. What is interesting about the Sunak announcement was



Talking the talk - now doing the walk away

the response of big business - which at first might seem a bit surprising. Under normal circumstances, if you get an announcement of this nature, you will get writers and editors of leftwing publications penning articles about how Rishi Sunak is in the pockets of big business, and so on. But big business too has decried the shift from 2030 to 2035 - for perfectly understandable reasons, when you think about it. Carmakers, for instance, have spent hundreds of millions of pounds over the last few years investing in electric vehicle manufacturing to prepare for the 2030 deadline - hence their angry reaction to the news that it has been kicked five years down the line. In a statement, Lisa Brankin, chair of Ford UK, said: "Our business needs three things from the UK government: ambition, commitment and consistency" and "a relaxation of 2030 would undermine all three". The same essentially goes for the banks, who too are not happy either.

One of Rishi Sunak's excuses, which is doubtlessly true, is that Britain only accounts for 1% of CO₂ emissions. Except, of course, we do have a situation where much of what Britain consumes is produced elsewhere - meaning that in terms of coal, petrol, steel, etc, and the products that come from them, the pollution happens elsewhere. Britain is not so virtuous after all, given the interconnected nature of the world. Again, Sunak is right in saying that Britain under these new proposals would just be coming in line with France, Germany, Italy and other countries in the Europe Union, who have never been anything but unambitious - given the urgency of the situation and what is needed.

We must turn for a moment to the rightwing press, who these proposals are aimed at. Rejoicing, there is the headline from the *Daily Mail* - "Finally! Common sense on net zero". The paper continues: "Is this the moment that Rishi turns the tide?" (the standing of the government could not get much lower, compared

to that of the opposition). Naturally, *The Sun* claims credit for the U-turn along the lines of the "It's *The Sun* wot won it" front-page headline that greeted the unexpected Tory general election victory in 1992. *The Sun* has been running a 'Give Us a Break' campaign, described as "brilliant" by the prime minister in a mutual back-scratching exercise. What the paper means is that, instead of backing strikes by doctors, civil servants, railway workers, etc, what is needed is the right to pollute the air, bringing premature deaths to younger and older people. Not to be left out, *The Daily Telegraph* denounces "the furious blob" that will "try to destroy Rishi Sunak for his net-zero heresy".

Projections

Meanwhile, according the latest report by the World Meteorological Organisation, it looks like yet another temperature record is about to be broken. They are saying that if we take projections for 2023, with a few months left to go, it is 55% likely that this year will be the hottest year on record (other organisations have similar forecasts, like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). What this means is that 2023 could be the hottest year since the industrial revolution began - meaning, in global terms, that by 2023 we will reach an increase (*vis-à-vis* pre-industrial levels) of 1.5°C. If you remember the 2015 Paris agreements, the target was to keep the rise in temperature *below* that figure.

It needs to be understood that this did not refer to one year, but rather what we could call 'the norm'. So this year it is quite possible that we will reach 1.5°C, but that does not necessarily mean that it is the new norm. Nevertheless, if we do not reach it this year, the WMO is saying that there is a 66% chance that this threshold will be reached before 2027. What the WMO also makes clear is that it has factored in both El Niño (the moving of oceanic currents, which has a warming effect) and the low dust that has come in over the Atlantic from the

Sahara - which would normally have a shielding effect, because in the air there is a lot of dust and particles that deflect solar radiation. But, given the particularly low level of Saharan dust, the Atlantic has heated up more than would otherwise be the case.

True, Rishi Sunak says the government is still committed to the 2050 target. However, the problem is like the proverbial oil tanker - it takes a long time to turn round. Basically, we are now in a situation that, if we were going to meet the 2050 target, we would have to more or less cease all production that creates CO₂. Yet, instead of any sort of reduction, we actually have a temperature *increase*. Precisely the problem with the approach of the British government is that if you slow down the rate

of increase, start to even it out and eventually go down - that still *adds* to the momentum of your oil tanker. In other words, the oceans get warmer and the polar ice caps continue to melt. That is a momentum that could last for hundreds of years, so you should not expect, for example, the restoration of the Arctic or the Antarctic ice sheets within that time frame. That means water melts into the oceans, which heat up and add to the temperature of the air - leading to an increased danger of the flooding of cities, and more and more extreme weather events. There is also the danger of a sudden qualitative shift in the climate pattern.

So, while it may be true that Britain is not a major player when it comes to global warming, it neatly shows you the problem with capitalism. It is not only characterised by rival firms all trying to make a profit, but also rival countries not wanting to take the lead on this question - always trying to shift the burden onto others. But the answer is not what many comrades on the left will say - more strikes and demonstrations.

And, of course, there will be those who say that the way forward is to pressurise the incoming Labour government. But Starmer's party has been busily watering down its already completely inadequate climate pledges, instantly accepting the go-ahead given to the Rosebank North Sea oilfield and rowing back on its 2021 promise to invest £28 billion a year until 2030 on green industries if it wins the next election. Now it is saying that Labour would ramp up investment over time, reaching £28 billion a year *after* 2027, because they do not want to be "reckless" with spending - increased "financial stability has to come first". What Starmer and co really mean is that protecting capitalism comes first - something that Labour has always done.

As we all agree, that is not the answer - what is needed is a different system. A system that is not predicated on production for the sake of production, but production for the sake of need ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Fighting fund

£224 in three days

We received very few contributions to the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund this week, but fortunately what was lacking in quantity was made up for in quality!

As I write, only nine donations have been received, but those nine totalled no less than £406! Topping the list in terms of that quality was comrade JC, who made a fantastic bank transfer of £100. Then, just a few days later, he decided to top that up with another £70! What can you say?

Then there were three £50 payments - from DT and DB via PayPal, and from RG by standing order. Finally we received £35 from GT, £25 from JT, £20 from DG and £6 from TT. All in all, no less than £406 has been received over the last seven days, taking our running total for September up over the £2K barrier - to £2,026, to be precise.

Of course, our monthly target is £2,250 - which means we still need to raise another £224 in just three days. But I'm convinced we can do it - or rather you, our readers and supporters, can! But obviously you have to move very quickly on this one - please make either a bank transfer to 'Weekly Worker' (sort code 30-99-64, account number 00744310) or a PayPal payment (go to [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate) for more details on either method).

As I say, I'm confident we can get there, but please make your donation by Saturday September 30 at the latest. Hopefully this time next week I'll have some good news to report! ●

Robbie Rix

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

LEFT

It's good to talk

Unwillingness to fight through political differences results in unprincipled splits which cannot be explained and reduces the movement to gravel. Mike Macnair issues a call for debate

Socialist Students, the student wing of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, recently leafleted Socialist Appeal's Marxist Student Federation, criticising its parent body and challenging the MSF to debate:

How can militant trade unions be built that are capable of fighting cuts and struggling for above-inflation pay rises? How can the working class prepare politically for a Starmer-led, rightwing Labour government? What forms of working class political organisation are needed? What attitude should be taken to the democratic right of the Scottish people to independence? How can students be mobilised for struggle and what should their relationship to the workers' movement be?¹

These questions are in response to the MSF's 'Are you a communist? - Then get organised' poster and sticking campaign. Quite a striking initiative, and the MSF no doubt hopes to be rewarded with the recruitment of freshers in the new university term.

Socialist Students tell us that by 'communism' they mean the "more advanced society that would develop after the working class in power enacts a socialist transformation, a revolution, on an international basis". But they think that the MSF's campaign does not "[raise] clearly what communism is and what it is not. But this is crucial. In the minds of many, communism means the totalitarian Stalinist dictatorships ..."

It is then a little surprising that Socialist Students offers to debate *not* the conception of communism and why the MSF has chosen to use 'communist' as a political identifier, but instead a series of very short-term tactical issues.

We may wish Socialist Students the 'best of luck' in getting the MSF to agree to debate. We in the CPGB offered Socialist Appeal a debate on 'communist unity' at our Communist University summer school this August and received a simple, unexplained refusal.

Socialist Students may have more luck. This is not only because SPEW is a great deal bigger than the CPGB (and probably Socialist Appeal too). It is also because the offered subjects for debate are ones on which SPEW is, to be frank, vulnerable to a self-identified 'communist' challenge. SPEW is in effect part of the 'official left' in the trade union movement. Its attempt to create an alternative Labour Party through the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition effectively failed with the withdrawal of the RMT union, and the whole idea of building a Labour Party mark two, based on the trade unions, is illusory, since the *existing* Labour Party is based on the union bureaucracy. Tailing the SNP around 'independence for Scotland' has had pretty lousy results for the Socialist Party, and at least Socialist Appeal's U-turn after the 2014 referendum seems to have the merit of being a less *persistent* error. And 'student trade unionism' has never been a very effective recipe for leftwing work among students ...

Nonetheless, hats off to Socialist Students for *offering* debate. It is still part of the dominant culture of the far left to refuse to debate, and, indeed, to refuse to recognise the *existence* of



Now they are communists, so why not debate?

other far-left trends. It is only necessary to scan the pages of *Socialist Worker* or *The Socialist* to see this phenomenon at work. In issues concerning trade union policy and elections, of course, the problem cannot be completely avoided. But it is far too common for groups to set up *their own* front organisations, which will secure first-mover apparatus control for the group, and avoid their 'grunts' at the base being 'contaminated' by contact with other left groups. (Witness, for example, the fact that this summer has seen three rival far-left initiatives to try to organise 'rank and file' trade union militancy.)

Histories

Hats off to Socialist Students too for the fact that their leaflet addresses the divergent *histories* of SPEW and Socialist Appeal. Part of the far left's traditional refusal to debate, and to address the *existence* of other groups, is a refusal to explain their own group's history, and/or its reason for separation from other groups. Instead we find a variety of competing publications and websites which offer far-left 'motherhood and apple pie' as the reason for the group's existence - but *no* explanation of the promoters' back-story, or why they need to publish independently from other left groups.

Take, for example, Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (RS21).² On its website, if you go to 'Articles', then 'Archive' and on that page, search 'SWP', you can find a *few* documents from RS21's 2013 split. The impression you would get is that the split was *merely* about the SWP leadership's personal misconduct in betraying the organisation's anti-sexist political commitments. If so, we should expect that RS21 would be in its organisational forms a smaller version of the SWP, and that in its political activity it would give a considerable focus to trying to persuade potential SWP recruits that Alex Callinicos, Charlie Kimber, Amy Leather and co are not fit and proper persons to hold leading positions in a left group - because if the SWP could get rid of these wrongdoers, RS21 could return to the fold. In reality, RS21 is not like this. It has identified *some* larger lessons from its split with

the SWP - but what these lessons are, it does not share with website readers.

'Salvage'³ is the depressed relic of the other (smaller) part of the 2013 split in the SWP, the International Socialist Network, which itself split in late 2013-early 2014 over a ridiculous argument about BDSM imagery.⁴ Its most recent update is the May 2023 'perspectives'. Neither there nor in the 'About Salvage' page can we find any accounting for the founders' political history or the differences with the rest of the left.

'Tempest', is produced by a group which (largely) emerged from the implosion of the US International Socialist Organization in 2019.⁵ It is *possible* to find reference to the collapse of the ISO on the Tempest website,⁶ but there is not a lot, and certainly no real attempt to draw serious lessons from a collapse to which Tempest authors were party.

Back on this side of the Atlantic, a couple of examples are the websites, 'Prometheus'⁷ and Nick Wrack's 'Talking about Socialism'.⁸ 'Prometheus' appears at the moment to be a dead or dormant site: the most recent post is from "winter 2022-23", the next before that from spring 2022. Nonetheless, it still contains an editorial, 'The politics of Prometheus', which has some substantial common features with the politics of CPGB (the primacy of politics and democracy, the rejection of broad frontism). But the site still does not offer an explanation of what its differences are, either with us or with anyone else.

'Talking about Socialism' is further from the CPGB politically, in so far as it places less emphasis than we do on political democracy and constitutional questions. But its response to the Ukraine war is broadly sound.⁹ And it appears from comrade Wrack's July 29 article discussing the 'Transform' initiative, that he at least shares with us rejection of the project of building a new Labour Party. He concludes:

Socialists-communists (I use the words as meaning the same) need to work together to build the beginnings of a new mass socialist party. There are thousands of socialists-communists in Britain who are not in any existing

organisation. We call on you to join our discussions. There are thousands of socialists in parties like the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal. These parties should be seeking to form a united, new Socialist-Communist Party. Together we could build a serious, significant socialist-communist party, which could dramatically transform the political landscape in the trade unions, and on the left in general.¹⁰

Comrade Wrack has a long political history: he resigned as editor of *Militant* in 1996, and was subsequently involved in the leadership of the Socialist Alliance, Respect, Respect Renewal, and the short-lived 'Socialist Platform' of Left Unity. Will McMahon, another regular contributor to 'Talking about Socialism', also has a long history in the various broad-front projects, going back at least as far. It is great news if comrades Wrack and McMahon have drawn the lesson from experience to break with their long-standing commitment to broad-frontism to take an initiative to unify 'socialists-communists' as 'socialists-communists', rather than making broader unity round 'something less' a precondition for unity.

But, as with the other groups/sites discussed so far, what remains missing is an actual discussion of the history (beyond the recent experience of Corbynism), or open explicit polemic which explains why a *new* initiative is necessary. Equally, it is not explained why it is *inappropriate* to unify efforts in this direction with the CPGB, which has been arguing for 30 years for a regroupment of communists as communists, of the sort that comrade Wrack now proposes.

Education

What lies behind this and all the other cases is the common belief of the late 20th century left that 'talking to ourselves' is a waste of time, and what we have to do is 'get out there' and address 'new forces'. In this way the old mantra, 'Educate, agitate, organise', is replaced by 'Agitate, agitate, agitate'. The result is *diseducational*, because real learning beyond school level progresses

through dialectic (in the pre-Hegelian sense): the engagement of competing ideas. And it is *disorganising*, because unwillingness to take the time to fight through the political issues results in unprincipled splits which cannot be explained to the larger movement and tend to reduce the movement to political gravel.

These points are not a novelty. The 1933 Pre-Conference of the International Left Opposition posed the issue thus:

The frequent practical objections, based on the 'loss of time' in abiding by democratic methods, amount to short-sighted opportunism. The education and consolidation of the organisation is a most important task. Neither time nor effort should be spared for its fulfilment. Moreover, party democracy, as the only conceivable guarantee against unprincipled conflicts and unmotivated splits, in the last analysis does not increase the overhead costs of development, but reduces them ...¹¹

Our debates need to be conducted in the open anyhow, because it is only in this way that they can be educational for the broader readership of our publications and (at the end of the day) that the broad workers' vanguard - and beyond it the class as a whole - can have the opportunity to choose between competing conceptions. All the more when our movement is splintered into pieces: each of the pieces needs to openly avow what the differences are and the lessons they have drawn from their own political histories.

On this basis I issue my own call to debate. All the groups I have mentioned should be telling the world more about their own specific histories and views. But I would call in particular on the comrades grouped round 'Talking about socialism' to tell us explicitly about their differences with the CPGB and why they do not propose unity *to us*. It would be great to hear what we are doing wrong in their view, and this could potentially carry the discussion forward ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. I am indebted to comrade Lawrence Parker for images of the leaflet, which is a four-page text, the front page being the headline, "The struggle to build a revolutionary party in the 2020s: the limits of the Marxist Student Federation's 'Are you a communist?' campaign".
2. www.rs21.org.uk.
3. salvage.zone.
4. See, for example, P Demarty, 'IS Network: bondage and bigotry' *Weekly Worker* January 30 2014 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/995/is-network-bondage-and-bigotry); C Winstanley, 'IS Network: Self-flagellation and the "kinky split"' *Weekly Worker* February 13 2014 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/997/is-network-self-flagellation-and-the-kinky-split). My point is not that arguing about BDSM imagery is ridiculous: it is the conduct of the argument, and the fact that it led to a split.
5. www.tempestmag.org.
6. www.tempestmag.org/2023/03/revolutionary-socialist-organizations-in-the-21st-century.
7. prometheusjournal.org.
8. talkingaboutsociasim.org/author/nickwracktalkingaboutsociasim-org.
9. talkingaboutsociasim.org/no-money-forward-in-ukraine.
10. talkingaboutsociasim.org/what-sort-of-new-party-of-the-left.
11. W Reischer (ed) *Documents of the Fourth International: the formative years (1933-40)* New York 1973, p29.

LABOUR

Still getting it wrong

Diane Abbott has finally spoken out on Labour's 'fraudulent' disciplinary process. But, asks Carla Roberts, is Sir Keir's refusing to allow her to stand as a Labour candidate the result of racism?

It has been just over five months since Diane Abbott MP was suspended from the Parliamentary Labour Party for her crass letter to *The Observer*, in which she wrote that Jewish people, travellers and "redheads" - basically anybody who is not black - "are not all their lives subject to racism". Instead she claimed they are only subject to the lesser "prejudice" and in the process equated the persecution and mass extermination of Jewish people with the teasing experienced by redheads.

Of course, Labour leader Sir Starmer was quick to pounce on one of the few remaining Corbyn supporters in parliament. Abbott immediately and humbly apologised, blaming some computer mishap that allegedly sent a half-finished letter. (We very much doubt the other half would have been any better.)

Some on the left believe that Abbott should not have been criticised for her *Observer* letter, because showing 'real solidarity' demands that we do so uncritically. Kevin Bean's article in the *Weekly Worker* at the time was widely criticised for 'attacking' Abbott.¹ What nonsense. Of course, we continue to oppose her suspension, as all socialists should. But we do so critically, because her letter, quite frankly, was a lot of ahistorical and apolitical nonsense. A reflection of the dire identity politics that remains popular on the left, despite the fact that it so obviously weakens and splits our class into smaller and smaller groups defined by colour, sex, gender, etc.

By reducing racism to simply a question of skin colour, Abbott drew on the very same ideas of a 'hierarchy of racism' that her letter was ostensibly designed to counter. It is just that Keir Starmer has got the pyramid the wrong way around, you see.

Abbott was, of course, correct to state that the trans-Atlantic slave trade and apartheid in South Africa were ideologically justified on the basis of biological racism. However, the same must be said of the oppression of Irish Catholics by the British colonial authorities, and Jews - above all under the Hitler regime. Indeed, Ireland was radically depopulated through a socially caused famine and an imperial neglect that justified itself on the basis that the 'Africanoid' Irish were inferior compared to the fine, upstanding Anglo-Saxons. The Nazis exterminated between four and eight million Jews ... along with millions of Roma, Sinti, Slavs, homosexuals and Soviet POWs by putting mass killing onto an industrial footing.

Today, Romany gypsies and Irish travellers too, while they appear to Abbott as just another type of white people, are clearly and seriously disadvantaged when it comes to poverty, education, health, life expectancy, mental illness, etc. They are undoubtedly subject to overt racism by politicians, the media, the police and often also the local population that has been whipped up into vigorously opposing the setting up even of temporary camps in their neighbourhood.

Reading through Abbott's September 19 statement² published on the social media platform, 'X' (formerly Twitter), it becomes clear that she continues to view politics chiefly through the prism of race - and herself. At no point does she try to link her suspension from the PLP to the wider witch-hunt and the



Did not speak out against the witch-hunt

anti-Semitism smear campaign. She writes:

The internal Labour Party disciplinary against me is fraudulent. The Labour Party has not charged me with anti-Semitism because they know it is untrue. As somebody who has fought all forms of racism all my life, I would consider it a very serious allegation. Instead, it has been used to smear me, my reputation, and decades of anti-racist work.

Before her

Her - and hundreds before her, of course. Why did she not speak out when others were falsely smeared as anti-Semites - at a time when it still could have made a difference? What about the disciplinary process, when it comes to Tony Greenstein, Chris Williamson and black activists Jackie Walker and Marc Wadsworth? Was that non-fraudulent? What about the hundreds who have since been publicly smeared as anti-Semites, often because they dared to criticise Israel? What about the bans and proscriptions? What about those who have been expelled because they 'liked' a social media post by Labour Against the Witchhunt? The list goes on, as we all know.

"I am the longest serving black MP," she writes. "Yet there is widespread sentiment that, as a black woman, and someone on the left of the Labour Party, I will not get a fair hearing from this Labour leadership."

At least there is some small recognition here (the only one in her statement) that her suspension might have something to do with the fact that she is on the "left". But the "yet" implies that she believes she should have been treated differently to others on the left, because she is the "longest

serving black MP". Perhaps that is the reason why she "remained silent about this issue until now". This was "in the hope that "some sense of decency and recognition of the tenets of natural justice might prevail".

So she did not say anything before, because she thought, when it comes to herself, a black woman, a different set of criteria would apply, compared to the hundreds of others who have been vilified, smeared and persecuted? That is either extremely naive or extremely presumptuous.

In any case, Abbott - just like the rest of the entirely useless Socialist Campaign Group of MPs - in the main kept her mouth firmly shut. Instead of at least trying to take on the right, the official Labour left continues to this day to appease it, begging for forgiveness for the entirely fake 'mass anti-Semitism problem' of the party. In reality, it was exactly this silence and apology that has allowed the witch-hunt to take hold, fester and become as successful as it is today. Corbyn and his allies showed their enemies exactly where they should best be attacked. The SCG is now so weak that Starmer can pick the remaining 'left' MPs off one by one, with little or no opposition.

As a result, not only has the left inside the Labour Party been crushed, but the campaign to conflate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism continues to grow and poison all areas of society - in the media, schools, universities, town halls, political parties, national governments and the European parliament.

The truth is that Diane Abbott's suspension has nothing to do with anti-Semitism or indeed the colour of her skin. No, withdrawing the whip from Diane Abbott is just the latest round in Sir Keir Starmer's campaign to show the ruling class that he really

is a man they can trust. With talk of the next general election taking place in May 2024, Starmer will want to make sure that there is no chance of Abbott - or Jeremy Corbyn for that matter - coming back onto Labour's benches.

Replace me

The question is, why does Abbott go public now, after having kept quiet for so long? It appears it has to do with her prospect of being re-elected to parliament - or, more precisely, the lack of such a prospect. Abbott believes that the shutting down of her local CLP's executive committee and replacement of its principal officers has less to do with the recent conviction for paedophilia of the election agent of Meg Hillier (MP for the neighbouring constituency of Hackney South) and the "relevant child safeguarding issues" posed by "members in both constituencies" - but was merely done in order to "replace me as the candidate prior to the next election". Perhaps, perhaps not.

But it seems to have dawned on her at last that Starmer will indeed not make any kind of exception for her or let her off with a slap on the wrist. "Others have committed far more grave offences," she complains, yet they "have been immediately excused as supporters of this leadership". A rather weak defence, you would think, but the *Morning Star* editorial of September 21 makes the same point - listing various unpunished "offences" by rightwing MPs:

The racism is blatant once the record under Starmer is considered. Shadow cabinet member Steve Reed accused a Jewish businessman of being a 'puppet master.' He apologised -

no sanction. Veteran backbench MP Barry Sheerman speculated about a 'run on silver shekels' when two Jewish businessmen did not get a peerage. He apologised, referencing his long support for Labour Friends of Israel - no sanction ...

The editorial continues:

It may be as relevant that they are factional allies of the Starmer regime, which is also trying to hound Jeremy Corbyn and Jamie Driscoll out of office. But the racism in the difference in treatment is unanswerable.

Factional - yes, obviously. But racist? Really? It is now commonplace for many on the left to accuse Starmer and the Labour Party of 'institutional racism'. Anti-black racism, obviously - not anti-Semitism, as the accusation against Corbyn went. The Forde Report, many claim, exposed such institutional racism. Wrong. Martin Forde KC wrote that Labour was "in effect operating a hierarchy of racism or of discrimination" and that it was not taking accusations of anti-black racism or Islamophobia as seriously as allegations of anti-Semitism.³

We all know why, of course. Those allegations were inflated and weaponised, because that is the stick with which to beat Corbyn. Many on the left now see their job of reclaiming the said "hierarchy of racism" - but with anti-black racism on top. Diane Abbott's *Observer* letter is a (not very sophisticated) reflection of that widespread adherence to ID politics ('My experience of racism is worse than yours').

The boring truth is that the Labour Party under Sir Keir Starmer is not institutionally racist. Just as it was not anti-Semitic under Jeremy Corbyn. As a party with a membership of hundreds of thousands, of course, there is no doubt there will be a small minority of racists (and anti-Semites), reflecting what exists in wider society. But does that mean that either the leadership or the mass of Labour activists are racist?

It is absurd to claim that the straight-laced Starmer, who is going out of his way to show that he is capable of running 'multicultural' British capitalism without rocking the boat, would do so by running the Labour Party in a racist manner. Black and British-Asian members of the shadow cabinet, over 40 Labour MPs from "ethnic minority" backgrounds⁴ and a commitment to official anti-racism paint a rather different picture.

Of course, what goes unquestioned is national chauvinism, unity around British red, white and blue nationalism, pursuing our national interests and loyalty to the UK monarchical constitution. But then most of the official Labour left share that exact same outlook which amongst them simply passes for common sense ●

Notes

1. 'Race, prejudice and stupidity' *Weekly Worker* April 27: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1440/race-prejudice-and-stupidity.
2. twitter.com/HackneyAbbott/status/1704149054123360651.
3. www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/mar/17/labour-accused-still-not-engaging-hierarchy-racism-claims.
4. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ethnic_minority_politicians_in_the_United_Kingdom#List_of_ethnic_minority_Members_of_Parliament.

SCOTLAND

Give Tusc critical support

Voting Labour will strengthen the hand of Sir Keir and the right. **Scott Evans** reports on the recall background, the fixes and the candidates standing in the October 5 by-election

Voters in Glasgow's Rutherglen and Hamilton West constituency will have to choose between 14 (!) candidates. We recommend critical support for Christopher Sermanni of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. This is not because he is the only 'socialist' standing, for reasons we will come to, but because Tusc represents the least worse option.

The by-election has been called following a recall petition for Margaret Ferrier, which succeeded in getting the required one in 10 of constituent signatures to trigger a recall. Ferrier won the seat in 2015 in a massive swing to the Scottish National Party in a constituency that had been Labour since its creation in 2005, then lost it back to Labour temporarily by a very narrow margin in 2017, until she was re-elected in 2019.

In September 2020 Ferrier had developed Covid-19 symptoms at a time when guidance was such that nobody should be travelling if they were displaying symptoms. But she seemed to take this to mean that one must travel *as much as possible* when displaying symptoms, and promptly attended church, a family lunch, travelled down to London by taxi and train, participated in debates and ate in the House of Commons tea room, and then travelled back up to Scotland by train (lying to the SNP chief whip that the reason for returning was due to family illness).¹ When Boris Johnson's chief advisor, Dominic Cummings, was embroiled in a similar scandal, she stated that the government's advice was clear and called his position in post untenable - thus digging her own grave.

The SNP did not come to the defence of Ferrier. Previous first minister Nicola Sturgeon called her actions dangerous and indefensible - she was suspended as an SNP MP in October 2020, and continued to sit as an independent. Alex Salmond, who is the leader of the breakaway Alba, and former SNP first minister, said he thought the by-election should not take place at all and opposed the manner in which the SNP "combined with Labour" to attack Ferrier. Alba's 'Scotland United' policy includes support for only one pro-independence candidate in each seat, so it does not have anyone standing in this election.

Much to some people's disappointment, it is not the case that every MP may be recalled at a moment's notice if constituents demand it. An MP first has to fall foul of the Recall of MPs Act 2015, which requires a custodial prison sentence or a suspension from the house of at least two weeks following a report by a house standards body.² It is only the fourth application of the act, and the third successful one.

As with everything, we should be principled in the mechanisms we demand for accountability (or safeguarding, etc). It is very easy, but short-sighted, to support whatever mechanism is currently being used largely or exclusively against one's enemy - such as generalised no-platforming, or celebrating precedent-setting cases of a heavy-handed police and judicial crackdown on rightwingers. Even for more trivial-seeming and distant matters (the left is far from being able to elect a Karl Liebknecht at the moment), such as the call by some



Labour Party mark 2: a hopeless project

for 'full recall', we should be careful.

My own personal view is we should support accountability and the right to recall all workers' representatives. But the idea of the *constituents'* recall for MPs, following an initiative taken by them, may be opposed on the basis that it unduly amplifies momentary unpopularity, increasing resources spent on news-management, and further solidifies the tendency of MPs to become ombudsmen for constituents' day-to-day problems alongside councillors and social workers.

Under capitalism, a socialist MP subject to pro-recall campaigns run by pro-capitalist interests may have to be defended by trade unions and socialist parties in expensive counter-campaigns.³ But diving too deeply into this aspect of the story here would also raise too many larger issues: the merits and demerits of the 'constituency link'; alternative accountability mechanisms (outside of internal party discipline) for representatives (like automatic deselection rules such as that of the Representation of the People Act 1981); multi-member constituencies and proportional representation; and internal party mechanisms like mandatory reselection and recall.

Candidates

Each high-profile by-election has its own narrative through which the various competing parties want to spin their particular version of the tale. For Labour, the script writes itself: a chance to put a middle finger up to both the Westminster and Holyrood administrations, to both the Tories and the SNP. The symbolism of it is also clear: a Labour win is a sign of things to come, and soon the party will come riding in on a white horse to save the UK from the Tories and take the fight to the SNP as the official opposition in Scotland (having already vanquished the internal Corbynite menace...). Of course, it is a similar story for the Scottish Lib Dems and Greens, though they will not expect to actually be able to win.

In the general election in 2019, only five candidates stood, but as I have stated, the number for this by-election it is a whopping 14. As well as Tusc, these includes candidates from the Scottish Socialist Party, Greens, SNP and Labour - all of whom claiming some degree of 'left' credentials for one reason or

another. The leader of every one of these groups and parties has at some point called themselves a socialist or have lots of people who describe themselves as socialist in them today. Every one of the candidates from these parties has come out against austerity and for help over the cost of living. But, of course, none are viable vehicles for achieving socialism, as even those which correctly take the Marxist view that the working class is the key agent for driving towards socialism (Tusc, the SSP and left Labourites) are mired in either reformism, broad-leftism, or tailing one wing or another of liberals and/or nationalists.

The Labour candidate, Michael Shanks, actually left the party in 2019 in protest over Labour's approach to Brexit, as well as the so-called 'anti-Semitism' under Jeremy Corbyn, saying he could not even vote for Labour under these circumstances. But now he is back as a contender to become MP in a race where three other Labour members were blocked during the selection process apparently without explanation,⁴ over which two Constituency Labour Parties have submitted a formal complaint.⁵ This, of course, is a familiar and unsurprising story of the Labour right's grip on power.

The SNP's case is obviously much more difficult. It has been a rocky year for the party, to say the least, and people are in general wanting change. The approach of the SNP candidate, Katy Loudon, has been to position the SNP to the left of Labour (not exactly a difficult task). Her focus has been the two-child benefit cap and the rape clause, though Scottish Labour have said they will oppose the position of Labour HQ on the cap regardless.

The Scottish Greens' story here concerns the fact that they have stood at all in such a symbolic by-election. It means that two pro-independence candidates are standing, even though the Greens are the SNP's junior partners in the current Scottish administration.

Turf war

But what about the actual left? Why on earth are both Tusc and the SSP fielding a candidate in this by-election?

Following talks in mid-May at which SSP members were present (including the current SSP candidate, Bill Bonnar), Tusc announced that Chris Sermanni would be its

candidate in the by-election. In July, after the SSP put forward its own candidate, this prompted an open letter from Tusc addressed to the SSP and calling for "a single socialist candidate". Finally, on September 14 Tusc explained that it had met with SSP members in August, but that talks broke down - essentially because for Tusc the candidate had to be Sermanni and for the SSP it had to be Bonnar.

Point-scoring

While Tusc invited the SSP to campaign for Sermanni under its own name, it does not seem to have been entertained that there should be a procedure which both could agree on for deciding who should be selected of the two candidates by members and leaders across both parties. That is, a procedure which does not amount to mere haggling and points-scoring in a closed meeting. This failure probably, at least in part, stems from a common ailment on the left: an unwillingness to be, at least in the short term, in a minority within any organisation.

The SSP, in a classic sectarian move, has in public completely ignored the Tusc candidacy (as far as I can see). Its public statement on September 22 focused entirely on Labour, and concluded: "The only party campaigning on these anti-poverty measures is the SSP." Comrades, this is ridiculous, almost spiteful posturing. On September 26, the SSP pulled a stunt where it "challenged" the Labour candidate to attend a screening of the film on Jeremy Corbyn, *The big lie*, on September 30 in Rutherglen, concluding "The Scottish Socialist Party is the only option left for traditional Labour voters who genuinely want socialist change." Yet Bill Bonnar's slogan, "For a socialist MP on a workers' wage", could easily also be applied to Sermanni, who has said: "I would only accept the average wage of a skilled worker and donate the rest back to working class and socialist causes."

Who should have stepped aside and, as neither did, who should we support? The September 14 Tusc article offers a number of reasons why either candidate may be preferred. Aside from Sermanni's trade union credentials, three particularly stupid points amount to 'First come, first served' (Tusc announced its candidate first); 'Finders keepers, losers weepers' (Bonnar last stood for the SSP there in 2005); and 'You snooze,

you lose' (Tusc last stood a candidate covering the area much more recently, in 2021). Tusc also emphasises its approach to building a new mass workers' party, though in my view this was likely included more as a distinguishing-brand feature than as a real key element in the breakdown of the talks. Nevertheless, pointing out that the SSP does not make any such call is worthwhile.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty has called for a vote for Labour to keep the Tories out and "help start to rebuild the Labour left".⁶ For such comrades (?) it will never be the right time to vote for a party other than Labour, and it will always be the worst Tory government ever potentially in waiting. This perspective is so hopelessly limited, it hardly needs rebuttal.

Sermanni's bid⁷ comes with the usual Tusc slogans. Indeed, this includes "the right to a second independence referendum and an independent socialist Scotland".⁸ The final three words are a slogan that the overtly left-nationalist SSP uses as the main symbol of its identity, whereas for Tusc this is just a part of its broader programme. This slogan can only ever refer to either a watered down, unMarxist 'socialism', which Marxists should in no way champion, or the disastrous policy of 'socialism in one country'. It is an abominable slogan for any self-proclaimed Marxist to be using at any time, but especially after the legacy of the 20th century. Besides all that, the SSP has not openly supported working closely with others on the left since its dalliance with Rise in 2015-20 (a very weak initiative), and has not attempted to grasp the reasons for its own increased marginalisation over the past two decades since the days of Tommy Sheridan.

All in all, while we recommend a Tusc vote in this election, it hardly represents the alternative to the poison of Labourism we need and continues to tail left nationalism. The socialist left is woefully unprepared for the current global challenges; these sectarian turf wars will need to be overcome sooner rather than later, hopefully left in the ever-distant past and remembered only as a bad dream.

At which point we will be able to proudly and simply say, 'Vote communist!' ●

Notes

- publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmstandards/1276/report.html.
- Until 2020 this had to be the Commons Select Committee on Standards, extended to include others like the Independent Expert Panel, to close a loophole after Tory MP Rob Roberts dodged a by-election after sexual misconduct allegations.
- It would also give a single constituency's voters the power to recall a government minister - for example, the prime minister - though there is nothing requiring a PM to be an MP besides precedent.
- www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/labour-councillor-claims-rutherglen-hamilton-29869213.
- twitter.com/tomorrowssmps/status/1652260605787619330.
- www.workersliberty.org/story/2023-09-19/rutherglen-election-vote-labour.
- socialistpartyscotland.org.uk/support-the-trade-union-and-socialist-candidate-in-rutherglen-and-hamilton-west.
- This is a quote from Tusc's election bid launch (www.tusc.org.uk/19288/29-05-2023/scottish-tusc-to-stand-in-rutherglen-and-hamilton-west) and from the policy document we have: "The break-up of the UK - and it's Scotland that is currently the weakest link in that chain - would be a catastrophe for the ruling class and their economic, strategic and geopolitical interests." See www.tusc.org.uk/17486/01-03-2021/core-manifesto-for-the-2021-scottish-parliament-election.

POLEMIC

Unity and its discontents

Are campaigns calling for unity bound to fall on stony ground? Lawrence Parker takes issue with Mike Macnair on communist rapprochement

What follows is partly based on a recent blog article discussing remarks made by Mike Macnair at the CPGB-PCC's Communist University on the subject of communist unity.¹ I am not much of a fan of simply repeating previously written articles, as one runs the risk that chunks of the target audience will have already read the original. However, comrade Macnair suggested it would be a useful exercise to produce an article for further debate and I am happy to do so in that spirit.

At CU, comrade Macnair was left holding the baby after Socialist Appeal had refused to debate with the CPGB on the topic of communist unity. Naturally, the last thing Socialist Appeal would want to do during its current 'Are you a communist?' promotional campaign is talk to actual communists. It was correct to invite Socialist Appeal, of course, and its non-appearance illustrates vividly that what we are dealing with here is a *sect project* fundamentally concerned with building a secluded group rather than the mass Communist Party that its current efforts might imply to the naive.

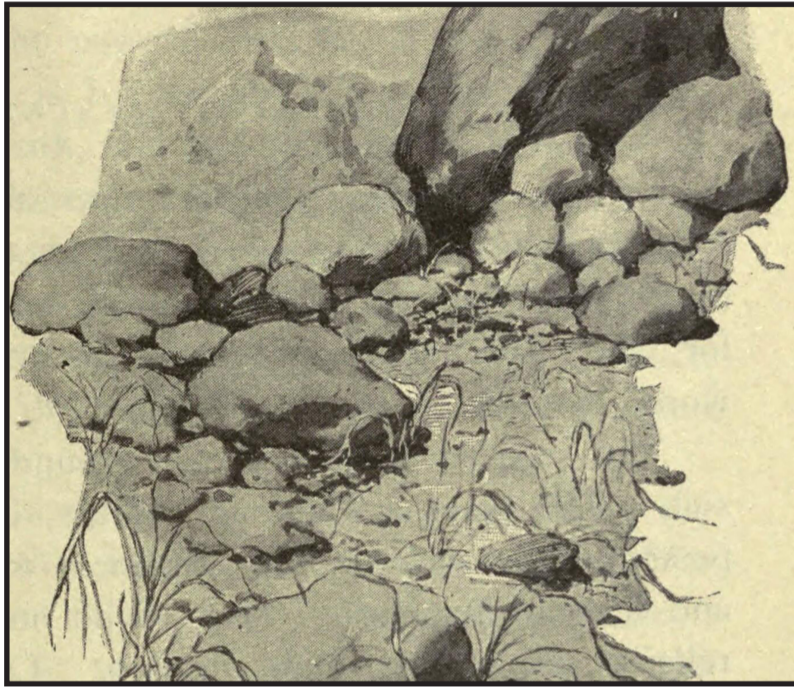
The irony here is that the 'Are you a communist?' schtick follows in the wake of the Young Communist League (linked to the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain) growing its forces around its communist identity. And now other groups, such as the Socialist Party (along with Socialist Appeal they share Militant Tendency as their 'mothership'), are suddenly discovering that they too are communist organisations. However much these groups, who all think they are singularly anointed and righteous, may dislike it, this then becomes a *collective* far-left issue that begins to pose the problem of *partyism*. That brings us to the CPGB, which is itself a long-running campaign for communist unity - albeit one that has lost ground in recent years.

As part of this, the CPGB is now not often self-reflexive about its own role in communist unity, and the *Weekly Worker* does not have a strong narrative about its own party project. This now tends to be occasionally mentioned as part of perspectives or fund columns, but not ceaselessly broadcast, reflected upon and elaborated, as it used to be. However, what comrade Macnair did fuzzily say in passing about the CPGB in his CU session struck me - and others, I think - as definitely not in keeping with his organisation's history and culture.

He said: "Suppose the CPGB were to launch an appeal to the left to unite. This wouldn't work. We've had a series of attempts of one sort or another of a small group launching appeals to unite, but it won't work." Now, people who know their left history will, of course, remember that it was precisely this kind of rapprochement that the CPGB undertook in late 1994, after Jack Conrad's 'Party, non-ideology and faction' *Weekly Worker* supplement,² which, in its early stages, was a unity campaign with micro-groups (Open Polemic, the Communist Action Group and Independent Communists) that had emanated from the collapse of 'official' communism.

Useful work

While this was not hailed by the CPGB of the mid-1990s as a wildly successful initiative, it was agreed to have been a useful undertaking. Open Polemic (partly composed of people previously in the Proletarian group, which, like *The Leninist*, had



Some fell among stony places; they withered away (Matthew xiii: 20-22)

been a split from the New Communist Party) even took out a form of representational factional entry in the CPGB in 1995-96 and had a regular column in the *Weekly Worker*. In the context of endless trivial splits and rancour on the left, such things are not to be sniffed at. I did ask comrade Macnair for his opinion of this venture during the session, and he was honest enough to say that he did not know an awful lot about it.

Future

I would advise comrades to read a very useful balance sheet of this period of CPGB activity by Mark Fischer. He argued:

While the process has not produced scores of eager-beaver new cadre, it has been successful and a source of real strength. Firstly, it has clarified admirably the question of pro-partyism with some of the detritus of official communism, elements which previously might have regarded themselves as rivals of some sort for the heritage of the CPGB.³

We can project that lesson into the future. As the communist left revives and becomes more united and purposeful, pretenders and silly sects will most likely be swept aside. I saw this partly happen in the Socialist Alliance in the late 1990s, as the bigger organisations moved in and quickly side-lined the prima donnas and sects of one, who had previously been holding court. What it will also likely expose is who is comfortable being in a minority; who is comfortable with losing votes and tough arguments; and those who want to swan around as leaders. The CPGB has not historically had a problem in being in a minority; others have a more dubious record.

Groups such as Open Polemic, the Communist Action Group and Independent Communists had winked out of existence by the late 1990s, precisely because it was very difficult for them to pretend that they stood for the idea of a Communist Party any more, after they knocked themselves out of a pro-party unity campaign. Rapprochement both clarified and cleaned up this piece of leftwing backwater. If, as comrade Macnair correctly argues, we cannot go around the existing far left, then such small bonfires are necessary.

Fischer also argued that Open Polemic's "brief membership of the party brought a concreteness to the call for rapprochement. This is a strength - something openly recognised even by people who today categorise themselves as 'enemies' of our party."⁴ This is also very true. Where can communists today learn and grow into conducting themselves in a mass party of the future with its debates, trends, clashes of opinion and probable personal rancour and bitterness? At this juncture, only by working as closely as possible with micro-groups and rivals on the left, given that far-left groups are not generally thought of as viable by most working class people due to their fissile nature.

In the CPGB-PCC's case, I came across it in the Socialist Labour Party (just as Open Polemic was walking out, as it happens) and, in the bigger arena of Arthur Scargill's party, its members' skill in patiently talking to a factionally divided left, without offering them a non-aggression pact, was noticeable. Rapprochement did start to lay foundations for reaching the wider left, as the decade wore on.

I do not think comrade Macnair's relative dismissal of the unity of tiny far-left groups holds water and this became particularly clear when he talked of having hopes and expectations in splits that took place a decade ago in the Socialist Workers Party (which, I agree, has mostly produced sub-political rubbish). This sounded very much like passivity to me, as if the CPGB was polemicising and critiquing the left, but then waiting for something positive to emerge. The group's old activist conception that allowed it to punch beyond its weight in the 1990s (partly informed by a false narrative of a "Bolshevik party of the new type"⁵) has disintegrated. Its subsequent idea of a patient strategy is correct, but it does need some kind of activist underpinning and methodology. If it is patience, then it needs to be shot through with some sense of urgency and purposefulness. Otherwise, you end up with the disappointments of comrade Macnair's rather hazily expressed waiting game.

Doing ideological battle with the larger organisations of the far left and the labour movement as a whole is vital, as is the goal of a truly mass, multi-tendency Communist Party that forms the advanced part of the working class. But, given that, don't

we have an elementary duty to do all in our power to unite, even at the micro-scale, to begin that process? As Jack Conrad said in 1994:

Stage one is calling again upon the surviving pro-party elements scattered by the collapse of 'official communism' and those groupings who, formally at least, take a pro-party position. Stage two will require us to reach out to those who define themselves as being in the Leninist tradition. Stage three should open the door to all genuine Marxists. Stage four might still be a long way off, but any sizeable Communist Party ought to set itself the aim of organising those serious libertarian and syndicalistic workers who are revolutionary, but at the moment mistrust the party...⁶

To that end, these early stages of rapprochement were deemed by Conrad to be an integral part of the attempt to "make the CPGB into a mass vanguard party, together with those who want to help and against those who are incapable".⁷

But 1994 was not quite 2023 despite the continued dispersal of the Marxist left. Back then, Conrad could confidently spotlight the CPGB-PCC as a broker of a future Communist Party. After the dissolution of the 'official' CPGB, his faction had captured the name of the party with only a largely stillborn *Morning Star's* CPB as a potential competitor: "Objective conditions dictate rapprochement with the PCC. A rapprochement of pro-party groups with the PCC, because it is the only established and effective pro-party centre."⁸ This clear and confident tone, that could self-reflect on its role and lay out the means by which it could achieve its ambitious goals seems to have faded in recent times. Some of that self-doubt was evident in comrade Macnair's session at CU.

Read against other public statements, it is easy to see a context for this drift. Last year, comrade Conrad argued:

There has been a recent uptick in various individuals and little groups declaring themselves to be communist. If they are worthwhile, however, not mere social media poseurs, they will contact and enter into negotiations with the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee.⁹

Defensive

This defensive statement assumes that the CPGB-PCC is in the same position in 1994 and the natural arbiter of any future communist unity process.

The comrade repeated this line to the recent aggregate, stating that other groups and individuals "know where to find us". But this is exactly the problem. All of the left knows the *Weekly Worker* and, even though its audience and influence has shrunk in recent years, visibility and awareness is not a problem. But most of the left, including a majority of those that class themselves as communist, do not wish to approach the CPGB for one reason or another.

So, there needs to be something beyond sitting in a corner. Unless you are beautiful beyond all compare, you could wait an awful long time for someone to buy you a drink ●

Notes

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NiO9afftM.
2. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/75/supplement-party-non-ideology-and-faction.
3. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/169/moving-on.
4. *Ibid* (original emphasis).
5. J Conrad *Problems of communist organisation* London 1993, p8: communistparty.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Problems-of-Communist-Organisation.pdf.
6. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/75/supplement-party-non-ideology-and-faction.
7. *Ibid*.
8. *Ibid*.
9. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1414/notes-on-the-war.

Online Communist Forum



Sunday October 1 5pm

A week in politics - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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

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

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

USA

Opening up yet another front

Saudi Arabia and the US are looking to repair their strained relationship with a strategic deal which could easily lead to a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, says **Daniel Lazare**

With the Ukrainian offensive increasingly bogged down now that the autumn rains are setting in, the US is opening up yet another front in its ongoing struggle with Russia, China and Iran.

The location is the Persian Gulf, which has been oddly quiet in recent years. One reason is that the main protagonists have been preoccupied with internal affairs: Iran with the anti-hijab protests, Saudi Arabia with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's economic liberalisation campaign and Israel with the turmoil over Binyamin Netanyahu's judicial 'reforms'.

But another reason is that America has been allowing its attention to drift. With one war going badly and another conflict brewing in the western Pacific (that is potentially even more dangerous), it has not had time for what was once billed as an 'American lake'. Much has changed as a consequence. Straying farther and farther from the fold, the Saudis are forging closer ties with China, seeking to join Brics, the international alliance formed by Russia, China and India, and re-establishing diplomatic relations with Iran. The kingdom has also embarked on a rapprochement with Syrian president Bashar al-Assad - the target of US regime-change operations for more than a decade. But now Assad is back in the Arab family's good graces, courtesy of the Saudis, but much to the dismay of both Israel and the US.

The result is a major setback in a part of the world that America once thought of as its own. To that end, the Biden administration has come up with a 'grand strategy' aimed at taking back lost ground by shutting out Beijing, boxing in Iran and locking Israel and the Saudis in a long-term embrace - all in one fell swoop. The plan, disclosed last week in a front-page story in *The New York Times*, calls for a Middle East version of Aukus¹ that will soothe Jerusalem and return Riyadh to the pro-US camp, so that Washington can once again take control.²

But the proposal has a touch of panic about it due to Joe Biden's growing political woes. A recent *Washington Post-ABC News* poll had devastating news for the president. It showed him trailing Donald Trump by 42% to 51% and found that just 37% of Americans think he is doing a 'good job' - versus 56% who do not - and that 74% see him as too old for another term. It also found that 44% say their finances have deteriorated since he took office - the highest such number in more than 25 years.³

What is even more devastating is that 40% of respondents say they would blame Biden if the federal government shuts down due to a deepening gridlock on Capitol Hill (versus only 33% who would blame the Republicans). Even though it is rightwing crazies like Matt Gaetz and Marjorie Taylor Greene who are plainly driving the shutdown, a plurality of Americans believes the liberal centre is responsible, with all its hypocrisy, warmongering and sleaze.

The foundering Ukrainian offensive is compounding the damage. "More people will die, more buildings will burn, and the surrounding farmlands will be seeded with land mines and unexploded shells that probably will take decades to clear," *The New York Times* grimly noted about the struggle over a tiny village known as Robotyne.⁴ *The Washington Post* recently conceded that the war will not



UK-supplied Typhoons led Saudi bombing campaign against Yemen

end this year or next, but "may well drag into 2025 or even longer".⁵

For a White House that originally counted on a quick victory over a dilapidated Russian military, this is as bad as it gets. The result is a new diplomatic drive aimed at shoring up the Persian Gulf, where, until recently, Washington maintained maximum control. But it is a last-ditch effort that does not look like it will work out any better than the rest.

Ultra-right Israel

The details show a government that is deeply out of touch. Desperate to keep the 1995 Oslo Accords alive - accords that never offered Palestinians anything more than Bantustan-like status to begin with - the plan calls on Israel to commit to no further annexations and no new settlements and to return certain Palestinian population centres to Palestinian control.⁶

This is a mantra that the US has been repeating for decades, yet the chances of it happening are now less than zero. Instead of cutting back, for instance, Bezalel Smotrich, Netanyahu's ultra-right finance minister, has called for doubling the number of Jewish settlers in the West Bank from 500,000 to a million.⁷ Where the proposal calls on Israel to put a stop to unauthorised hilltop settlement, national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir is urging settlers to "run for the hilltops" in order to establish more. While visiting one outpost in early June, he said:

There needs to be a full settlement here. Not just here, but on all the hilltops around us. We have to settle the land of Israel and at the same time need to launch a military campaign, blow up buildings, assassinate terrorists. Not one, or two, but dozens, hundreds or, if needed, thousands.

Needless to say, a fascist like Ben-Gvir is not going to change course, no matter how nicely the United States asks. As for all those supporters of the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement who think that the US merely has to apply a bit of economic pressure for Israel to snap to attention, the fact is that US leverage

has been steadily diminishing for years. American military aid is now two-thirds less relative to Israeli GDP than it was in 1999, while the Jewish state has carved a foreign policy for itself that is completely independent of anything Washington has to say. When ethno-nationalists (from Geert Wilders of the Netherlands to Narendra Modi of India) seek inspiration, they do not look to the United States. Rather, they look to Israel - the most successful ethno-state of all.⁸

This is what makes America's latest appeal so abject. All it shows is that an over-extended US needs Israel at this point more than Israel needs the US.

The plan's Saudi proposals are just as batty. In return for normalising relations with Israel, the United States is offering a mutual defence pact plus US aid in developing a civilian nuclear programme. The first is certainly appealing from a Saudi point of view. But it would draw the US even more deeply into the kingdom's war with Yemen, which, despite a ceasefire in effect since mid-2022, could reignite at any moment. It would also draw the US into a military conflict with Iran, if the Saudis attack the Islamic republic or if they provoke an attack in return. America would be under pressure to respond, as things now stand, but it would be under even more pressure if the plan goes through. It is a recipe for additional military adventures on the part of an empire that already has its hands full.

Weapons grade

The effect is to raise US foreign policy to a new level of incoherence. After all, Saudi Arabia is the country that Biden vowed to treat as a "pariah" due to Mohammed bin Salman's role in the death of *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi in a Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018. (The CIA concluded that MBS ordered the murder personally.)

As Biden put it in a Democratic debate a year after the killing, "I would make it very clear we were not going to in fact sell more weapons to them. We were going to in fact make them pay the price, and make them in fact the pariah that they are." Biden added that he found "very little social redeeming value in the present

government in Saudi Arabia" and said with regard to the Yemen war that he would "end the sale of material to the Saudis where they're going in and murdering children".⁹

But that was the last decade. Now Biden wants to turn the Saudis into the closest of allies, while selling them even more. As for a civilian nuclear programme, the proposal follows on the heels of the US abandonment of the 2015 Iranian nuclear accords, which the Obama administration - including then-vice president Biden - said would prevent Iran from using its civilian reactors to manufacture weapons-grade uranium. This is the deal that Trump repudiated in May 2018, but which Biden promised to restore in 2020 - only to then sabotage negotiations by insisting that Iran cut back on its missile development programme as well (an area that the original agreement was never meant to cover).

With more oil than it knows what to do with, Saudi Arabia has no more need for nuclear energy than it does for wind power or hydro. The only conceivable use for such a programme would be to enrich uranium to weapons-grade levels. Where the 2015 accord was supposed to prevent a nuclear arms race in the Persian Gulf, the new strategy would rev one up.

But stoking conflict is the only way the US knows, when it comes to reasserting control. The US and Saudi Arabia are locked in a dysfunctional marriage straight out of *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?* There is little doubt, for instance, that Saudi intelligence and diplomatic officials played a key role in 9/11. (For the gruesome details, see the long-suppressed 28-page chapter of the joint congressional report on 9/11, which Barack Obama released in 2016 under intense public pressure.¹⁰) Yet, rather than investigate, George W Bush preferred to save the relationship by invading Iraq.

Two weeks after Saudi Arabia began its war against Yemen in March 2015, then deputy secretary of state Antony Blinken flew to Riyadh to assure the kingdom: "We have expedited weapons deliveries, we have increased our intelligence sharing, and we have established a

joint coordination planning cell in the Saudi operation centre," he said about a war that would result in one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent history.¹¹ A few days after that, an Obama administration official told *The Washington Post* that it did not object to al Qaeda using hundreds of US-made TOW missiles - which the Saudis were happy to supply - to take control of Syria's northern province of Idlib, which al Qaeda (now known as the 'Al-Nusra Front') holds to this day.¹²

The US repeatedly sought to protect Saudi Arabia and allow it to have its way because it needed it in order to hold onto nearly half the world's known oil reserves. It saw the gulf as key to the global energy supply and hence to world economic domination. It would therefore stop at nothing to keep it under US control. Jimmy Carter declared in January 1980 in a statement written by his national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski:

An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

The Strait of Hormuz is still the world's most important energy checkpoint, as the US Energy Information Agency noted in 2019, and the fact that most of the oil now goes to India and China makes it more important from a US point of view rather than less.¹³

Reasserting control is therefore a top priority. In militarising the gulf, the US has created a complex security structure stretching from Israel to Saudi Arabia, with gulf monarchies like Bahrain and Qatar - home, respectively, to the Fifth Fleet and the vast Al Udeid airbase - playing supporting (but nonetheless vital) roles.

It is a structure that the US neglected following the Khashoggi murder, but which it now wants to restore in all its glory. But, even though it threatens to raise tensions in a region that has already seen more than its fair share of war, it is necessary in order to claw back control. To quote Madeleine Albright: "We think the price is worth it." ●

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IRAN



Vladimir Putin meets with supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and president Ebrahim Raisi

Foot in mouthery

Every September the United Nations general assembly hosts a get-together of leaders. **Yassamine Mather** zeroes in on the Iranian president's embarrassing contribution

After a few years of low-key events, during and after the pandemic, this year dozens of presidents and prime ministers made the journey to the United Nations New York HQ to give long (usually meaningless) speeches. A reflection of the UN's irrelevance - despite illusions in it among sections of the left.

The heads of state or their representatives are free to choose the subject of their speeches. So you end up with talks about all and nothing. For example, deputy prime minister Oliver Dowden, representing the British government, rambled on about artificial intelligence (part of a plug for a conference Rishi Sunak wants to host next year). While Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu talked of the existential threat posed by Iran's nuclear programme, the Iranian president, Ibrahim Raisi, lamented foreign intervention in his country, blaming all the protests over the last year on western powers.

If this is true, then, considering the widespread protests in every city, town and village up and down the country, foreign powers must exercise extraordinary influence with the borders of the Islamic Republic. Frankly, Raisi's speech was probably the most embarrassing made by an Iranian president - surpassing those delivered by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2011 and 2012.

Does he not realise that, if this were the case, it raises more questions than it answers. How did these foreign powers gain such widespread leverage? Why after nearly 44 years in power is the regime so vulnerable? Why is it that it has been forced, for all practical purposes, to back down, when it comes to one of its most cherished symbols - the obligatory wearing of the hijab?

During Raisi's speech, the Israeli ambassador to the UN, Gilad Erdan, was filmed walking out of the main hall holding aloft a picture of Mahsa Amini - the young Kurdish woman who died last year under police detention, sparking a year of protests. Erdan accused the

UN of rolling out the red carpet for "the butcher of Tehran". Rich, coming from the representative of a government that only a day earlier had killed five Palestinians - a government that has ignored more than 100 UN resolutions on Palestine. The international press and media which reported Erdan's stunt failed to mention the fact that, while ordinary Iranians are fighting to defeat attempts to segregate buses and metro trains - and succeeding - Likud's religious coalition partners are trying to impose (and in some cases succeeding in enforcing) gender segregation in Israel.

Raisi also repeated what has become a common theme of supreme leader Ali Khamenei's recent speeches: "The west is in decline and will soon lose its power". Now the left has many valid arguments about US relative decline, the danger of war and how capitalism as a mode of production has created what is now almost universally recognised as a climate crisis. However, Raisi, whose rightwing government is one of the most ardent supporters of the 'free market' and unregulated capitalism, fails to see that the Islamic Republic is part of the problem too.

Decline

It is certainly true that the US has been in decline for decades - a process that is inevitable when you consider that America accounted for roughly 50% of the world's GDP in 1945. However, no-one in their right mind predicts the imminent collapse of the US. If Khamenei and Raisi are waiting for such a situation to get them out of the current impasse with the failed nuclear talks and the associated economic disaster brought about by sanctions, they are truly living in cloud cuckoo land. Hoping for the miraculous return of the 12th Imam seems a much more plausible approach!

The Hidden Imam, purported to have disappeared down a well in 878, is particularly venerated by the Shia regime in Iran. When commanded by god, the 12th Imam will return to lead the forces of righteousness against the forces of evil in an apocalyptic war

that will establish peace and justice on earth. Obviously Khamenei and Raisi consider themselves amongst the righteous.

US-Iran

The UN jamboree also involved the appearance of spouses and there was no exception in Iran's case. Raisi's wife, Jamileh Alamolhoda, gave an interview to *Newsweek*, and told it:

Women in Iran are supported by the family, by the father, by all the members of the family, and they play a crucial role in the society, owing to the support they receive from the family. And that is absolutely due to the fact that the core of the family plays a significant role. Women in Iran, or anywhere in the world, play a crucial role in maintaining the very core of the family, so they play a very crucial role in society.

Men in Iran prefer not to ask their spouses to work or bring money home. Women are regarded as persons sharing love with men in the position of mother, spouse or daughter.

Mrs Raisi is the daughter of ayatollah Ahmad Alamolhoda, who has been in charge of the Astaneh Quds Razavi Goharshad foundation - a multi-billion-dollar business looking after the shrine of the 8th Shia Imam in Mashhad. The shrine welcome tens of thousands of Iranian and Iraqi pilgrims every month and is one of the richest institutions in the country. So the ayatollah and his family have not exactly been short of money. I do not think this woman, with her background, even begins to understand the lives of ordinary women who have to take on two or three jobs to put food on the family table, to buy medication for their children, etc. They and their partners do not have the luxury of family wealth.

She went on:

The feminist movement from other parts of the world has also not found its way in Iran, and that is primarily due to the fact that it is inclined toward violence. As

opposed to that, women in Iran prefer tranquillity rather than being exposed to violence through the feminist approach.

I am no supporter of feminism, but branding all feminists as 'violent' is bizarre. You would have thought such ill informed nonsense came from of an uneducated woman. But, no, Alamolhoda has a doctorate in the philosophy of education and served in a number of academic positions before founding the Institute of Fundamental Studies of Science and Technology at Shahid Beheshti University in 2013. In 2020, she was appointed secretary of the Council for the Transformation and Renovation of the Educational System.

Yet her views on feminism are on a par with some of the worst misogynist statements by the ex-shah, who once referred to women's brains being smaller than men's, resulting in less intelligence and capability.

Iran's foreign minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, was also in New York most of last week, at a time when the prisoner exchange between Iran and the United States and the subsequent unfreezing of six billion dollars of Iran's oil revenues seemed to herald a slight thaw in the relationship between the two countries. According to a number of news agencies, Abdollahian applied for a waiver from the restrictions on the movements of Iranian officials, in order to visit Washington. (Since 2019, when Donald Trump imposed those restrictions, Iranian officials in the USA can only visit areas of New York close to the UN headquarters.) However, the Biden administration refused the application and he returned to Tehran.

Nevertheless, there seems to be some progress regarding the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the US. A number of news agencies report that supreme leader Khamenei has "granted permission" for direct talks to take place between the two countries. Of course, that means permission for publicly acknowledged direct negotiations - secret direct talks have been ongoing ever since Joe Biden became president ●

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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Demography is destiny?

Family, home and nation politicians gathered in Budapest to bemoan falling birth rates and rising levels of migration. **Kevin Bean** stands up for the political economy of the working class

The 5th Budapest Demography Summit, which took place last week, was probably not at the top of most readers' must-see list. The bi-annual event, which brings together rightwing and conservative political leaders, intellectuals, lobbying groups and religious organisations, has been running since 2015 and seems to be going from strength to strength.

Amongst this year's participants were host Viktor Orbán, Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni, former US vice-president Mike Pence and rightwing 'intellectual' Jordan Peterson.¹ If that line-up did not give you a clue about the nature of the 'demography' under discussion, the conference's title - 'Family: the key to security' - should tell us that this event is clearly located on the wilder shores of rightwing opinion and its fears that 'the west' is being undermined from within by demographic decline.

These fears are often linked to conspiracy theories about 'the great replacement' and the role of shadowy 'globalist' forces out to destroy the white, Christian west. Orbán has long made these themes part of his stock-in-trade, especially when directed at George Soros and other critics of his 'illiberal liberalism'. However, we do not have to go to Budapest to find advocates of these ideas: Tory MPs like Miriam Cates and Danny Kruger, along with other attendees at this spring's National Conservative conference in London, made similar arguments to those of Orbán and his co-thinkers.² Although home secretary Suella Braverman's speech in Washington this week focused on migration and was clearly positioning her for a post-election leadership bid, it too saw demographic change as a threat that the west will have to confront.³ Far from being the obsession of an eccentric minority, the politics of demography, migration and the family are now moving centre-stage.

Decline

The demographic decline that Orbán *et al* are so concerned about is real enough. Leave aside Japan, China and South Korea - let us take Europe. Although fertility rates vary across the continent, they have generally been falling since the 1960s and nowhere is there the necessary 2.1 rate that guarantees the mere reproduction of a given population. Thus France tops the list with a rate of 1.86, closely followed by Ireland, the Czech Republic and Sweden on 1.71, while at the bottom we have Poland on 1.44, Italy on 1.27 and Spain on 1.23.⁴ When combined with the numbers of babies born to foreign-born women in some states and their supposedly higher fertility rate compared to that of 'native' mothers, it is clear how the politics of demography can be mobilised by not only the far right, but by 'mainstream conservatives' as well.⁵

However, the explanation of this pattern has little or nothing to do with religion. France is officially secular, Ireland and Poland officially Catholic.



Diego Rivera 'Adoration of the Virgin and Child' (1912-13)

Nor is it education levels. Benefits such as readily available crèches, after-school care, paid but compulsory time off work before and after the birth of a child - including provision to involve the father, paid leave to look after a sick child. Such measures prove to be the main factor involved in why women have more children in France and Scandinavia than in Italy and Spain.

There is a rightwing version of this though. Orbán has made the politics of the family a central issue and has sought to turn back the decline in fertility rates by a series of measures that provide tax incentives, financial support and loans to encourage women to have more children. Combined with a propaganda campaign in defence of 'traditional family values', and of Christian Europe against liberal attacks and the threat of 'cultural Marxism' and feminism, these politics have been echoed by other rightwing leaders in Italy, Poland and Slovakia.⁶

Even so, the impact of these changes on Hungary's fertility rate since the introduction of these 'family-friendly' policies has been marginal: going from 1.2 children per woman to 1.5. Negligible and nowhere near the rate of reproduction that Orbán is seeking.⁷

Apart from a handful of countries, fertility rates have been falling globally since the 1960s - a trend that is clearly linked to wider social, economic and political change.⁸ These rates are in comparison with those of the patriarchal feudal and early capitalist family, which had very different economic and social functions compared to contemporary capitalism. The feudal family, in particular, was a unit of production and male children were at a premium as workers and an insurance for old age, when the parents were no longer able to work. The incentives to have (male) children were clear and can still be seen in those economies where agriculture remains an important part

of the economy, such as Vietnam, China and India.⁹

Similar incentives were also at work in early capitalism, where the wages of child labour were an important part of family income: Emile Zola's famous novel *Germinal* shows how this worked in the French mines in the 1860s and the ways parents fought hard to keep their wage-earning children within the economic unit of the family for as long as possible. For Marxists the struggle to limit the working day and end the abuses of child labour was a central demand in the 19th century and, in the form of the Ten-Hour Act, produced a major gain for the working class.¹⁰

Marx argued that the act was a Magna Carta for the working class, as it represented a victory for the political economy of the proletariat against that of the capitalists.¹¹ Marxist parties supported legislation enforced by the capitalist state to limit child labour, even against those sections of workers

who argued that child labour was a necessary addition to the family income and that such laws attacked workers' living standards. This internalisation of bourgeois political economy, which reduced human beings to mere units of production, was an important issue for the working class movement and one that was successfully challenged with the growth of full-time education for children and successive limitations on working hours in the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Main burden

Nowadays children cost - they are very expensive from birth till way into early adulthood. The use-value of average labour-power is far greater now than it was in the early stages of capitalism. Secondary and tertiary education is now the norm. So if the main burden for raising the next generation is carried by the parents, not society, the tendency will be for fewer and fewer children.

Only with a substantial reduction in the legally permitted working day and the full socialisation of housework and child-rearing will women be in a situation where they have children without worrying about the economic costs involved, and have children simply because they want to have children.

By contrast, the family, home and nation politicians gathered in Budapest want to turn the clock back ●

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