

# weekly **Worker**



**Rupert Murdoch about to step down and a real-life drama of succession in the high bourgeoisie**

- Letters and debate
- Not much left of left
- Socialist Alliance fusion
- MAGA USA

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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## TORIES STARE AT LOOMING GENERAL ELECTION DRUBBING





## LETTERS



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

## Fund translations

Is Marxist unity possible? No, not if self-defined Marxists hold on to the illusion that socialism in one country is realisable. Nor if they ally with leftwing nationalists. It follows there can be no unity with, for example, the Communist Party of Britain, George Galloway's Workers' Party, the Revolutionary Communist Group or the Scottish Socialist Party (amongst others). Entryism to split and win members from these groups is another matter.

So how can unity be achieved? Contributors to this newspaper have argued correctly that there is no alternative to education and debate. They have pointed out this is a continuous process subject to an ongoing review of goals and the means of achieving them.

An example of this is the widespread disagreement on the distinction between socialism and communism. Some individuals and groups claim to follow Marx and Engels. They argue that the terms, 'socialism' and 'communism', have identical meanings. Both refer to lower and higher post-revolutionary 'phases'. Others cite Lenin and Trotsky to state that socialism refers to a temporary, transitional stage on the way to communism. Socialism comes after the working class has taken power. It is now the ruling class. According to the stageists, socialism is a global society, in which planning exists uneasily with the market and the state has yet to 'wither away'.

Alongside these differences, Marxists continue to disagree about the nature of Stalinism. Following Trotsky, some people think that the regime's nationalised property and abolition of commodity relations were progressive. They were transitional to socialism. Others argue that, in the absence of workers' democracy and control on a global scale, nationalised property relations are typical of corrupt, militarised, bureaucratic regimes. An elite dominates these and tries to pump a surplus from workers' labour-power.

In the light of these differences, I suggest the goals of socialism and/or communism take priority in discussion and debate between Marxists. This includes a clear focus on how the working class can overcome the barriers of commodity fetishism and abolish national, economic, religious, ethnic and other divisions. It entails discussion of how to build a mass communist-socialist party and the role programmes play in this.

Towards globalising these tendencies, it would be helpful if the CPGB were able to fund the translation of its programme into a variety of different languages,

Paul B Smith  
Ormskirk

## Bankrupting dues

This letter is written from an unaffiliated communist who took part in the UK Marxist Unity Reading Group, which read the first edition of the *Cosmonaut* reader and was also involved in organising one of the 'rank-and-file' conferences this past summer which Mike Macnair mentions in his article, 'It's good to talk' (September 28).

The primary thrust of comrade Macnair's article is correct - as an ex-member of Socialist Appeal, I could talk for hours about how the group's full-timers stifle any intellectual curiosity of newer members wanting to explore writing by other comrades outside of the narrow funnel which they have built. It's also true that my knowledge of the internal factions within RS21 only exists from who I know and conversations held at the pub at events like Troublemakers or The World Transformed. I also know that one of the "rival far-left initiatives", Troublemakers at Work, has reached out to the other conferences to try and work together - this came off the back of a trades council motion calling for it to do so. So far, no-one else has replied.

Given all of that, I find myself slightly frustrated that the comrades in the CPGB-PCC obscure the main difference between their organisation and others: namely the 10% of your pay packet a month in membership dues. When I and other comrades conducted the UK Marxist Unity Reading group there was some genuine interest in joining the CPGB-PCC, but all of us balked at the idea of losing that much money a month to what is essentially a Zoom discussion group and a website. Is it any wonder that comrades are joining discussion groups like 'Why Marx', 'Talking about Socialism' and RS21 instead of bankrupting themselves?

It would be useful to know whether the CPGB-PCC has conducted any internal self-reflection on the proliferation of these groups with very similar political commitments and, if the organisation hasn't, then why not? Comrade Macnair argues "... 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." I would argue that the CPGB-PCC is guilty of this itself. If you were to read the pages of the *Weekly Worker*, listen to the organisation's podcast, the Communist Forum, or read comrade Macnair's excellent book *Revolutionary strategy*, you would have no idea of the huge financial burden placed on its membership and could be convinced that it is the rest of the left that is ignoring the open arms of the CPGB-PCC.

Finally, I would like to mention that I have spoken to many a comrade who has enquired about joining the organisation, and have been told a similar story that they either get no email back or just a curt message from Jack Conrad, who from what I understand is the group's full-timer and part of the reason for the high dues. Again I'd like to stress the only way I know that Jack Conrad is a full-timer is through gossip between comrades. If the comrades are serious about growing the organisation, then I would argue that comrade Parker's recent piece, 'Unity and its discontents' (September 28), offers some useful recommendations around reaching out to other groups and individuals.

If the CPGB-PCC held themselves to the high standards they hold others to, then I would argue they need to be far more transparent about the joining process, the 10% of your wage dues, and how that money is spent and why. They also need to actively reach out to other organisations or

reading groups and try and discuss these issues face-to-face rather than expecting everyone to come to them.

Sam Turner  
email

## Whole left

Lawrence Parker's article, 'Unity and its discontents' (September 28), helpfully reminds us that the CPGB's unity initiative in 1994 (some time before I became a member) had positive results, even if they were on a very small scale. They lay primarily in identifying which groupings that claimed to seek to reconstruct a Communist Party were not really interested in doing so in practice.

Comrade Parker is, I think, probably right to warn us of the danger of passivity, and from this point of view to criticise some of my formulations; but I don't think he is right to say that our approach to the splits in the Socialist Workers Party 10 years ago was passive. The reality was that we *did* approach both trends in the split, but both refused outright to engage with us - as far as we could see, due to opposition in principle to our insistence on political transparency (including publishing material from the SWP's internal debates).

More generally, the idea of a "patient strategy" (more exactly, a "strategy of patience") is not a strategy for *us alone*, with which we could approach the masses, but *for the left as a whole*. Nor have we, in fact, been passive over the past 10 years. We intervened vigorously in Left Unity to push the conception of building a communist, rather than a broad-frontist, party. In 2015 we turned sharply to the Corbyn movement and actively set out to intervene in it via Labour Party Marxists - again with considerable effort and initiative.

This was a more difficult project, because the Corbyn movement was on a mass scale, but heavily involving flash-in-the-pan 'clicktivism' and unwillingness of the larger part of the newly self-identified leftists to *persist* with political action in face of the bureaucratic control of Labour Party organisations by the right, as well as dominance of 'official' lefts who were determined to steer them into *non-confrontation* with the right. Intervening was a duty, but it was the same sort of duty as attendance at large TUC demonstrations or strike support work: necessary, but unlikely to have much immediate political impact.

After Corbynism, what? We are by no means the only people to be asking this question, but most of the answers are 'more of the same': eg, Left Unity and its co-thinkers' attempt to rebrand yet another 'broad left party'. The SWP is continuing with Stand Up to Racism; the Socialist Party in England and Wales with more 'Labour Party mark two' stuff, and so on.

Socialist Appeal's Marxist Student Federation, with its "Are you a communist? - then get organised" campaign, is no more than superficial coloration, imitating the stunt-imagery of the Young Communist League. YCLers appear masked at the Tory Party conference, and their banner offers merely the low-level, left-Labourite slogan, "Resist Tory rule". I agree with comrade Parker that we need to find ways to *engage* with this stunt-imagery; but it is not clear that it poses the immediate possibility of the sort of regroupment appeal that CPGB comrades initiated in 1994.

I agree with comrade Parker that "1994 was not quite 2023", but not, I think, for the same reasons. It is not

that the CPGB has lost confidence in our *party conception*. Rather, we are in a somewhat different situation after a prolonged engagement with a left that appears to be in fairly severe political decline, relative to where it was in the middle 1990s - not in numbers or in fragmentation, but in decreased political education and increased tailism of mainstream bourgeois ideas.

The next step needed to break open this logjam is not *immediately* obvious - and I would note that neither comrade Parker nor comrade Catriona Rylance in her letter actually offers positive alternative proposals for present tasks.

Mike Macnair  
Oxford

## Severe punishment

Tony Clark writes yet another confused (and confusing) letter (September 28). He gets into a terrible tangle trying to prove that the concept of 'dictatorship' within Marxism is somehow opposed to the achievement of true democracy for the working class. In fact, it is an essential condition.

In a previous letter, Tony boasted he is the only person to have noticed that that Marx was hijacked by Blanqui and that Marxism was diverted by Blanqui's concept of 'dictatorship'. It doesn't seem to occur to Tony that the reason why he is the only person to have 'noticed' is not because he is super-insightful, but because he is completely wrong!

Tony mixes up the different meanings of 'dictatorship', leading to the confusion in his letter. On the one hand, he says he acknowledges that Marx and Engels and subsequent Marxists used the term in the sense of meaning class rule, as opposed to its more present-day meaning of anti-democratic rule. At the same time, he claims Marx's use of 'dictatorship' meant he was anti-democratic. But these are two different meanings. *Either* Marx did indeed mean 'class rule' or he was advocating abolition of democracy and democratic rights. Both cannot be true at the same time. I suspect Tony is really opposed to the concept of working class rule, of the political and economic power of the working class - of socialism.

I am not sure Tony understands the word 'dictatorship' in either sense. Apparently, Franco's Spain was a dictatorship, but not totalitarian?! This is a distinction without a difference. Franco's regime shot, imprisoned and otherwise repressed hundreds of thousands over the years, who I am sure nonetheless would have been highly appreciative that it was a dictatorship rather than totalitarian.

Tony claims his concept of 'democratic socialism' does have a class perspective - but nowhere does he describe how or where. 'Democratic socialism' may have developed within the British labour movement, but it was precisely as a non-class, reformist, social democratic doctrine for a reformed, ameliorated capitalism - a capitalism run for the benefit of all classes.

The essential difference between Marxism-Leninism and classic social democracy is that the former outlines the need for the capitalist class to be first overthrown and then held down by the new rule of the majority working class: ie, the dictatorship of the proletariat. By yet again ignoring these essential and basic class perspectives, Tony is indeed taking a completely non-class, reformist approach.

To accuse Trotsky of advocating "democratic socialism" is frankly to make nine cats laugh out loud. I personally have no time for

Trotsky whatsoever. Those who quote him in the *Weekly Worker* are just embarrassing. Even the selected quotes are eclectic, obscure, confused and contradictory. He was a complete charlatan, a renegade and remained in essence a Menshevik. If he had ever taken power in the USSR, he would literally have been a labour dictator and would have presided over the destruction of soviet power and the restoration of capitalism. His whole nonsensical 'theory' of 'permanent revolution' was comprehensively ridiculed and demolished by Lenin in the years before the 1917 revolutions (ie, before Trotsky actually deigned to join the Bolshevik Party), and later within the Soviet Communist Party, as essentially a Menshevik, social democratic 'theory', which preached defeatism and a complete lack of faith in the Soviet working class and the working people in being able to establish a socialist society.

I do not find it at all surprising that Trotsky and subsequently Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, etc - having had their defeatist and rightwing social democratic views on the question of being able to build socialism in the USSR defeated and routed within the Communist Party, faced with the indubitable reality that socialism was indeed built within the Soviet Union - resorted to increasingly desperate, illegitimate and ultimately illegal methods of trying to undermine that very power which was building and consolidating socialism. If you conspire with enemies of the Soviet state to bring about a coup d'état, install a 'coalition government' of rightists, Mensheviks and capitalists, to open up and dismember the USSR between the Axis powers, then frankly you deserve to receive the most severe punishment.

Yes, Lenin *did* refer to the dictatorship of the proletariat as "absolutely unrestricted by any rules whatever, and based directly on force", and was right to do so, most effectively in *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky*.

Tony never acknowledges this was written during the Russian civil war when 14 allied powers were attempting, in Churchill's lovely words, "to crush the Bolshevik baby in its cradle" - both through direct military force and via the reactionary resistance of the overthrown landlord, monarchist and capitalist classes within Russia. The Bolshevik regime, the working class power, was fighting for its life. Had reaction won, the death and destruction which would have been wreaked by the revanchist forces would have made the massacres after the defeat of the Paris Commune look like the proverbial vicar's tea party. But, for Tony, defending working class power is 'dictatorship' and therefore bad.

How can a sovereign power be constrained by any laws or rules? That makes no sense. The sovereign power *makes* the laws or rules and therefore cannot be constrained by any such. The proletariat, the working class, having established its sovereign power, its sovereign rule, is fully entitled, through the moral and material forces of history, to defend that rule against (almost) inevitable attempts of the overthrown classes turn back the clock, restore their rule and drown the revolution in blood.

That is where the 'dictatorship' element comes in - the threat, deterrent or actual use of force to suppress attempts by the overthrown classes to restore their rule. This exercise of 'dictatorship' is what enables the *majority* class to exercise its political and economic rule, to exercise its sovereignty and its will:



the rule of the majority, a genuinely true democracy. The two apparently opposite concepts of 'democracy' and 'dictatorship' are in fact dialectically united through the concept of class, and the basic question of which class rules. That is why I say Tony has a completely non-class approach to this question.

Finally, I do not question that there is an increasing energy and climate crisis. That is completely obvious, as is the fact oil is a finite and probably diminishing resource. What I emphatically reject is Tony's unique (uniquely wrong) notion that capitalism is completely dependent on cheap oil and that when oil runs out, as it will, capitalism is somehow doomed. No, capitalism is perfectly capable of revolutionising itself and developing new and alternative forms of energy. Capitalism will either be overthrown and superseded by the working classes and peoples of this world, or it may well destroy the planet we live on. But we can be pretty sure it will not grind to a halt simply because it has run out of oil.

**Andrew Northall**  
Kettering

## Prison rights

Readers may remember that I have been corresponding with a prisoner interested in Marxism. Unfortunately for him, he has been relocated to Woodhill prison. Comrades who read *The Guardian* will have seen the article some weeks ago which described Woodhill as one of the worst prisons for the conditions of inmates.

Our friend wanted to have lessons in both English and maths, so that he can take exams, possibly working towards a degree (his written English is excellent). He said the following: "You'll be unsurprised to learn that I have been stonewalled yet again by the retrogressive surrogate for common sense ... It was said by the education department that I was too proficient for their maths class and that I was studying more towards an academic level." Therefore, he was not allowed to attend the class. He goes on: "How they came to this conclusion evades me ... because of staff shortages they did not have the time to evaluate me."

There were only five people in

the maths class and the same was true of the English class. Out of 500 inmates, he says, there are just five spaces for students in English, and only one learning level (he was refused permission for the English class as well). Apparently there are several civilian staff employed, but few are used for teaching, since only 10 students are being taught at any one time.

Other information he gives is that letters take one month to be received by him. The prison has decided that, in order to decrease drugs being smuggled in on ink blots or pencil, all letters will be photocopied and only the photocopies given to the prisoner!

There are serious staff shortages in the prison, and there is a high level of violence. He explains: "I'm just one of thousands who have been in my cell 23+ hours a day for over two years ... Just about everything that is done by the establishment is done for control. Control at all costs, contrary to any human rights."

He goes on: "They won't allow me to have anything else sent either - books, etc." Comrades may remember the attempt in 2014 to forbid prisoners from being sent books - such a ban was legally challenged, and it was ruled unlawful!

Part of the problem with not being able to receive books or attend classes is that this will affect his chances of parole: "Parole from Woodhill is questionable," he writes. The parole board is heavily influenced by what the prison administration writes about inmates in reports - reports that are not disclosed to prisoners.

Nevertheless, he asserts: "I find that writing resurrects my spirit and allows me to flourish mentally ... And, although my life may appear to be pitiful and constricted in criminality, I do have a desire to change that and to inspire others to do the same."

So, of course, we will keep on supporting and writing to him.

**Gaby Rubin**  
London

## Cancel visit

It was recently announced that Yoon Suk-yeol, the puppet fascist ruler of south Korea, has been invited to

visit Britain in November.

Yoon is not welcome in Britain! Yoon is a new Hitler and a war maniac. The visit will be at the expense of the British taxpayer and is a complete waste of money. South Korea is not an independent country, but a fake country - a colony of the US. It is also becoming increasingly dependent on Japan. Of all the puppet rulers of south Korea, Yoon is the worst ever. He is an extreme, Yankee-loving sycophant, who sang the song 'American pie' in front of the Yankee imperialist war boss, Biden. Yoon is also kowtowing and grovelling to the Japanese imperialists, the sworn enemy of the Korean nation.

Yoon is a millionaire several times over and is exploiting the south Korea people. He has declared the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and its Korean People's Army as the principal enemies of south Korea. He is scheming to carry out an attack on People's Korea in cooperation with the US and Japanese imperialists. Yoon has formed the so-called 'Nuclear Consultative Group' with the US and is planning to have US nuclear submarines permanently deployed in south Korea.

Yoon has reduced inter-Korean relations to nothing and is bringing the outbreak of a second Korean war and a nuclear war closer. Domestically he is reducing living standards and also repressing the trade unions, as well as pro-reunification patriots and followers of the Juche idea.

By inviting Yoon, the British authorities are dragging Britain into a possible conflict on the Korean peninsula. In the interests of peace the visit should be cancelled! The Korean Friendship Association (KFA) of the UK plans to organise protests against Yoon's visit. We hope that the broader labour and peace movement will support these.

Instead of the old 'Good luck with that' or 'Oh, that's the KFA - don't go there' attitude, the British left and progressives should give active support to KFA UK's campaigning against the south Korean puppet fascist regime!

**Dermot Hudson**  
Korean Friendship Association

## Abolish Ofcom

The home secretary being interviewed by a deputy chairman of her party is not journalism. But, whatever disagreements we may have with Lisa McKenzie, Aaron Bastani, Paul Embery or James Schneider, we are not holding our breath for any of them to appear on the BBC or Sky. Between 60% and 80% of the electorate, depending on the issue, supports an active industrial strategy, renationalisation of the rail service, renationalisation of the utilities, renationalisation of Royal Mail, and much more besides. The domestic policy touchstone of centrism is NHS privatisation, public support for which is negligible. Yet try telling any of this to any broadcaster apart from GB News.

Left and right should be united to demand the abolition of Ofcom, along with all the other uniparty enforcement agencies, such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission. "We have never had propaganda channels"? Is that supposed to be a joke? No, these people are so biased that their prejudices are invisible from within their utterly closed subculture. They really do think that everyone is like them. In reality, almost no-one is.

**David Lindsay**  
Lanchester

# ACTION

## 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](http://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](http://www.facebook.com/events/866133211524440).

## 150 years of workers' struggle in Bristol

**Saturday October 7, 11am to 5pm:** Meetings, entertainment and stalls, Engine Shed, Station Approach, Temple Meads, Bristol BS1. Organised by Bristol Trades Union Council: [www.facebook.com/bristoltradesunioncouncil](http://www.facebook.com/bristoltradesunioncouncil).

## Defend the right to boycott

**Saturday October 7:** Day of action 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. **Birmingham:** 11am, Farmers Market, All Saints, King's Heath B14. **Brent:** 11am, Kilburn Square, Kilburn High Road, London NW6. **Bristol:** 12 noon, Cascade Steps, Bristol BS1. **Durham:** 12 noon, Market Square, Durham DH1. **Harrow:** 1.30pm, Outside St Ann's shopping centre, Harrow HA1. **Hastings:** 12 noon, town centre, Hastings TN34. **Hitchin:** 10.30am, Barclays Bank, 5-6 High Street, Hitchin SG5. **Hull:** 11am, Queen Victoria Square, Hull HU1. **Norwich:** 11am, Exchange Street/London Street, Norwich NR2. **Oxford:** 11am, St Michael's, Cornmarket Street, Oxford OX1. **Plymouth:** 11am, New George Street, Plymouth PL1. **Sheffield:** 12 noon, Town Hall, Pinstone Street, Sheffield S1. **Southampton:** 11am, Guildhall Square, Southampton SO14. **Tunbridge Wells:** 10am, 2 Calverley Road, Tunbridge Wells TN11. **Windsor:** 10.30am, Windsor Castle, Windsor SL4. **Worthing:** 3pm, Town Hall, Chapel Road, Worthing BN11. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.palestinecampaign.org/events/right-to-boycott-day-of-action](http://www.palestinecampaign.org/events/right-to-boycott-day-of-action).

## Save Liverpool Women's Hospital

**Saturday October 7, 12.30pm:** Demonstration. Assemble outside Liverpool Women's Hospital (corner of Upper Parliament Street and Grove Street), Liverpool L8. March to the stone arch by Albert Dock. Fight NHS cuts and privatisation. Support NHS staff. Organised by Save Liverpool Women's Hospital: [www.facebook.com/SAVELWH](http://www.facebook.com/SAVELWH).

## 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 of the United Association of Durham and Northumberland in 1825 and the strike movements of 1831 and 1832. Organised by Follonsby Wardley Miners Lodge Banner Association: [www.facebook.com/FollonsbyBanner](http://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](http://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1994733120884151).

## Peace now: against a world at war

**Sunday October 8, 6.30pm:** Fringe meeting, The Racquet Club Hotel, 5 Chapel Street, Liverpool L3. Speakers include Oliver Eagleton (author), Alex Gordon (RMT), Lindsey German and Andrew Murray (Stop the War). Entrance free. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events/17522](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events/17522).

## For the Many Network

**Monday October 9, 5pm:** Launch event, The Casa Bar, 29 Hope Street, Liverpool L1. Founding members Ken Loach, Ian Hodson, Andrew Feinstein and Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi introduce the ideas behind the For the Many network. Admission by free ticket. Organised by For the Many Network: [www.facebook.com/forthemanynetwork](http://www.facebook.com/forthemanynetwork).

## Muslim and Jew: beyond Israel

**Monday October 9, 7pm:** Public meeting, Pakistan Association, 68a Mulgrave Street, Liverpool L8. Speakers include broadcaster Dr Azzam Tamimi and rabbis from the Neturei Karta UK. Registration free. Organised by One Democratic Palestine: [www.onepalestine.land/rabbi-on-the-road-beyond-israel/#Booking](http://www.onepalestine.land/rabbi-on-the-road-beyond-israel/#Booking).

## Weaponising anti-Semitism

**Tuesday October 10, 6pm:** Book event, The Casa Bar, 29 Hope Street, Liverpool L1. Electronic Intifada journalist Asa Winstanley discusses his book *Weaponising anti-Semitism* with Matt Kennard from Declassified UK. Organised by Asa Winstanley Book Tour: [asawinstanley.substack.com/p/join-me-for-my-uk-book-tour](http://asawinstanley.substack.com/p/join-me-for-my-uk-book-tour).

## What it means to be human

**Tuesday October 10, 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: 'The expressive chimpanzees of Fongoli'. Speaker: Kirsty Graham. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.facebook.com/events/844390890682839](http://www.facebook.com/events/844390890682839).

## 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.

## Fighting fund

# You did it!

**G**ood news, comrade readers! Thanks to some splendid donations received in the last few days of the month, we managed to scrape past that monthly *Weekly Worker* fighting fund target of £2,250.

The prize for the most generous donor was comrade LM, who usually hands a £20 note to our editor when she sees him each week. Well, this week he suggested that she set up a monthly standing order for convenience sake - which she did on September 28. But she thought we might as well have that £20 note as well, meaning that her total donation, when you add the £80 SO, was £100!

Other SOs/bank transfers came from Irish comrade AM (£67 - or €80), GB (£11), MD and VP (£10 each) and AR (£5) - who, as usual, also paid us his monthly PayPal contribution for the same amount. Another PayPal donor was MF (£50), while comrade Hassan paid us £15 in cash (£5 for each of the last three weeks!).

All that came to £273, taking

our total for September up to £2,299. Yes, we exceeded the target by £49. So now let's see if we can keep up the momentum in October!

Well, we start the month with £336 in the kitty after just four days, as I write - all of it coming in the shape of those start-of-the-month standing orders. Thanks go to AC (£50), FK (£37), CG (£30), BK, II, MW and SJ (£20 each), MD (£18), RG, BG and MT (£15), TM (£13), MM (£11), AN, CP, DI and YM (£10) and DC (£6).

Quite a good start then, but, as I say, we really do need to keep up that momentum. Let's make sure that the *Weekly Worker* can continue its essential work of campaigning to unite the revolutionary left around a Marxist programme within a single, democratic-centralist party. Fancy helping us out? ●

**Robbie Rix**

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



## CONSERVATIVES

# Staring at an electoral drubbing

Peddling conspiracy theories, bashing the EU, migrants and the undeserving poor - no wonder Nigel Farage loved it. But, writes **Eddie Ford**, this year's Tory conference was dominated by one issue: HS2

**G**iven that this year's Conservative Party conference was dominated by the question of HS2, it was obviously a stroke of genius to hold it in Manchester at a convention complex converted from the city's former central railway station - perfect symbolism! In the run-up to the conference Rishi Sunak was unable to give a straight answer to a straight question - will he be axing the Birmingham to Manchester leg?

In the end, as widely predicted, Sunak announced that he has gone for cancellation, because "the facts have changed" - presumably meaning the rising costs. It would still be going to Euston, but the station rebuild would be taken out of the hands of the HS2 organisation and handed to the new Euston Development Zone. Instead, according to Sunak, the government would invest the £36 billion saved from HS2 in other transport projects across the whole country.

Of course, the cancellation will itself have its own costs running into the many billions. It would be Namialand to believe otherwise. Compensation will have to be paid to companies for the work they have already done in design and development, there are the compulsory purchases too. There is moreover the question of investors who have banked on Manchester having a high speed connection with Birmingham and London.

Without the fine details yet, there are a lot more unanswered questions. For example, what exactly happens to Northern Powerhouse Rail ('HS3'), as the Manchester part of HS2 was to form the start of this east-west link. Prior to Sunak's announcement, a furious Andy Street - Tory West Midlands mayor - told reporters that the prime minister was in danger of "cancelling the future" and warned him that abandoning the link whilst actually in the city would be "an incredible political gaffe" - something that is still hard to disagree with. As for Andy Burnham, the Labour mayor of Manchester, he described the axing of the northern legs as "profoundly depressing".

### Boosterism

It is a far cry from the glory days of 2019 and Boris Johnson's boosterism. Now we have a Tory prime minister rubbishising *all* his post-Thatcher predecessors, U-turning on net-zero targets, promising to be the drivers' friend by opposing 20mph limits, dismissing Ulez zones and promising to fix pot holes. Yes, it's change, but hardly inspiring. Same goes for his 'big idea' of upping the smoking age by a year, every year. Imagine a poor shop keeper having to ask a 25 year-old, a 35 year-old, a 45 year-old for ID before selling them a pack of twenty. It really is very stupid.

No wonder Tory insiders talk of their party undergoing an identity crisis. What do we believe in? What do we stand for? There are no answers from Sunak, that is for sure.

The internal divisions were well illustrated by the row over taxes, which bubbled and boiled throughout conference - with the chancellor's speech on October 2 making no commitments to cutting taxes: rather announcing £1 billion of savings from freezing Whitehall jobs and a further crackdown on benefit claimants. True, bashing the worst off, the most desperate, the undeserving poor, always goes down well amongst the Tory rank and file.

But as things stand now, the British taxpayer is experiencing



**HS2: a train crash**

World War II levels of taxation, yet the Tories have always prided themselves on being a low-tax party - a fundamental part of their political DNA. A point made by Michael Gove, levelling up minister: breaking ranks, he demanded tax cuts before the next election.

Essentially, what has happened is that some workers in some industries have just about managed to keep up with inflation, meaning that a whole raft of them have landed themselves in higher tax bands ('fiscal drag'). Vote Tory, get high taxes!

Sir John Curtice, purportedly Britain's leading psephologist from Strathclyde University, has said that the Manchester conference was more like a wake. Divided at every level and seems to be facing a massive general election defeat. Opinion polls are extraordinary gloomy for the Tories. Depending on which poll you look at, they are either 18 or 16 points behind Labour with no prospect of a post-conference bounce - quite the opposite, if anything. Further spooking them was a poll published in *The Observer*, revealing that a third of those who voted Tory in 2019 are now intending to switch to other parties - things are looking worse and worse for the Tories.

Curtice also tells us that the key issues that concern the British people, quite understandably, are the economy and most of all, the national health service - which is creaking, as the Tories have systematically run it down. Waiting lists under the Blair-Brown Labour governments consistently fell, as they threw money into the NHS, even if a lot of that money went into hugely wasteful 'private finance initiative' schemes. Nonetheless, they got hospitals built, workers got pay rises and the NHS expanded.

But waiting lists under the Tories have gone up and up. The pandemic is a partial explanation, true, plus recent BMA strike action. The main reason, however, is austerity and starving the NHS of funds to upgrade facilities, invest in new treatments and hire workers. There are well

over a 100,000 unfilled posts. Hence waiting lists now stand at an enormous 7.2 million! Of course, though not always said explicitly, the Tory answer is yet more privatisation - meaning the slow and remorseless death of the NHS.

### Agenda

With the Tories facing a big election defeat the jockeying to replace Sunak began even before the Manchester conference and its fringe meetings.

So step forward Suella Braverman, home secretary, with a speech in Washington DC to a rightwing thinktank on September 26 - setting out her leadership pitch. She spoke about the need for human rights "reform" due to the "existential challenge" posed by illegal migration, arguing that world leaders had failed to meet the challenge because of fears of being called "racist or illiberal". She went on to suggest that being gay or a woman and fearful of discrimination should not be enough to qualify as a refugee, claiming that multiculturalism was a "misguided dogma" that had allowed people to "live parallel lives".

Then we had her populist speech to conference itself, warning of a "hurricane" of mass migration and attacking the "luxury beliefs" of liberals - the Human Rights Act should be renamed the "Criminal Rights Act", she said. Ramping up the rhetoric, she claimed that "Britain would go properly woke" under a Labour government, with people "chased out of their jobs for saying that a man can't be a woman" and "scolded for rejecting that they are beneficiaries of institutional racism". Going full-throttle, she defended Tory London mayoral candidate, Susan Hall, who had stated that Jewish people were "frightened" by the prospect of the "divisive" Sadiq Khan, being returned as Labour mayor. Some quickly compared her "hurricane" comment to Enoch Powell's notorious 1968 "rivers of blood" speech.

There is definitely a critique to be made of top-down, state-sponsored multiculturalism and official or institutional anti-racism - phenomena that have indeed divided the working class, as the *Weekly Worker* has pointed out many times. Of course, some sections of the left still live in the 1960s. Britain is inherently racist, we are told. Yet here was Braverman daring anyone to call her a racist as she dished out her anti-migrant bile. Sunak too. In his closing speech he recalled his family's migrant background and proudly listed the ethnic minority members of the current government - to the applause of delegates. But what the Conservative Party, the Labour Party, the Liberal Democratic Party, etc, etc, stand for is British chauvinism, the interests of Britain as against other countries and peoples.

We also saw the (re)appearance of Liz Truss, the shortest-serving prime minister in British history - does she fancy another stab at the leadership? Showing absolutely no signs of contrition, acting more like a saviour coming back from afar, her fringe event - or 'growth rally' - attracted a packed audience, in marked contrast to the rows and rows of empty seats for ministerial speakers at the conference itself. She called for *immediate* cuts to corporation tax, the building of 500,000 new homes and resuming fracking to cut energy bills, urging Tory Party members to "unleash their inner conservative" instincts.

During the meeting, Ranil Jayawardena (environment minister in the Truss cabinet) called for stamp duty to be scrapped on people's principal homes, while Jacob Rees-Mogg called for the scrapping of the "pernicious" inheritance tax. Jake Berry, the Conservative Party chairman during Liz Truss's brief premiership and one of 30 Tory MPs who have signed a pledge to vote against further tax rises, said he was unafraid of "standing up" to Rishi Sunak's administration. Priti Patel, the former home secretary, declared that "we cannot be timid any more"

and "we cannot accept the status quo". So far, Truss's Growth Group includes 60 MPs - the same size as the government's current working majority in the House of Commons.

Two rival manifestos were launched at conference, one by the more than 30 Conservative MPs in the Northern Research Group - calling for huge investment in public services in the region, and the transfer of more political and tax-raising powers from Whitehall. The other one was issued by the New Conservatives - a group of the usual suspects of rightwing MPs, who demand that Sunak pulls Britain out of the European Convention on Human Rights, cuts taxes for families, small businesses and entrepreneurs and halves the number of visas for migrant workers and foreign students and their families, in order to slash immigration. Danny Kruger, co-chair of New Conservatives, said "radical action" was needed to recreate the wide coalition of supporters that had allowed his party to win an 80-seat majority in 2019.

### Bizarre

Showing their desperation, prominent Tories seem determined to refight sometimes bizarre battles from the past and going down the rabbit hole of crazy conspiracy theories. Thérèse Coffey, the secretary of state for the environment, promised to cancel EU rules on "bendy bananas" - remember them? She also attacked "green zealots" who want to make people eat "fake meat", which "might be OK for astronauts", but people want "great Welsh lamb" or "Aberdeen Angus beef". Robert Jenrick, immigration minister, called for the right sort of British women to have more children - playing straight to the 'great replacement' nonsense. Mark Harper, secretary of state for transport, said he would stop local councils from deciding how often people can go to the shops, despite being unable to name a single council which is doing any such thing. Tory backbencher Miriam Cates, one of the co-chairs of the New Conservatives, used a fringe event to bizarrely argue that internet pornography was a driving factor in people becoming transgender - without presenting any evidence, of course. Meanwhile, Steve Barclay, the health secretary, declared war against "wokery" in the NHS on the grounds that women's rights were being increasingly sidelined. Therefore transgender women will be banned from being treated in female hospital wards in England and sex-specific language would be used when dealing with women's health.

No wonder that Nigel Farage was pleased with how the Manchester conference panned out, telling the BBC's *Today* programme that the Conservative Party was increasingly aligned with his views. He also thought that GB News, being one of its presenters, would be influential in determining who gets to be the next leader of the Tories - the station regarding itself as an anti-establishment disruptor. Farage received a hero's welcome from rightwing Tories at Liz Truss's fringe event, while Priti Patel hailed his role in delivering Brexit and helping Boris Johnson win the 2019 general election by standing candidates down. If Farage became a Tory member, many would choose him as party leader if they could ●

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**MEDIA**

# The last emperor

Rupert Murdoch is due to step down as chair of Fox and News Corp. In his place will come his lacklustre son, Lachlan. Paul Demarty finds much of interest in Michael Wolff's latest blockbuster about the real-life version of the TV drama 'Succession'

**W**riting a book-length account of contemporary events is always a high-risk endeavour. There is no news so old as the news of the day before yesterday. There is a danger of appearing spectacularly invalidated by events, even though those events may themselves be invalidated.

Michael Wolff, author now of three volumes documenting the chaos of Donald Trump's presidency, is a lucky man - the first of those, *Fire and fury*, beat better-known journalists to the punch and drove the news agenda for a few weeks. His latest book concerns another ageing titan of the right, Rupert Murdoch, and his struggles to get Fox News back on a tight leash. It was published, as good fortune would have it, at the exact moment that Rupert - a sprightly 92 years old - announced his retirement, and thereby has allowed Wolff's publicity-tour interviews to be more than usually topical for a man in his trade.

That tour has allowed Wolff to set the agenda somewhat. He has cast doubt on whether Rupert is really stepping back. Indeed, is the retirement real? Reading between the lines of Murdoch's letter to his employees - indeed, merely reading the lines - it indeed seems unlikely. He retains control through his ownership of the various concerns under the Murdoch umbrella. He promises - or threatens - his underlings that he "will be watching our broadcasts with a critical eye, reading our newspapers and websites and books with much interest, and reaching out to you with thoughts, ideas and advice".<sup>1</sup>

His nominal successor is his son, Lachlan Murdoch, whose general lack of initiative invites comparisons with Hua Goafeng, who replaced Mao Tse-Tung after the purge of the Gang of Four, and whose signature policy became the 'two whatevers': "We will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and unswervingly follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave." It did not work for Hua, alas; but is there anyone with the institutional heft to replace Lachlan? Who is *his* Deng Xiaoping?

## Human drama

Wolff's book - called, with an inveterate gambler's confidence, *The fall: the end of the Murdoch empire* - makes the case that no such Deng waits in the wings. Despite his use of the 'Murdoch empire' soubriquet, his focus is overwhelmingly on Murdoch's United States holdings, and within that specifically Fox News. He sets out to answer the question: given that Murdoch all but openly despised Donald Trump, how has he allowed his most profitable enterprise to become, for a long time at least, a PR agency for the former (or current, depending on whether or not you are Sean Hannity) president? How, indeed, can it have blundered so badly that it was saddled with \$787 million in legal damages?

Wolff's style is to tell the story as a human drama, as he did in *Fire and fury* (which I previously reviewed in these pages<sup>2</sup>). For Marxists, the fundamental question is at a higher level - of the role played by the



**Rupert Murdoch: no natural successor**

bourgeois media in wider society - but the personal approach has its uses. In fact, it is more than usually appropriate here, simply because the Murdoch organisation is something of an outlier these days in the corporate world (if not so much in the news media), being precisely a family business.

Wolff names each chapter after its principal character - Rupert, Lachlan, Tucker (Carlson), Laura (Ingraham), and so forth - in a pattern surely inspired by George RR Martin's *A song of ice and fire*, which became the TV hit *Game of Thrones*. As with that work, there is something of the absolute monarchy about its proceedings: the scions of great families battling the ambitious courtiers for control - by turns ambitious, charming, thuggish and sociopathic.

Wolff begins his text with a hypothetical obituary of Murdoch, and ends it with a future-tense description of the likely corporate fallout from his death - the details are plausible, but suffice it to say that a lot of lawyers are going to profit from it. In between, the through-line is the ruinous lawsuit between Fox and Dominion Voting Systems, a small-fry manufacturer of voting machines propelled to notoriety by a series of wholly fantastical allegations that it had put the fix in for Trump. It was that lawsuit that yielded the near \$800 million settlement, and the Murdochs' failure to prevent or manage it effectively is his primary subject.

That, in the end, is a matter of the absolutism of the empire. Wolff documents Murdoch's inability to step away from day-to-day management (true, as we have now seen, even in 'retirement'), and turn succession plans into realities. An old-fashioned patriarch must hand on to one of his sons (the egregious maleness of the whole affair is a key takeaway); but which son? Lachlan, closer to his father's proclivities, including even for the print business, seems gormless and unimaginative in the face of a drastically changed media environment. James has more imagination, to be sure, and is more plugged in to the potential of digital media; but he has become ever more

comfortable in the civilised company of the Davos set, and indeed, under the influence of his wife, Kathryn Hufschmid, turned out to be something of a liberal.

In the event of Murdoch's death, his estate is in the hands of a trust whose voting members are his four eldest children. The main decision before them concerns the financial engine room of the media business, Fox News. Yet it is not merely a financial decision. Fox is blamed by many for the rise of Donald Trump - we do not know if Rupert is among them, but we do know that he considers Trump a "loser", an "asshole", a "fucking idiot", according to Wolff (and to various leaks and anonymous briefings over the years). Successive attempts to wean Fox off the Trump Kool-Aid on the part of the ruling family have failed, not least because they cannot agree on what to do. Rupert has attempted to steer it back towards the free-market, imperialist conservatism he favours. He ordered them to find someone for a choice slot who would reflect that outlook, and they found one, lower down the pecking order at the company, who would steady the ship and counterbalance the craziness. His name was Tucker Carlson.

Rightwing media has always been a world of strange inversions, and Carlson - a crank, but by no means an idiot, as even Murdoch had to admit - saw an opportunity. He did not have to abandon his preppy vibe, having already ditched his ridiculous bow-tie years earlier. There was no point trying to outdo Sean Hannity in the low-class signalling stakes. He could do a job by turning his natural patrician contempt against the 'liberal elite' so hated by Fox viewers, and thus became, in time, the Fox News channel's biggest draw.

## Discipline

Wolff writes ambivalently about Roger Ailes, who led the channel for two decades before his sexual predations finally caught up with him in 2016, shortly before his death. He has history with Ailes, who phoned him up in 2001 complaining about a profile he had written about him;

as an unlikely result, the two became friends, having lunch together frequently for many years.

Wolff does not attempt to spare his friend the just judgment of history - that he was a misogynistic and quite possibly sociopathic tyrant. But the tyranny worked. Television, he understood, was a zero-sum game between some of the most prickly egos in the world - the presenters. He stuffed their mouths with gold, and ultimately created a monopoly on conservative celebrity. You *could* leave Fox, but it would lead only to a pay cut and slow oblivion. Discipline was thereby maintained.

## Asshole Trump

With Ailes gone, and all the signs pointing to cable news' decline after the fashion of Rupert's beloved newspapers, a power vacuum developed. Ailes had been able to keep the Murdochs - whom he treated with egregious *lèse-majesté* - at bay because he was the goose that laid the golden egg, and you did not slay such a goose, even if he was - no less than Trump - an asshole. With him gone, there was no protection from the family bickering, and no clear power centre. His successor, Suzanne Scott, was anonymous. The egos of the talent began to come out of hiding.

Hannity became a trusted advisor of Trump; Carlson a conservative megastar and liberal *bête noire*, including among the friends and family of K Rupert Murdoch (although perhaps the funniest moment in the book is a dinner visit of Carlson's to Murdoch and his then-fiancée, Ann Lesley Smith, a die-hard, evangelical, far-right wingnut, who believed Carlson to be a prophet and read him various *Bible* verses that foretold his coming on the scene - ever the Episcopalian, Carlson could not agree).

If Rupert and Lachlan wanted a return to the not-so-distant past, James increasingly wanted a redemption arc to take over Fox and turn it into a "force for good". Wolff's scepticism here is irrefutable - to turn Fox into a liberal-centrist outlet would merely be to make it yet another cable news network like CNN and MSNBC - all of which are in far worse nick

than Fox, which has endured largely because its audience is older and less prone to 'cord-cutting' (but, alas, more prone to death). For the tech-fetishist James Murdoch, it seems weirdly unambitious. Yet perhaps he merely wants to destroy it - only a Murdoch can, after all, and no Fox is better than the Fox we have.

The Murdochs could not take clear action on the Dominion case, because they had no idea what they were doing with Fox in the future. They were left desperately attempting to keep the financial damages below 10 figures and, in order to make it stick, were forced to offload Carlson.

True enough, as far as it goes; but the wider picture is less well painted by Wolff. It is a major premise of his argument, to be sure, that this picture is changing; but for him, as for the typical bourgeois intellectual, the change appears as a mere matter of - if not progress - a linear *progression*. Just as TV supplanted print in the minds of Americans, so the internet displaces TV. To this, we could object - as his James Murdoch implicitly does - that the shift to TV dominance of news is geographically variable. Broadcast media never dominated the news agenda in this country, thanks to regulation, and now we suppose it never will.

There is another question, left untreated by Wolff, but certainly important to his subjects. Digital media is no less monopolised than print or broadcast, but the monopoly is not on content so much as advertising (that is, the actual money). The result has been a secular decline in the ability of major media concerns to impose a particular narrative. The great platforms are subject to censorship, but in a notably crude form, compared to the rigorous and invisible enforcement of the Overton window prior, at least, to the American cable news revolution, of which Fox was the greatest beneficiary. The ad-platform monopoly is a *form* of financialisation, and, as in other industries, one notable consequence has been that the media has gotten notably *worse* at what is its actual job: in this case the distortion of the popular field of vision.

This must figure into our account of the Murdoch empire's travails. Murdoch dominated a political media landscape he largely created, but which no longer exists in the same way. His disastrous attempts to foist Ron DeSantis on reluctant Americans rather seals the deal. The Fox monopoly on conservative opinion is gone. It is succeeded by a relationship between media and state more intimate than it has been in recent decades, but less effective than the prior models at 'manufacturing consent'.

The long-term consequences remain unclear ●

Michael Wolff *The fall: the end of Fox News and the Murdoch dynasty* Henry Holt, 2023, pp320, £10.99

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## Notes

1. www.cnn.com/2023/09/21/rupert-murdoch-steps-down-as-chairman-of-fox-and-news-corp.html
2. 'Fire in the hole' *Weekly Worker* January 11 2018 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1185/fire-in-the-hole).



**LABOUR**

# Not much left of the left

So many rival projects and not a serious idea amongst the lot of them. A week ahead of the Liverpool conference, **Carla Roberts** looks at what little remains of the once mighty Corbyn movement

The soft left has been in political and organisational disarray for some time, but its lack of purpose is perhaps symbolically expressed by the ‘Stop Starmer’ campaign.

Supported on Zoom by a number of individuals linked to the *Not the Andrew Marr show*, it has organised a protest for October 7, the day before the start of Labour Party conference - not in Liverpool, mind, where the conference will take place, but outside Sir Keir Starmer’s constituency office in London. The campaign is supposed to “bring people together who oppose the Labour leader” and “highlight the danger of a Starmer government”. Apparently, Starmer is “the most untrustworthy political leader this country has seen”.<sup>1</sup>

Quite a statement. But is Starmer really worse than the notorious liar, Boris Johnson? What about Tony Blair, who launched a war against Iraq based on outright lies? Or Winston Churchill, the guy who sent the army and tanks against striking miners in Wales? To paraphrase Harry Truman: show me a politician, and I’ll show you a crook.

Yes, Keir Starmer was the one who had to do the dirty work of cleansing the Labour Party after its infection with Corbynism. Would Yvette Cooper have been doing a less nasty job? Wouldn’t she have jumped on the anti-Semitism smear campaign to weed out the left? Would David Lammy not have grasped the opportunity to suspend Corbyn and his allies in the Parliamentary Labour Party? Would Andy Burnham have stopped short of proscribing critical organisations like Labour Against the Witchhunt? We know the answer.

## Promises

It seems some of the organisers of this campaign feel personally hurt that Starmer has broken some of his lame promises - which he was clearly never going to deliver anyway. Starmer is not acting the way he is out of some personal spite or because he is a particularly nasty specimen of a human being. He is showing the ruling class that the Labour Party can once again be trusted to be a loyal servant of capital. Labour’s contradictory nature as a bourgeois workers’ party means that on this or that occasion it is pulled to the left - and after Corbyn, Starmer is now pulling it back to where it normally is, on the right. In other words what the mainstream media calls the ‘centre-left’. Starmer is a typical former state apparat, he comes from the left in his youth but long ago saw the light and reconciled himself to serving, not opposing the system. True, given where the world is at the moment he will probably be the most rightwing Labour PM in history. But the same goes for any other realistic alternative Labour candidate for the job. To pretend otherwise is to misunderstand what the Labour Party is and, worse, how capitalism as a system works.

In any case, socialists should never blindly ‘trust’ any ‘political leaders’. We should always critically engage and question whoever is leading working class organisations. Otherwise we are building up messiahs who have to be followed unquestioningly - a feature we see far too often on the left. Many organisations foster a culture of blind obedience, which will produce nothing but sects. A healthy working class party needs discussion and



Launching the 2019 election campaign, along with his hand-picked front-bench team

debate and a culture of free speech, where ideas can be challenged and contested. Otherwise it will wither away and die, sooner or later. And the ‘Stop Starmer’ campaign is a sign of the demoralised Corbyn left taking the short road to oblivion.

The main problem of the campaign is obviously the lack of any kind of political outlook that goes beyond ‘anyone but Starmer’. Who then? Another Labour leader? A different party? What kind of party? With what programme? This lack of a positive perspective of any kind - let alone a socialist one - has allowed all sorts of flotsam and jetsam to support the campaign. At the launch event in Conway Hall in September, for example, decent socialists like Andrew Feinstein and Audrey White rubbed shoulders with the Brexiteer and Ukip ally, George Galloway, who was able to advertise his national-chauvinist Workers Party of Britain. That is very much the opposite of useful.

The campaign is loosely linked to the snappily titled Organise Corbyn-Inspired Socialist Alliance, (OCISA)<sup>2</sup>, which wants to stand a candidate against Starmer in his constituency of Holborn and St Pancras at the next general election on the basis of, you guessed it, the Labour Party’s 2017 manifesto. Like so many, those comrades are labouring under the illusion that it was this reformist programme in itself that inspired hundreds of thousands to support the Labour Party under Corbyn.

It seems unlikely that many of them actually read the rather turgid and dull document (which did not mention key issues like the monarchy or electoral reform, just constitutional tinkering). It was the prospect of some kind of ‘change’, however small, that excited many - and Corbyn seemed to have it within his reach to effect such change. Some local anti-cuts activist, no matter how deserving, standing on the same programme will be lucky to get more than 100 votes. Both campaigns are *designed to fail*, meaning that we will end up with something that is not exactly what the left needs: yet more demoralisation.

## For the Many

You cannot blame Ken Loach for not trying - here he is, once again, doing his best to get some kind of organisation off the ground. He helped to launch Left Unity in 2013, which quickly went into hibernation after Corbyn was elected Labour leader in 2015. Loach joined the

party and turned his back on LU, which is now involved in the new organisation, Transform. Transform also includes the Breakthrough Party, the Liverpool Community Independents and the People’s Alliance of the Left (which in turn counts the Northern Independence Party and the Socialist Party’s Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition among its affiliates). Transform, which wants to become a party, will be officially launched on November 25 in Nottingham. For the Many, which describes itself as a “network”, will be launched on October 9 during the Labour conference. If any reader knows of any substantial *political* differences between those two outfits, I would be keen to hear about them.

Quite why Ken Loach is not backing Transform is slightly opaque and seems to be down to the personalities involved. Many of the organisers who are driving Loach’s project are based in Liverpool - where the Community Independents are despised by much of the more principled left. The eight former Labour councillors at the core of LCI might have voted against budget cuts on Liverpool council, but they also voted in favour of the arms fair and kept their mouths firmly shut during the anti-Semitism smear campaign. Alan Gibbons even helped push the witch-hunt when he was running Momentum under the constitution written by pro-Zionist Jon Lansman, according to which anybody expelled from the Labour Party had to be expelled from Momentum. In a classic and predictable turn of events, he was ‘let go’ from Momentum himself when the witch-hunters eventually came for him.

We hear there are ongoing and quite heated arguments over whether For the Many should reference Corbyn. Some participants have objected, we hear, not because of any political differences - but because he comes with the ‘anti-Semitism’ baggage. I would have thought that naming the organisation after his 2017 manifesto would be a bit of a giveaway, as is the involvement of his wife, Laura Alvarez. But perhaps some people can be fooled some of the time that way.

For the Many describes itself as a “grassroots alliance seeking to unite the left, based on 2016-19 Labour principles, through a network for communication and coordination”. Presumably “grassroots” here refers to a *number of individuals* who were meeting behind closed doors

to set up the new formation over the last few months (rather than the *organisations* involved in Transform, who were doing the same behind a set of different closed doors). Apart from Loach and Alvarez, the other leading people involved are Andrew Feinstein (a former minister under Nelson Mandela), Audrey White (Merseyside Pensioners Association) and Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi (Jewish Voice for Labour). I would not describe them as ‘grassroots’ in any sense.

We have yet to see any programme or political statement from For the Many (if it indeed goes beyond Corbyn’s manifestoes), but if the organisers are too scared to deal with the anti-Semitism smear campaign head on then it will be of very limited value. After all, the campaign to conflate anti-Zionism and criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism is continuing to grow and has spread from the Labour movement into workplaces, town halls, schools and universities.

This kind of debate also shows that some people have learned very little from the witch-hunt in the Labour Party. Appeasing the right and their smears, lies and slanders will not make us stronger - it will help our enemies, those we have to fight politically. Beyond taking on the witch-hunt, we would argue for any new organisation to have a clear socialist programme. And by that we do not mean motherhood, apple pie and platitudes, but a Marxist programme that takes the fight for political democracy seriously.

## Transform

Unsurprisingly this is something that Transform, with its 10 short ‘core principles’, does not do.<sup>3</sup> It does not even reach the dazzling heights of Corbyn’s manifestoes. It wants to be a “left party” - not a socialist one. There is only one reference to socialism in the widest sense: it claims that Transform “is *eco-socialist*, supporting transformative political, social and economic change in order to build a truly sustainable world and achieve climate justice” (my emphasis). It wants to “redistribute wealth and power from the elite to the people” - a classic Lassallean formulation that Marx famously riled against. Marxists do not fight for ‘fairness’, ‘justice’ or a more equal distribution (or the even stranger ‘redistribution’) - they fight for the working class to become the ruling class, which *owns and controls* the means of production.

Having set up The World Transformed after Corbyn’s election, Momentum is now merely one of the 33 ‘partners’ of this annual jamboree, which runs parallel to the Labour Party conference and has absolutely no impact on it. As always, it will be snazzily and expensively produced and has a worthy, if slightly dull, programme, with lots of ‘can do’ workshops, films and speeches by big names (Jeremy Corbyn and Jamie Driscoll among them). It is going nowhere politically, but that is exactly the point of this festival, which has taken on a life of its own. A bit of harmless fun.

Momentum itself is still trying to find its feet in the post-Corbyn labour movement. It recently reconfirmed the Lansman rule that only Labour Party members can join. Non-Labour members (including those suspended or expelled in the witch-hunt) may become “Momentum movement builders” and may support the organisation financially, etc - but without having a vote or any say.<sup>4</sup> Not exactly a very attractive proposition and, unsurprisingly, Momentum provides no membership figures nowadays.

## Momentum excited

It has clubbed together with what remains of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy to stand a couple of ‘joint slates’ in the various internal Labour elections coming up during and after conference. Both will also inform delegates via text messages and emails about they should be voting at conference. I would venture a guess that sooner or later those two organisations will merge - probably when enough people remember that they still have a subscription to Momentum and cancel it.

There is, however, no sense of any kind of fightback. The only thing Momentum has been getting slightly excited about is the planned abolition of the ‘equality roles’ for disabled, black and gay members in Constituency Labour Parties, proposed by Labour’s national executive committee. Of course, this is an attack from the right on what remains of the left, but we should seriously question how useful these positions really are.

In truth they are a patronising way to show that ‘we are taking the issue seriously’. Often, the opposite is the case: it leaves such matters to the ‘equality officer’ rather than making them into questions for the whole CLP. They are a reflection of the dead end of ID politics, where *what you are* is far more important than what you believe in or fight for.

Momentum disagrees, of course: “We must stop this - and we can!”, it proclaims in an email to anybody on its database: “To come into force, the rule change needs to be passed at Labour conference on Sunday 8th October. We urge all Labour Party stakeholders to reject this rule change on the conference floor.” If the petition on the subject is anything to go by, there is not a chance of that happening.<sup>5</sup> Although this is right up the street of the official Labour left, it has gathered a less than impressive 835 signatories. A figure which tells us everything about the current state of the official Labour left - and, of course, Momentum itself ●

## Notes

1. *Morning Star* September 5 2023.
2. ocisa.org.uk.
3. transformpolitics.uk.
4. join.peoplesmomentum.com/?ref=mmb.
5. forms.peoplesmomentum.com/petition.



## OUR HISTORY

# Debating unity in Socialist Alliance

Recently there has been talk going around about CPGB-AWL 'fusion talks' in the early 2000s. There were talks, that is for sure, but not about fusion. This was before the Iraq war and in the context of the Socialist Alliance, which brought together six principal organisations, including the CPGB, AWL, SPEW and SWP. In the interests of clarity and to encourage worthwhile left unity, we republish our report from October 2 2002 of the CPGB's membership aggregate, written by Mary Godwin

Two rival motions concerning the CPGB's relations with the Alliance for Workers' Liberty were presented to the September 29 aggregate of CPGB members.

After a lengthy and intense debate, the following motion, formulated by John Bridge, was adopted with no votes against and one abstention: "This aggregate of CPGB members reaffirms the existing position regarding the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Namely that fusion will be sought through the struggle in the Socialist Alliance and the successes made towards establishing a Socialist Alliance party. An important stepping stone in that direction is a Socialist Alliance political paper - official if we can, unofficial if we must."

An alternative motion was presented at the start of the debate by Martyn Hudson: "This aggregate of CPGB members must affirm not a project of fusion with the AWL, but the construction of a CPGB-AWL bloc with regard to the Socialist Alliance. A political paper is a necessary part of that project. This bloc is necessary to undermine the misleadership of the Socialist Alliance by the Socialist Workers Party." Comrade Hudson's motion attracted some support during the discussion, but was defeated in the vote with only three comrades in favour.

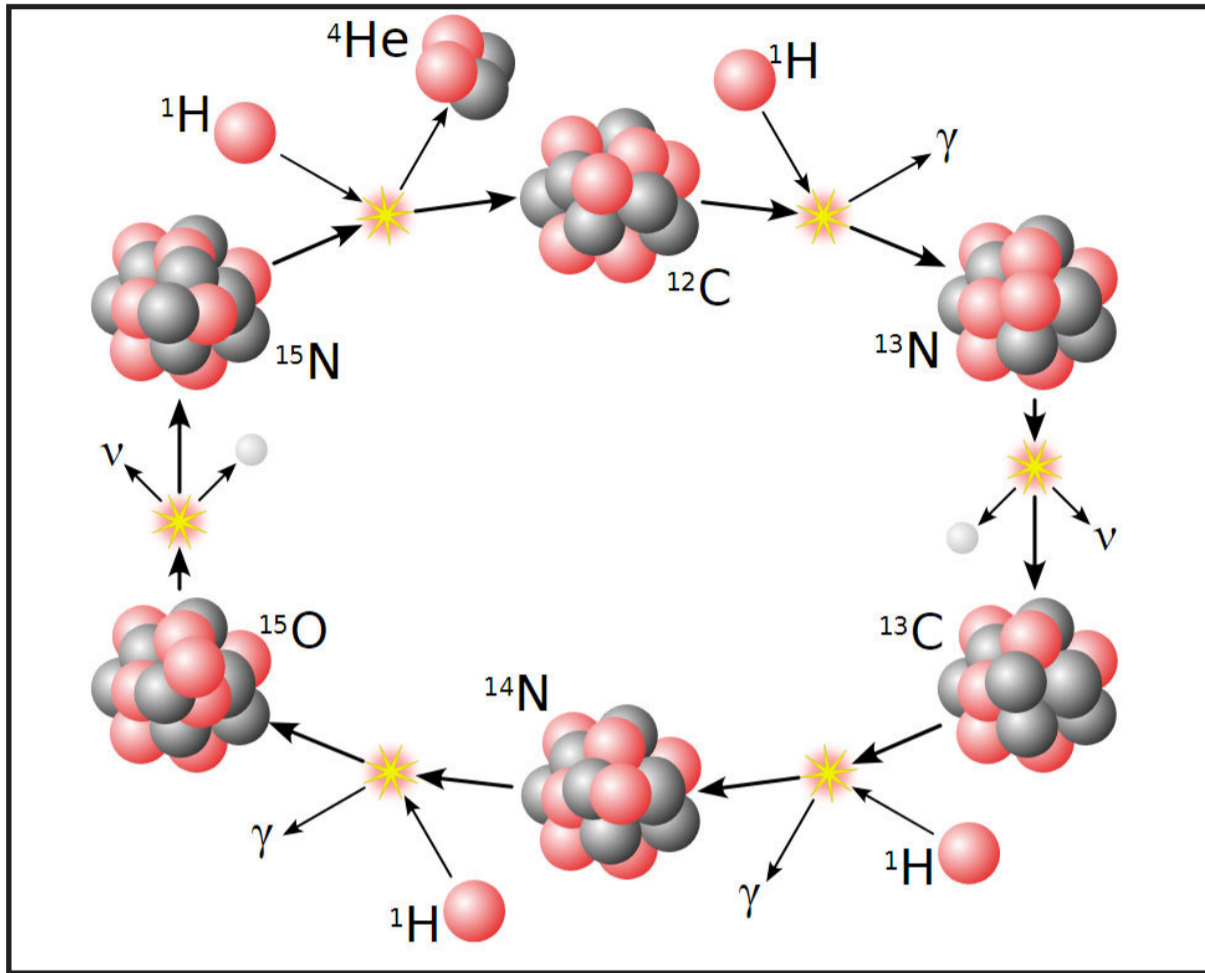
Opening the discussion, comrade Bridge gave a brief account of the history of the AWL and its involvement with the Socialist Alliance. Like other left groups, the AWL celebrated Blair's election victory in 1997, and anticipated a "fructification of hope", a "crisis of expectations". When this did not materialise, this caused another crisis - this time for auto-Labourism - resulting in a welcome, if untheorised, gravitation towards the Socialist Alliance.

Two loose wings can be discerned within the AWL, which are primarily characterised by the comrades' attitude towards democratic questions and their importance. We should encourage the victory of the political wing - despite its half-formed nature - over the economic wing, which is at present dominant and colours the whole organisation.

Comrade Bridge described our relations with the AWL as healthy: we can fight alongside them in the Socialist Alliance despite political differences. The kind of disagreements illustrated by the debate at Communist University on Palestine (reported in *Weekly Worker* September 26 2002) cannot be allowed to be made into a barrier preventing the co-production of the political paper mentioned in both motions. Such differences ought to be debated out within its pages.

### AWL purpose

Comrade Bridge pointed out the crucial reason why it would be a mistake to aim for fusion with the AWL now, despite the open, democratic culture of both groups. The uniting goal of CPGB members, and the overriding aim of our work in the Socialist Alliance, is to bring together the revolutionary left into a single, democratic-centralist organisation. Both the old and new versions of the 'What we fight for'



**Fusion in a Socialist Alliance party, yes; then the battle for programmatic clarity would become ever more intense and unforgiving**

column in the paper make this clear, and the comrade rebutted claims that the new version represents a watering down of this goal with the aim of facilitating unity with the AWL.

However, the reason for the existence of the AWL seems to be to build the AWL, in the hope that one day the masses will join them. While the AWL calls in the abstract for the unity of the revolutionary left, such a notion does not guide its practice - and certainly not its participation in the Socialist Alliance. At the SA national conference on December 1 2001 the AWL took an anarcho-liberal position, standing against steps that would take the alliance in a partyist direction and instead voting for a loose form of organisation in a futile attempt to prevent the Socialist Party in England and Wales walkout. Leading AWL comrades openly state that the alliance is mainly useful in that it provides them with the opportunity to attack the SWP. It is this difference in fundamental aim which makes immediate unity with the AWL impossible, comrade Bridge concluded. We positively engage with the revolutionary left as a whole, and regard groups like the SWP as part of the solution. The AWL regards the SWP purely and simply as part of the problem.

Comrade Hudson, in presenting his alternative motion, pointed to two areas in which he agreed with the AWL against the CPGB majority. First, there is nothing positive in the history of the old CPGB - at least for the last 60 or 70 years. Reforging the CPGB and uniting the revolutionary left are not the same process, he said, but mutually exclusive concepts. Second, he did not think the SWP are objectively revolutionaries. He characterised them as Stalinist with rotten politics and an authoritarian

internal culture which stamps on dissent. The SWP is a "machine to maim revolutionaries". Therefore he proposed a CPGB-AWL bloc which would be aimed at undermining the SWP and winning the leadership of the Socialist Alliance. He said such a bloc would unite two democratic-centralist groups against a bureaucratic-centralist, authoritarian regime which is paralysing the SA.

### 'Fusion talks'

A range of different views emerged in the debate. This was a natural consequence of comrades from different regions, who do not regularly have the opportunity to thrash out ideas face to face. Comrades attended from Wales, Scotland, Manchester, Peterborough, Liverpool, north-east England, Surrey, Hertfordshire and, of course, London. Many intervened in the course of the debate.

Cameron Richards from south Wales claimed that comrade Bridge had given a distorted impression of the AWL in his opening: it is still a horrendously economic organisation, but has improved in recent years, and we could benefit from cooperating with it in trade union work. Comrade Richards regretted the way the quality of debate with the AWL has declined in recent months. He did not agree with comrade Hudson's dismissal of the history of the CPGB, but thought the resumption of "fusion talks" with the AWL would be valuable - "we should give the bloc a go". He added that on the ground very little is happening in the Socialist Alliance, which may not remain the focus of our partyist project in the way comrade Bridge's motion implies.

Replying to comrade Richards, Mark Fischer said there never were "fusion talks" - what took

place were exploratory discussions with a view to cooperation. He criticised the AWL leadership for using differences over the history of Afghanistan to avoid serious debate about the party question, and for attributing to the CPGB political positions it quite clearly does not hold. Similarly, others criticised the AWL for using the excuse of the so-called independents in the Socialist Alliance to back out of their initial support for an unofficial Socialist Alliance paper. At the fringe meeting on an SA paper, jointly organised with the Revolutionary Democratic Group at the SWP's Marxism 2002, the AWL refused to provide a platform speaker.

Stan Keable said that the way the Socialist Alliance has developed means that the SWP needs the participation of other groups, which gives us the opportunity to polemicise and work with them in a way we could not in the past. The partyist project is aimed at organisational unity among all those who share our aim of building the revolutionary party the working class needs, irrespective of their particular ideological differences. He made the point that the closest organisational unity both facilitates and necessitates clarification of differences, and added that our aim of reforging the CPGB does not mean we have illusions in the old CPGB tradition.

Lee Rock, a PCSU militant from east London, said that the two motions have elements both for and against a fusion with the AWL, so the situation is unclear. He was opposed to fusion now, but thought a bloc with the AWL would be more useful and more likely than a joint paper with them, as it would mean unity and cooperation at all levels rather than just among the leadership and editorial boards. If a joint paper was

published, he advocated maintaining our own separate publication alongside it.

Marcus Ström, a member of the Provisional Central Committee and the SA's executive, argued that a joint paper would facilitate cooperation at all levels of the party. In reply to comrade Richards, he said the AWL cannot teach us much about trade union work. All they do is ape the sectarian methods of the SWP at a lower level. He rejected comrade Hudson's motion, saying it focuses not on what the class needs, but on the sectarian aim of bashing the SWP. He agreed with comrade Bridge that to dismiss thousands of leftists as part of the problem is both sectarian and pessimistic. He hoped to recruit the SWP and other groups to the partyist project.

Peter Manson, *Weekly Worker* editor, said we can cooperate with the AWL on particular questions within the SA, as with any other group - such as over a motion on the euro for the forthcoming conference. However, what would be the aim of comrade Hudson's bloc, apart from opposing the SWP? The AWL does not agree with our aim of fighting to transform the Socialist Alliance into a revolutionary party. In fact, as comrade Ström pointed out, it does not even meet its commitment to help pay for the SA office.

Bob Paul said he broadly agreed with the motion put forward by comrade Bridge, but would have preferred it to have contained some mention of the positive aspects of the AWL - its openness, willingness to debate and democratic internal culture. John Pearson from Manchester said he was reassured by the motion and the discussion, having previously suspected that the Provisional Central Committee intended to subordinate the CPGB to the AWL in the editorial board of a joint paper.

### Sect mentality

In reply to comrade Hudson's description of the SWP as Stalinist, Ian Donovan said the phenomenon of revolutionaries being damaged or "maimed" is a characteristic not only of Stalinist groups, but some of the more bizarre Trotskyist sects too, such as the Spartacists or Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party. Despite its democracy and openness, the AWL retains traces of the same Trotskyist sectarianism, as demonstrated by their ranting denunciation of the SWP as anti-Semitic, comrade Donovan claimed.

Replying to the debate, comrade Bridge said the Trotskyist groups on the left today embody the worst errors of Leon Trotsky - a sect mentality adopted as orthodoxy as a consequence of their lack of a partyist perspective. This mentality can be overcome by winning comrades to the perspective of building a revolutionary party, not by joining forces with the AWL in some sectarian hostility towards the SWP. He called for a clear vote from the aggregate and a clear message on the idea of a joint paper.

The decisiveness of the vote for the resolution moved by comrade Bridge indicates that the long discussion helped to clarify in comrades' minds their own ideas and the position of the leadership ●



## USA

# Liberals and authoritarians

Joe Biden does not, cannot, understand the MAGA movement. Daniel Lazare looks at his September 28 speech and finds something rotten in the state of America

**B**ourgeois liberals claim to oppose rightwing authoritarianism, but invariably end up feeding it instead. This is the takeaway from a speech that Joe Biden gave in Arizona last week on Donald Trump's 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) movement and the threat it poses to US democracy.

The threat is quite real. With the Republicans emerging as the party of 'J6' (the January 2021 Capitol Hill insurrection), a Trump victory would not only mean a presidential pardon for all or most who took part, but would also spell the end of anything resembling free presidential elections. Instead of voters, rightwing mobs - or their leader in the Oval Office - would determine who wins and who does not. Since America barely qualifies as a democracy to begin with, this would tip it over into outright authoritarianism.

That is authoritarianism, as in Augusto Pinochet - or perhaps Anastasio Somoza, the Nicaraguan dictator of whom Franklin D Roosevelt famously remarked: "He may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch." Whether or not leftists will be tossed out of helicopters is unknown. But with Trump and Ron DeSantis, his nearest Republican rival, both vowing to round up and summarily expel "six or seven million" illegal immigrants, it could lead to scenes that are hardly less gruesome.<sup>1</sup>

So it is no joke. But what stands out about Biden's September 28 speech is how it characterised the Trump campaign, as an assault on American patriotism:

Seizing power, concentrating power, attempting to abuse power, purging and packing key institutions, spewing conspiracy theories, spreading lies for profit and power to divide America in every way, inciting violence against those who risk their lives to keep America safe, weaponising against the very soul of who we are as Americans.

That is how he summed up MAGA's goals. Biden went on:

This MAGA threat is the threat to the brick and mortar of our democratic institutions. But it's also a threat to the character of our nation ... that gives our constitution life, that binds us together as Americans in common cause.

Since Trump wants to divide America, the solution is to bind it together ever more tightly. "We have to stand up for American values embedded in the constitution [and] the declaration of independence," Biden said, "because we know the MAGA extremists have already proven they won't."<sup>2</sup>

## Conservatism

Fending off MAGA extremism also means fending off 'bad' conservatism (as opposed to the 'good' conservatism that Biden fondly remembers from his 36 years in the US Senate). This means celebrating the life and times of the late John McCain, the ex-prisoner of war turned Arizona senator, whom Biden regards as a patriotic hero, even if he was a Republican and whom he spent the first eight or nine minutes of his speech praising to the skies:



Trump is way ahead in Republican polling

While in Hanoi, I visited a marker depicting where John ... had endured all the pain. Imprisoned five and a half years. Solitary confinement for two years ... He was beaten, bloodied, bones broken, isolated, tortured, left unable to raise his arms above his shoulders again.

As I stood there paying my respects, I thought about how much I missed my friend ... I thought about something else as well. I thought about how much America missed John right now, how much America needed John's courage and foresight and vision. I thought about what John stood for, what he fought for, what he was willing to die for. I thought about what we owed John, what I owed him, and what we owe each other ...

So McCain is anti-Trump, and the way to defeat one is by celebrating the other.

To be sure, McCain, who died of cancer in 2018, was a Barry Goldwater-style Republican with a pronounced libertarian streak, which is why he voted with the American Civil Liberties Union more often than not.

But he was otherwise a hawk's hawk who rarely met an imperial war he did not like. In 2000, he called for a programme of "rogue state rollback", in which the United States "would arm, train, equip, both from without and from within, forces that would eventually overthrow the governments and install free and democratically-elected governments".<sup>3</sup> He called for a US invasion of Iraq just months after 9/11, sang "Bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb Iran" to the tune of the Beach Boys' 'Barbara Ann' in 2007, at a time when Washington was revving up hostilities against Tehran, and called for the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi a few months into the Arab Spring. He championed Islamist rebels in Chechnya ("Yes, there are Chechen terrorists, but there are many Chechens who took up arms only after the atrocities committed by Russian forces"), and he was on the phone "several times a day" with Georgian nationalist Mikheil Saakashvili, who launched the South Ossetian war against Russia in 2008.<sup>4</sup>

He also travelled to Chile for a "friendly and at times warm" meeting with Augusto Pinochet,<sup>5</sup> travelled to Syria in 2013 to meet with Sunni terrorists who had taken part in the kidnapping of 11 Lebanese Shi'ite pilgrims a year earlier (he

claimed to have had no knowledge of the incident),<sup>6</sup> and, during the Euromaidan uprising in Kyiv, met with Oleh Tyahnybok, leader of the anti-Semitic Svoboda party, who had said of Ukrainian nationalists during World War II: "They took their automatic guns on their necks and went into the woods, and fought against the Muscovites, Germans, Jews, and other scum who wanted to take away our Ukrainian state."<sup>7</sup>

In short, he's just the sort of Washington warmonger whom Trump followers love to hate. So, in playing up McCain as a patriotic hero, Biden wound up reinforcing a MAGA *Weltanschauung* that divides US society into two groups: super-hawks who continually call for war; and the poor grunts on the ground who have to fight them.

Biden did not help matters by also lavishing praise on political institutions that are looking more and more shopworn. "For centuries, the American constitution has been a model for the world, with other countries adopting 'We, the people' as their North Star as well," he said. "For all its faults," he added, "... American democracy remains the best [path] forward to prosperity, possibilities, progress, fair play, equality."

This was just two days before those same "democratic institutions" brought the country to brink of a government shutdown due to growing chaos on Capitol Hill.

Passing budgets is something other countries do as a matter of routine, but which America finds more and more difficult due to its broken-down constitutional machinery. *The New York Times* neatly summed up the problem, once a 45-day spending bill went through: "Dysfunction is the new normal."<sup>8</sup> A growing portion of the public apparently agrees. According to a poll released by Pew Research on September 19,

■ 63% of Americans express not too much or no confidence at all in the future of the US political system.

■ 63% say they are dissatisfied with the presidential candidates who have emerged so far.

■ 81% say that America's elected representatives do either a somewhat or a very bad job of "keeping their personal financial interests separate from their work in Congress" - a roundabout way of saying that four out of five see the legislative branch as corrupt.

■ Trust in government, which once hovered in the mid-70s, is now down to just 16% - an historic low.<sup>9</sup>

This is what society looks like when it is on the verge of a political breakdown. With the budget deadline looming, a far-right Virginia congressman named Bob Good recently raised eyebrows by declaring that people should not worry about a shutdown, because "most of what we do up here hurts the American people".<sup>10</sup> This is an example of how Republican neo-Confederates cannot stop trashing government nearly three years after a fascist mob stormed Capitol Hill. But if fed-bashing still works, it is because it accords with what a growing portion of the population believes - which is that America's decrepit political system is a millstone around society's neck.

## Multi-dimensional

What Biden does not understand, of course, is that it is not Trump's fault. The Orange One is a symptom rather than a cause. "Polycrisis", the favoured term among academics these days, suggests that a variety of global problems - inflation, climate change, mass migration, political breakdown, etc - are coming together to form a single Big Bang. But it is misleading, because it implies that the problems are disparate in nature, when in fact they all flow out of a single cause: a capitalist 'uni-crisis' that is multi-dimensional in an increasingly powerful way.

After all, capitalism is not merely an economic system, but a political, military and technological system too. Fossil fuels have been the central driving force since the invention of the modern steam engine in 1778. Huge mechanised armies have enabled capitalist powers to conquer vast new territory and carve out new colonies. Popular elections, the penny press, mass education, etc have created a society of technically advanced workers and sophisticated consumers. To the degree America has given capitalism its own special stamp, it has been by pioneering new forms of mass production and mass consumption, in which suburbanisation, motorisation, Hollywood and the mass media all played a role. The US also pioneered new forms of limited democracy, in which Americans could noisily campaign for any candidate they wished, as long as he or she belonged to one of two bourgeois political parties. It pioneered new forms of free expression, in which they could spout off as loudly and vociferously as they liked, as long as what they said remained safely within bourgeois bounds.

But now a US-led system of globalised production and consumption is coming undone. Rampant fossil-fuel consumption is leading to a growing climate emergency, imperial aggression is leading to more and bigger wars, and motorisation is leading to pollution and sprawl, and intensifying racial conflict across urban-suburban lines. In the US, where rising standards of living are practically a birthright, median real weekly earnings are up just nine percent since 1979, while the home prices have risen 78% in real terms and college tuition over the same period has multiplied more than a dozen-fold.<sup>11</sup> With US life expectancy down 2.7 years since 2019, even health is collapsing due to suicide, obesity, gun violence and roughly 100,000 fatal drug overdoses per year.

The political crisis is thus one aspect of an all-sided capitalist crisis. Yet because constitutional paralysis is all-consuming, there is no way out. A political explosion is brewing as a consequence, but, the more it remains within constitutional bounds, the more irrational it will become. Instead of a modern socialist revolt, it will more likely resemble a medieval jacquerie, in which peasants burn down the manor house that they see as the source of all evil and oppression.

It is a disaster. Yet all Biden can do is blather on about the glories of a country that is pitching downhill:

Any room I walk in and no matter what heads of state I'm with, everything stops. Not because of Joe Biden, but because I'm president of the United States of America. We are the essential nation. We are the essential nation. The rest of the world is looking, so we have to stand up for our constitution, our institutions of democracy, because MAGA extremists have made it clear they're not going to.

So US workers have to stand up for the US as it presently exists, even though it is falling apart - that is the message to a disgruntled and pessimistic nation, in which political democracy is hanging by a thread. Yet Democrats wonder why it is just not getting through ... ●

## Notes

1. [www.nytimes.com/2023/10/01/us/politics/immigration-desantis-trump.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/01/us/politics/immigration-desantis-trump.html).
2. The full text is available at [www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/09/28/remarks-by-president-biden-honoring-the-legacy-of-senator-john-mccain-and-the-work-we-must-do-together-to-strengthen-our-democracy](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/09/28/remarks-by-president-biden-honoring-the-legacy-of-senator-john-mccain-and-the-work-we-must-do-together-to-strengthen-our-democracy).
3. [www.salon.com/2008/04/16/flip\\_flop](https://www.salon.com/2008/04/16/flip_flop).
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11. [mishtalk.com/economics/inflation-adjusted-men-are-making-less-money-than-in-1979-women-are-doing-better/](https://mishtalk.com/economics/inflation-adjusted-men-are-making-less-money-than-in-1979-women-are-doing-better/); [www.gobankingrates.com/investing/real-estate/how-much-new-home-cost-year-were-born-educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college-by-year](https://www.gobankingrates.com/investing/real-estate/how-much-new-home-cost-year-were-born-educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college-by-year).



## ECONOMY



Gone, busted, no more

# Hiding in the shadows

Interest rates are at a long-term high and look set to stay that way for at least a couple of years more. **Michael Roberts** warns that there are likely to be severe economic consequences

**T**he cost of borrowing to invest or consume is reaching record levels. One benchmark for this is the real interest rate on government bonds globally.

Governments are seen as the safest borrowers, unlikely to default, compared to companies or individuals. So creditors (or investors in bonds) are prepared to demand less interest return on government borrowing than they ask companies and households. Yet, even after taking into account inflation, government 10-year bond yields now have a global average of over six percent - something not seen since the late 1960s.

### Rising

The reason for these high yields is twofold. First, there is inflation itself. Rising inflation over the last two years meant that creditors want more interest to cover the loss of real worth of their bond purchases or loans. The second is the move by all the major central banks to raise their policy interest rates to levels not seen since the late 1970s. As I have discussed before,<sup>1</sup> the central banks reckon that hiking their interest, which set the floor for all other borrowing rates, will eventually drive down inflation back to their arbitrary target of a two percent price rise each year. With central bank rates now around four-five percent in the major economies, that feeds through to overall loan rates. Moreover, there seems little likelihood that the main central banks will reduce their rates any time before 2025.

This record cost of borrowing in real terms has already caused a mini-banking crisis in the US, with several smaller banks hitting the dust.<sup>2</sup> And it has led to a batch of governments in so-called emerging economies to default on their loan

obligations to creditors, both state and private, in the rich western economies. And more are set to join the current defaulters.<sup>3</sup>

But the other spillover from this 'liquidity squeeze' is the increasing risk of a new meltdown in financial markets, not dissimilar to the collapse in mortgage and speculative investment in the global financial crash of 2008. The financial 'regulators' are getting worried. The European Systemic Risk Board, the Bank for International Settlements and the International Organisation of Securities Commissions have all called out the mounting risks. Referring to the claimed improvement in regulating speculation after the crash of 2008, one financial stability policymaker from that crisis era stated: "We never really thought that we were solving one problem and what would the knock-on be?"<sup>4</sup> He argued that regulators are now entering a "new phase", where they have to ask, "Where did the risk pop out and how do we deal with that?"

The new risk that has 'popped out' is with non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs), comprising investment funds, insurance companies, pension funds and other financial intermediaries. These are sometimes called 'shadow banks'. NBFIs now account for 50% of global financial services assets and they are pretty much unregulated.

Within the euro area, the growth of the NBFI sector accelerated after the global financial crisis, doubling since 2008 from €15 trillion to €31 trillion. The share of credit granted by NBFIs to euro-area non-financial corporates increased from 15% in 2008 to 26% at the end of last year. Overall, the NBFI sector assets are now around 80% relative to the size of the banking sector.

And here is the problem. NBFIs are prone to the risk of 'deleveraging' when asset prices suddenly change and become volatile. This is nothing new and is in the nature of such speculative capital. And the collapse of any large NBFI will spill over into the banking system in general. The examples are numerous: the collapse of the hedge fund, Long Term Capital Management, as a result showed how financial stress in a highly leveraged NBFI can transmit directly to the large banks at the heart of the financial system.

Banks are directly connected to the NBFI sector entities via loans, securities and derivatives exposures, as well as through funding dependencies. I quote the European Central Bank:

Funding from NBFI entities would appear to be the most likely and strongest spillover channel, given that NBFI entities maintain their liquidity buffers primarily as deposits and very short-term repo transactions with banks.<sup>5</sup>

### Breakdown

More recently, the collapse of the hedge fund, Archegos, revealed the ineffectiveness of risk management and internal controls at banks, enabling NBFIs to take up excessively leveraged and concentrated positions. The now defunct Credit Suisse's losses linked to Archegos totalled \$5.5 billion. Again according to the ECB, "Not only was this loss substantial by itself, but it was a contributing factor to the ultimate downfall of the bank, leading to its government-orchestrated acquisition by UBS."

A recent report by the Bank of England concluded that:

... shadow banks operate alongside commercial banks to securitise risky individual loans and hence produce standardised asset-backed securities. Investors perceive these securities, free of any idiosyncratic risk, to be nearly as safe as traditional bank deposits, and consequently purchase them. That, in turn, allows banks to expand lending by charging lower spreads.<sup>6</sup>

But then the BoE goes on to say:

In periods of stress, however, the 'nearly' qualification turns out to be crucial and the imperfect substitution between securities and deposits grows apparent. Securities suddenly command a higher premium, enough to curtail the capacity of shadow banks to engage in securitisation. This spills over to commercial banks: no longer able to offload part of their portfolio at the same price, they resort to increasing spreads on consumers and businesses alike.

This affects the 'real economy', because

... as spreads shoot up, credit becomes dearer. Indebted households must cut back on goods and housing purchases. Indebted firms must cut back on capital purchases. Employment, consumption and investment fall, causing a recession. Thus, a drop in investor confidence - we call it a market sentiment shock - produces strong and positive co-movements among the main macroeconomic variables, credit quantities and asset prices, as well as countercyclical movements in household and business credit spreads.

This "market sentiment shock", it seems, "accounts particularly well for the two euro zone recessions in 2009 and 2012".

In short, 'shadow bank' speculative lending is very liable to lead to a breakdown in credit, spreading to the wider banking sector and then into the real economy, triggering a crash. Klaas Knot, chair of the Financial Stability Board, has said: "If we want to arrive at a world where these vulnerabilities are less, we have to tackle this issue." It was a priority because non-banks' leverage "can potentially threaten financial stability".

In essence, nothing has changed since Marx wrote in Volume 3 of *Capital*:

If the credit system appears as the principal lever of overproduction and excessive speculation in commerce, this is simply because the reproduction process, which is elastic by nature, is now forced to its most extreme limit. A crisis must inevitably break out if credit is withdrawn. ●

Michael Roberts blogs at [thenextrecession.wordpress.com](http://thenextrecession.wordpress.com).

### Notes

1. [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/04/27/inflation-causes-and-solutions](http://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/04/27/inflation-causes-and-solutions).
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## REVIEW

# State oppression and a turncoat

Richard O’Rawe, *Stakeknife’s dirty war: the inside story of Scappaticci, the IRA’s Nutting Squad and the British spooks who ran the war* Merrion Press, 2023, pp272, £14.95



One of the impossible contradictions of the Provisional Irish Republican Army’s long and bitter war against the British occupation of Ireland was their superb military achievements, whilst harbouring a vicious cancer in their soul. This is an utterly depressing and uncomfortable book for anyone who supported the republican struggle in the 70s and 80s.

How could such a heroic and disciplined team, rooted so deeply in working class republican communities, have been penetrated - perhaps from its inception - by a British army agent positioned at the very heart of the organisation (or, if the book is correct, a number of agents acting independently of each other)? This is the exposé of Freddie Scappaticci, as told by Richard O’Rawe - a one-time comrade.

Scappaticci was from the Italian emigre community, who - fleeing starvation and social collapse at home - had flocked to the heavy industry of Belfast from the 1870s. Scappaticci was head of the IRA’s Internal Security Unit (ISU) - the man ostensibly charged with rooting out agents such as himself. His team was known as the Nutting Squad because of its summary executions.

The book follows the style of an investigation. It is ruthlessly researched in gruesome detail, covering many of the operations which resulted in former comrades being ‘nuttied’ - shot in the head, often after merciless torture.

Scappaticci (‘Scap’ or ‘Scappi’) had like many young men around that time been born into the anti-Catholic pogroms of the late 1960s and joined the newly emergent Provisional IRA. He was interned in 1971, then again in 1974, and some time around 1975 he was ‘acquired’ by the British state and wormed his way into the

very heart of the Provisional army structure. Former volunteer Anthony McIntyre states:

He damaged the IRA irreparably and helped pave the way for its defeat... a seriously compromised IRA campaign would reinforce a peace lobby within republicanism. Arguably this is where the role of [Scappaticci] became crucial.

Other volunteers swore that he was not alone and that an even more senior figure in the structure may have been a British asset. Harry McCallion in his *Undercover war* - which amazingly reveals many of the black ops of Britain’s special forces in Ireland (basically a murder squad) - alleges Gerry Adams himself was an agent of the British state, especially in derailing the armed struggle! O’Rawe reveals a number of fingers pointed at Martin McGuinness, but draws back in his conclusions from finding a case against him proven. For me the jury is still out on both of them.

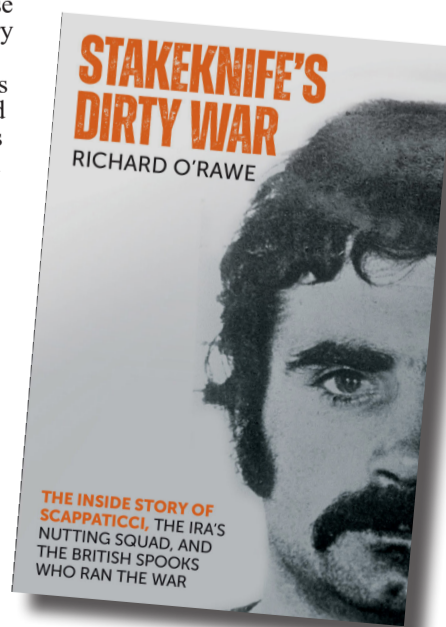
What is clear is that Scappi’s British handlers were informed in advance of all the victims interrogated, punished and murdered by him - and the death toll is said to be 18. It is clear that a number of these were former comrades who had realised his true role.

## Treachery

His degeneration seems to have started after being released from internment for a second time. He discovered a major money-making tax dodge, capitalising on the British state’s encouragement of commerce - particularly building contracts with tax exemptions and relief. The author notes that one could make £5,000 a week, and Scappi

**Irish republicans fought a protracted armed struggle with the British authorities but found themselves hopelessly infiltrated. A programmatic commitment to left-nationalism inevitably led to constitutional nationalism**

**Richard O’Rawe’s book provides a detailed account of a failure that was primarily not about security, but politics**



suddenly developed a taste for new cars, upmarket residences and the latest electrical gadgets well out of the reach of your average worker.

In the autumn of 1978, the Internal Security Unit of the IRA was formed, with Scappaticci second in command. Oddly they had chosen Joe Magee to head the unit - odd because he was an ex-member of British maritime special forces, the Special Boat Service. This was of immense importance to the British state, who correctly saw this IRA unit as a direct counter to their own intelligence and infiltration work. It was the most powerful body of the whole IRA operation, with virtually sovereign power and all-seeing observation powers. How many of their many victims were actually informers or assets of the British no-one can now really tell, although many relatives of executed men swear they were loyal republicans and not guilty.

One of the suggestions as to why he went over to the enemy is that they discovered his criminal tax fraud scam. He knew someone else who had been caught and got eight years for it. The offer of an amnesty and lavish bribes were strong inducements in keeping the life to which he had become accustomed. His treachery was one of the most important achievements of the British army in the whole operation.

Another suggestion made by fellow volunteers close to him is that he was blackmailed, owing to his predilection for pre-pubescent girls. It is suspected that he may have been caught and threatened with exposure and prison time from the state and possible death from the IRA. Such an accusation requires more than speculation or rumour and the pornographic material ultimately seized from his home was not of

young girls. Richard O’Rawe admits he does not know the reason Scappi turned traitor, but there is absolute certainty he did - and this had a devastating impact.

The author says:

... the FRU [Britain’s covert Force Research Unit] ran rings around the IRA in the 1970s and 1980s. This was not because the Provisional IRA were stupid, but rather because the British had learned the folly of allowing spies with English accents and foreign habits to live in local, sometimes hostile, communities ... nobody knew of Freddie Scappaticci’s treachery. Nobody.

It is said that the IRA underestimated the forces arrayed against them, and one can see how their popularity among the community and grassroots membership, among neighbours, relatives and friends, might have blinded them to this. They would never expect - given the cause, given the repression, given the close-knit weave of the community, that folk they knew could be informers (or worse). The test of loyalty was the commitment to fight, die and kill, and the trust in those who made that commitment was unshakable.

There was also a contrary, equally erroneous belief that the British would never have an agent who could coldly kill his own handlers, while working for them. But at least one did. That same man was someone who sat in on recruitment interviews of young IRA volunteers, quizzing them on their suitability, their conviction and advising them how to remain below the radar and keep their membership secret. He then passed on all the information to the security forces within hours of their joining.



# What we fight for

One of the most odious features of FRU work was to pass on to loyalist death squads information on republican communities and activists - resulting in the murder of literally hundreds of innocent Catholic men, women and children. The fact that this was the work of an official body of the British state exposes the ruthless nature of that machine. It might be added that the FRU played a similar role of murder and betrayal within the loyalist militias and communities too. To an extent the state, through its secret assassins, spies and agents, played out the conflict between and within the divided communities.

Were there suspicions? South Armagh IRA sussed out during the interrogation of James Young, an IRA man suspected of betrayal, that Scappaticci's questioning of him was aimed at discovering his unit's operations and volunteers, not the alleged crimes, and contacted the Belfast IRA to warn that he was not to be trusted. They ignored the warning.

The greatest achievement of the British state - if one can use such an expression without inducing nausea - was that most of the time it was actually directing the IRA's internal security operations, including who was to be executed, many of whom were important, sometimes vital, members of the organisation. They also presided over the killing of their own actual agents rather than involve civil authorities on either side of the border to save them. Indeed all of the executions under Scappaticci's direction were with the indulgence of the British states forces.

The book strongly suggests that most leading figures, such as Adams himself, may have been playing some game with the British secret state - a suggestion made in other, similar works. The book shows how Martin McGuinness - alleged by many to have been a prominent member of the IRA Army Council - was caught on camera preparing and helping to plant a bomb, as well as demonstrating weapons to younger people; and that the evidence was sent to British intelligence, but they chose not to act on it, when McGuinness could have been banged to rights.

## Worked for Britain

There are tales of betrayal and set-ups. The commander of North Derry and those of other active units of the IRA had been forced by Frank Hegarty - another subsequently outed British agent - to pass on details of an attack on the FRU to McGuinness, which they duly did, but were suspicious of.

They then did a careful check on the area prior to the attack and discovered that an ambush to be carried out by the British army's Special Air Service (SAS) had been planned at the time and location. They called it off and then were summoned to explain why they had done so, and eventually Hegarty confessed that he and others were 'touts' (or spies) for the British army. This resulted in his interrogation by the ISU, led by Scappi, and he was subsequently executed.

If Hegarty was indeed an agent, then it is clear that the British allowed him to be disposed of, to protect the bigger operation, and that this would have been a decision made by a senior member of the government. Scappaticci was later to argue that he was not the person who carried out that interrogation and that the subsequent execution was carried out by McGuinness, not him. It was McGuinness who had rapidly promoted Hegarty to positions of trust - much to the resentment of loyal serving, more honourable volunteers - so, once all this came out, getting rid of his protege might

have been an attempt at covering his tracks.

After reading this book one could be forgiven for pondering how it was the IRA continued to conduct such a devastating war against the British army and the Six County state with such an albatross of treachery round its neck. After all, Scappi occupied the Sinn Féin office and presided with others over the civil administration of Belfast.

But the truth is the IRA had deliberately decentralised their operations, which meant its units had a great deal of operational autonomy and internal control, jealously safeguarding their own plans and strategy. South Armagh was particularly guarded in what it shared with anyone from the Belfast organisation (and rightly so). But by 1989 McGuinness had reasserted the right of the Provisionals' Army Council (actually himself in particular) to vet all operations and plans.

This provided the British state with something it could only previously have hoped for - the most damaging development since the formation of the Provos. It was the breaking of the code which had prevented British forces gaining access to information about the whole IRA operation. It necessitated allowing some operations to continue, which meant that their own plants and touts might have to be executed to cover their tracks, and it also allowed for double-cross games, whereby unsuspecting, loyal volunteers were set up for assassination. In addition it meant, of course, that the British state effectively sanctioned the killing of its own troops and agents. In reality many units realised they were being monitored and withheld information on some of their operations or false-flagged them as those of some other faction.

Gerry Adams came to the leadership of Sinn Féin in November 1983, but how much of his agenda was already formed at that time is debatable. The author argues that his appointment came at a time of realisation that the armed struggle was unwinnable, but I am not sure whether this was a 'realisation' or rather a self-fulfilling prophecy, imposed on the movement by stealth and sabotage. Much of the targeted killing of key IRA volunteers and unit members came about via carefully constructed SAS ambushes and direct treachery from the inside. The militant wing of the movement was being culled - and not just its military sections.

Key to this change of strategy - 'from the bullet to the ballot box' - was the winning over of the Army Council (I would say the rigging of the Army Council) to a programme of winding down and ending the armed struggle. This had to be achieved while convincing both the rank and file and the movement at large that the Adams leadership still supported it. However, sections of the 'troops on the ground' started to smell a bunch of rats quite early on.

What is remarkable (or maybe not!) is that when Scappaticci's cover was finally blown - partially by his own handlers and partially by the full expose by the media of his role, including his role in various executions - instead of taking the advice of British agents and fleeing the country with his accumulated £1 million (to be increased to nearer £2 million with a golden handshake), he decided to bluff it out. What is worse is that, instead of 'nutting the nutter', the IRA and Sinn Féin leadership rallied to his side, proclaiming that the whole expose was British intelligence slander.

That they vouched for him when so many of the fighters on the ground knew he was a traitor begs

lots of questions. If they accepted he was a deep-plant traitor of long standing, operating on behalf of British intelligence and executing friend and foe alike, what would it do to their credibility and the trust of the community? But, if that had been their reasoning, they missed the more obvious conclusion: if a British agent could sit so comfortably in the heart of the organisation without detection, how many others even higher up in the movement were also playing a double game, particularly now with the abandonment of armed struggle and the embracing of the policies and strategies which the movement had been formed to resist?

## Fled to Britain

In 2003, when it was clear that the bluff had not worked - the evidence was too clear and the pile of innocent bodies too high - Scappaticci fled. He stayed in various locations in England and Scotland and in 2006 any press revelation of his whereabouts was banned as a result of a high court order. Of course, that order helped to prevent him getting a taste of his own medicine, had the IRA chosen to execute him, but again one must ask why it did not attempt to do so. We are told that the man might well have had a serious personality disorder, because, instead of fleeing to some anonymous sunny shore, he fled to "a major northern city" (rumoured to be Newcastle), where he took up his former profession as a builder, humping bricks and making cement.

That there seems to have been no attempt to arrest him for the various murders many had testified to, identifying him as the chief assassin, shows how deep the deception was - and still is. In 2015 the families of many of his victims decided to open a case with the police ombudsman on the collusion of the British state and its agents in the death of their loved ones. How far had they acted as a cover for the ongoing assassinations and executions, allowing Scappi to continue his reign of terror?

In October 2015 the director of public prosecutions for the Six Counties, Barra McGrory, ordered the Police Service of Northern Ireland to examine the role that Scappaticci - together with Special Branch, the FRU and MI5 - had played in the killing of alleged

informers and agents. Then in 2016 Operation Kenova was launched under the leadership of a former chief constable, Jon Boutcher. It assembled 50 detectives from around the world to demonstrate that this was to be no whitewash. The MI5 was livid - documents and files it had intended to destroy, revealing much of the work of its agents, were seized.

True to his word, in October 2019 Boutcher subsequently passed on 33 files, relating to former members of the IRA, the security forces, the British army, etc, to the public prosecution service. They contained evidence of kidnapping, torture and murder, as well as misconduct in public office and perversion of the course of justice. To this day no action has been taken on them, and we note plans to close all investigations on crimes committed during 'the troubles' by the current government. It makes you wonder if all of this will be buried along with the victims.

In May 2022 The British government's Northern Ireland minister, Brandon Lewis, introduced a bill to parliament which would prevent members of the armed forces from being prosecuted for crimes up to and including murder. This has so far been blocked, thanks to widespread opposition. Nevertheless, the attempts to undermine and emasculate the Kenova enquiry by the introduction of such legislation - in order to excuse not just British soldiers, but undercover agents and secret service operators - is clear. Amnesty for IRA and loyalist military operators from future prosecution would be a small quid-pro-quo - especially since at least some of the most pernicious of these were anyway carrying out government-approved actions.

Remarkably Freddie Scappaticci lived out the rest of his life in Britain, dying of natural causes in April 2023. But the Kenova report is yet to be published (the interim version is due out at the end of the year).

Meanwhile, Sinn Féin has shaken off the whole scandalous treachery like water from a duck's back and continues to grow its support and authority for its 'constitutional path to Irish unity' ●

David John Douglass

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday October 8 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](http://communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register)

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Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk)  
For further information, email Stan Keable at  
[Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk)

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: [youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](https://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)

■ 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.



# weekly worker

**Left must not  
tail or pander  
to right**

## Europe swings right

With far-right parties making big gains and set for further advance in EU elections in 2024, Kevin Bean asks how the left should respond

Saturday's general election in Slovakia has produced the now expected headlines across Europe about the continued rise of the 'populist right'. Robert Fico's SMER-SSD party secured 23.3% of the poll to become the largest bloc in the Národná Rada (national council). Although we can now expect to see a period of negotiation and coalition-building involving SMER-SSD and a number of smaller rightwing parties, it is likely that a new government headed by Fico will take office in the next few weeks.

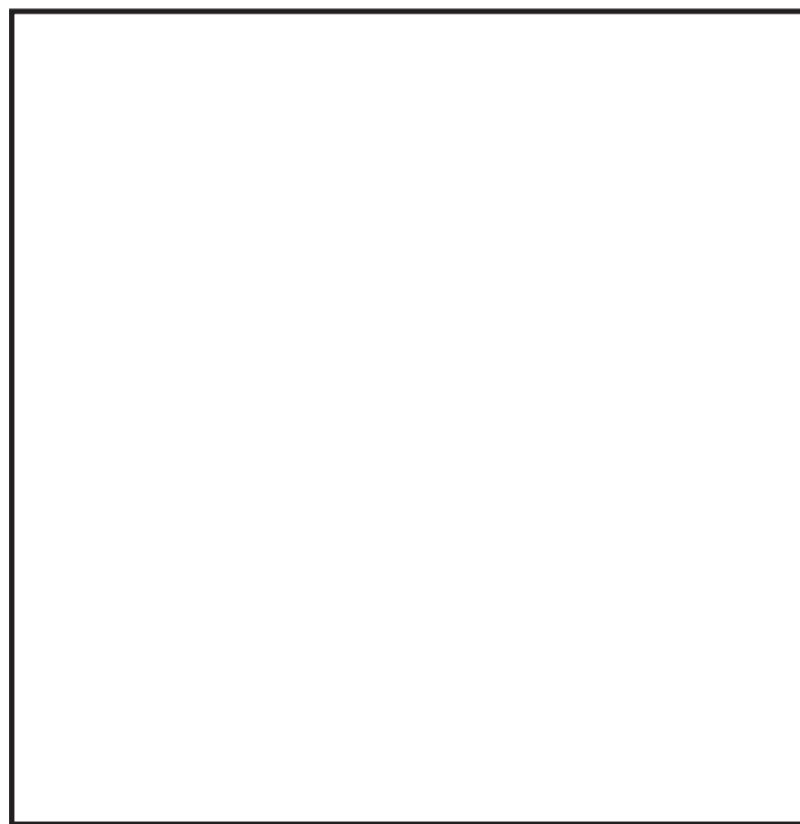
Slovakia's elections attracted more attention than usual because of the war in Ukraine and current tensions within the European Union: it has been argued that Fico's alleged 'pro-Russian' position and statements that he would not send military aid to Ukraine could weaken EU solidarity with Ukraine. Taken together with his rhetoric on migration and sympathies for the 'illiberal democracy' of his Hungarian neighbour, Viktor Orbán, Fico's victory appears to further undermine the EU's fragile 'unity' and add another member to the awkward squad that includes Orbán and the Law and Justice regime in Poland.

It remains to be seen how far any government led by Fico will follow up on the rhetoric and what the impact of his promised withdrawal of military aid for Ukraine will actually be in practice. Slovakia is hardly a major source of such aid, but politically the outcome might be more significant - although not in the ways that taking at face value Fico's campaign promises and populist national conservative rhetoric might suggest. If he follows the pattern laid down by his fellow 'awkward' squad members in Hungary and Poland, his government can expect to have a few run-ins at EU summits on migration policy, 'human rights' and the bloc's approach to Ukraine, but will these clashes amount to the promised 'existential' crises that could threaten the very existence of the EU?

### Inexorable rise?

The more alarmist headlines about the rise of 'Europe's hard right' certainly suggest that many commentators in the bourgeois media and amongst the political class believe that they do. The picture that is painted is of the inexorable rise of the populist right across Europe and the impact of its politics far beyond the margins of society.

Although the war in Ukraine gives the position of Slovakia, Hungary and Poland a certain geo-political importance, the emergence of populist and national conservative parties and movements is now an established pattern across the continent. Whether it is the appointment of Giorgia Meloni of the Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) as Italian prime minister in 2022, the strong polling for the Alternative für Deutschland and its potential



Still those who view the EU through funny glasses

breakthrough in regional elections later this year or the challenge posed by far-right candidates, such as Marine Le Pen, in the next French presidential elections in 2027, the evidence shows that Europe is clearly shifting to the right. As Meloni put it in a recent speech to the Budapest Demography conference, next year's European parliament elections will show up the fundamental fault lines and reveal the real strength of the parties who "defend tradition and the family".<sup>1</sup>

Although these various movements have their specific characteristics and are a product of the particular political dynamics within individual states - the Sweden Democrats have explicitly Nazi origins, and the FdI is rooted in the post-war Italian fascist tradition, while SMER-SSD originated from the post-Soviet Democratic Left - we can see common themes and elements in their populist, national-conservative positions. Usually framed as defence of traditional values rooted in Christianity and the established moral order, combined with essentialist ideas of the nation,

this national conservatism explicitly identifies itself in opposition to those elites and globalists, who would undermine these traditions. Thus, Orbán makes George Soros a particular target and a symbol of the powerful, who seek to undermine the Hungarian nation, while Meloni sees NGOs and feminists as destroying the fabric of society by their assaults on marriage and the nuclear family.

### Nation

The centrality of the family to the health and future survival of the nation was very much on display at the Budapest Demography conference, where these themes were linked to migration policy and the stoking of fears about the 'great replacement'. However, lest we think that these rather distasteful hints of 'blood and soil' and conspiracy theories are confined to dubious continentals, take a closer look at 'new conservatives' on the Tory Party conference fringe, with their calls for British families to have more children to obviate the need for migrant workers. Similarly, the fears expressed in Suella Braverman's

warnings of a "hurricane" of migrants coming to Britain would sit very easily in a speech by Meloni or Orbán.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the essence of Braverman's remarks would not be out of place in, say, the policy pronouncements of Josep Borell, the EU's foreign policy chief, who described the world outside Europe as "a jungle that could invade the garden"; or in EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen's recent 'convergence' with Meloni on the need for a European response to the 'problem of migration'.<sup>3</sup>

These examples show the wider impact that these new populist parties have had in pulling mainstream bourgeois conservative parties to the right. Rhetorical strands and policy initiatives that were once confined to the political fringes now surface in the legislative programme of major European states and in the conference speeches and electoral campaigning of governing parties. That British Conservatives should draw upon this type of politics should come as no surprise: the Tories in their various incarnations since the late 17th century have never been loath to stir up chauvinism and prejudice for political or electoral advantage - whether it be 'Church and King' mobs of the 18th century or opposition to 'alien migration' at the beginning of the 20th.

Typical of a process going on throughout Europe - the blurring of the lines between 'respectable' bourgeois politics and the previously unacceptable far right - is Germany. This 'crumbling of the firewall against the extreme right' has meant that the Christian Democrats (CDU) and their sister party in Bavaria, the Christian Social Union (CSU), have flirted with AfD positions and some CDU/CSU leaders have strongly hinted that they might be open to forms of cooperation with the AfD in regional parliaments and local councils. The arguments put forward by bourgeois parties in Germany and elsewhere are that 'mainstream politicians' have to address the concerns of the electorate and that if the right and their voters are put beyond the pale, they will only become more alienated and more extreme. Engagement and incorporation rather than ostracism and dismissal seems to be the core of this electoral strategy.

The growth of support for rightwing politics, whether in Germany, France or Italy, is not simply a product of alienation from the capitalist status quo and the inability of the mainstream parties to offer anything to the working class and wide sections of the petty bourgeoisie.

For the capitalist parties it is indeed a serious crisis of their system, and the politics and ideologies that uphold it. But is also a crisis for the left and working class movement as well - perhaps even more so, since we should offer the real alternative to capitalism and bourgeois politics. The rise of the right is our failure too, remember. However, in countering this swing to the right we should also remember that opportunism in Germany - and elsewhere for that matter - is not confined to capitalist parties fishing for votes or attempting to head off any challenges to the political status quo.

### Disaster

While the mainstream parties are being drawn to the right, the working class movement and the genuine left need to stand against similar 'strategies' currently being advocated that would draw us in that direction too. The former leading member of Die Linke in Germany, Sahra Wagenknecht, and her Aufstehen initiative (which could be launched as a party this autumn) have clearly made concessions to the politics of the right. In trying to create what she describes as a 'left' alternative that can appeal to *AfD* supporters, she is merely producing a red-brown lash-up.<sup>4</sup>

Such a political abortion has disastrous historical precedents and represents nothing but the deadeast of dead ends. Making political concessions to the right is an utterly hopeless way of countering the swing to the right - something the German and international left should reject out of hand •

### Notes

1. [www.governo.it/en/media/president-meloni-budapest/23574](http://www.governo.it/en/media/president-meloni-budapest/23574).
2. [www.ft.com/content/20445459-4914-4091-95b8-ec376ddf366b](http://www.ft.com/content/20445459-4914-4091-95b8-ec376ddf366b).
3. [www.lemonde.fr/en/european-union/article/2023/09/18/in-lampedusa-eu-s-vonder-leyen-unveils-a-european-response-to-migration-crisis\\_6137399\\_156.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/en/european-union/article/2023/09/18/in-lampedusa-eu-s-vonder-leyen-unveils-a-european-response-to-migration-crisis_6137399_156.html); [www.dw.com/en/eu-top-diplomat-denies-jungle-remark-was-racist/a-63484246](http://www.dw.com/en/eu-top-diplomat-denies-jungle-remark-was-racist/a-63484246).
4. [www.idowa.de/politik/gysi-wagenknecht-weit-mit-absplattungsplaenen-von-linken-3305951.html](http://www.idowa.de/politik/gysi-wagenknecht-weit-mit-absplattungsplaenen-von-linken-3305951.html).

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