

# weekly **worker**



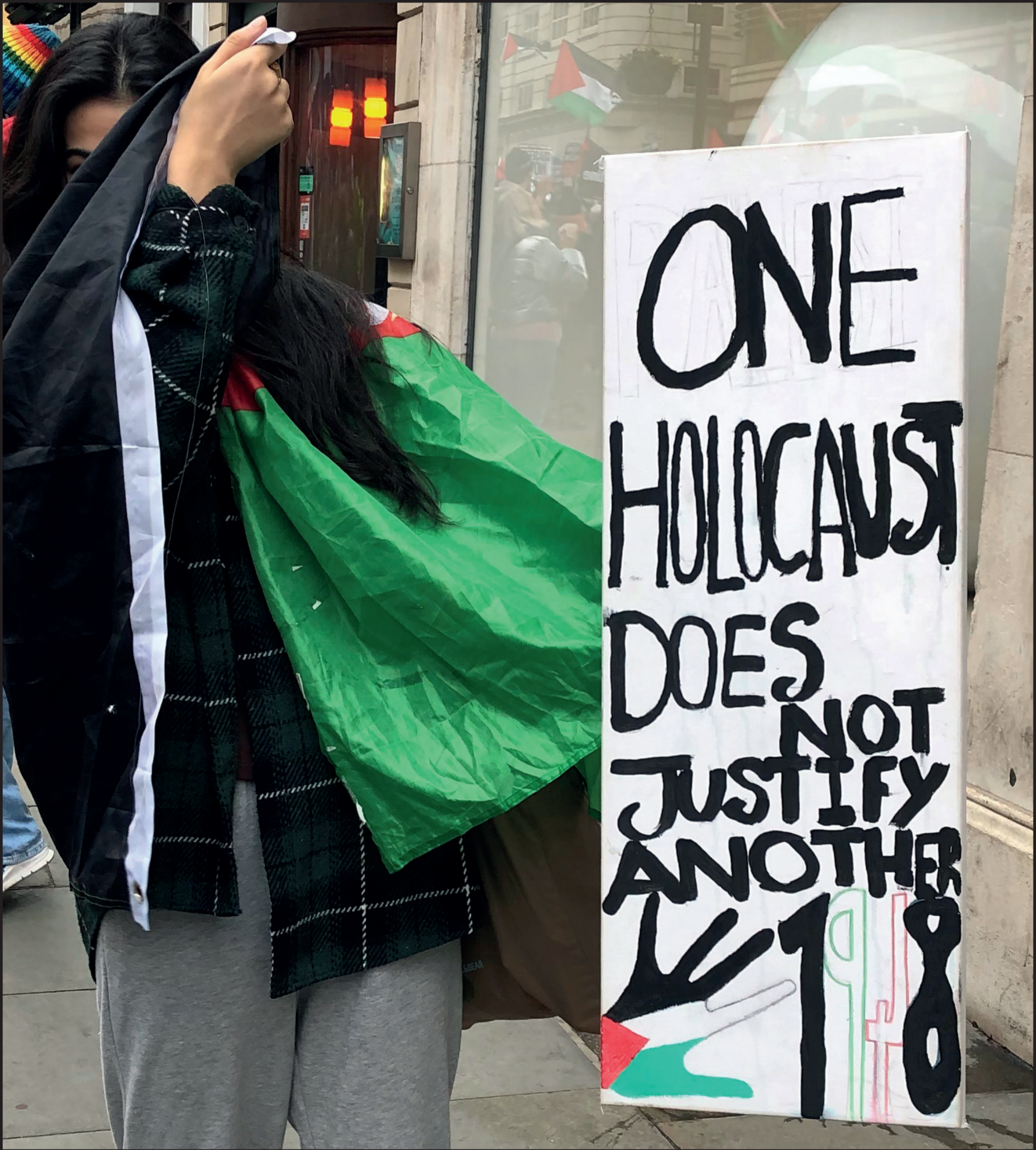
**George Galloway suddenly looks like a winner amidst Sir Keir's Rochdale chaos**

- Letters and debate
- Tucker Carlson's interview
- David Miller's victory
- Germany and rise of AfD

No 1478 February 15 2024

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10





## LETTERS



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

## No revolution?

In response to Tony Clark (Letters, February 8), I thought my position regarding the permissibility of factions within a Communist Party was perfectly clear. They should *not* be permitted. The correct operation of democratic centralism organised on the basis of Marxism-Leninism allows ample opportunities for members in their branches and on elected higher committees to influence and shape the party's policies, leadership etc.

For reasons I explained in my letter of February 1, the very existence of minority factions actively disrupts and undermines the democracy of the whole party - compounded by the fact they are themselves internally highly undemocratic and top-down. They have to be, in order for a small, unelected leadership core to be able to issue orders from the top and for them to be carried out unquestionably by their foot soldiers. Factions are inherently secretive, conspiratorial and manipulative. Collective voting and decision-making on the basis of individual judgements and consciousness, and actually listening to debates and discussions, are replaced by mindless bloc voting based on factional orders from above.

It is not just a question of whether factions are formally banned within the party's rules or whether or how the party leadership chooses to enforce this in specific cases. It is that individual party members fully understand they have rights *and* obligations, and that they operate with sufficient self-discipline to avoid any factional or other illegitimate activity within the party. It is these basic working class concepts of discipline and self-discipline which appear to be so alien to the petty bourgeois liberals, reformists and so-called 'ultra-left'.

Tony Clark persistently asserts the Bolsheviks should not have made revolution in Russia in 1917. So what should they have done? What would have been his alternative?

There is no doubt whatsoever

that Russia was deep in a pre-revolutionary situation in 1917 - riven with explosive contradictions due to objective factors, and irrespective of the role and impact of the Bolsheviks: being part of the world imperialist and capitalist system and first world imperialist war; having sharply growing elements of industrial capitalism, yet dominated by a predominantly backward peasant economy. A cold blooded ruthless monarchical autocracy viciously repressing workers and peasants alike; workers and peasants struggling and losing their lives and liberty for the most very basic of democratic demands; Russia as a country and people exhausted by pointless war and devastation; the autocracy itself facing an extreme rightwing militarist response to alleged weaknesses in trying to respond to the interrelated and interlocking set of crises and the impending catastrophe (from the landowners, aristocracy and capitalist point of view).

Lars T Lih and Jack Conrad in this paper have comprehensively demonstrated that the programme of the Bolsheviks in these circumstances was for the workers and peasants - the majority of the population - to seize the *vlast* (power) in Russia, in order to start to resolve the contradictions and crises in favour of the majority of working people, and to establish a democratic republic. Is this what Tony opposes? Again, what was Tony's alternative?

The Bolsheviks did not attempt to instantly introduce socialism in 1917 or afterwards, as is Tony's implication. The revolutions of 1917 were a practical implementation of the long-standing Bolshevik strategy of the revolutionary democratic dictatorship (rule) of the workers and poor peasants (the majority, hence *democratic*). The Bolsheviks, of course, never made any secret of their ultimate aim of socialism.

But the majority of working people taking power in October 1917 could not and should not have been limited to the 'classic' tasks of the 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution. How could it, when it was the majority working people who had taken state power? To meet the fundamental economic, political and democratic interests of the majority

working masses, their new rule simply had to at the same time make decisive moves towards socialism: ie, the full economic and political power of the working people.

'War communism' was an immediately necessary response to the war of intervention launched by the western imperialist powers. Once the existential civil war emergency was over, the shattered state of the industrial and agricultural economies required the reversion to the New Economic Policy. This was *never* a straight retreat from the aims and objectives of socialism. The core leadership of the Soviet Communist Party was absolutely crystal-clear: this was a period of *class struggle* between the growing proletariat and proletarianising majority of the peasantry *and* the growing role and strength of the capitalist elements. Growth of the industrial and agricultural economies *temporarily* met the needs and interests of both the new *vlast* and the capitalist elements, but was hardly sustainable in the medium term.

It was only when both the industrial and agricultural economies had recovered to a certain extent under the NEP, and the capitalist elements in both industry and agriculture were starting to increase their resistance to the *vlast*, that, having grown in absolute terms within the economy, *and* being backed by world imperialism and capitalism, the Soviet Communist Party in the late 1920s launched both rapid industrialisation and mass collectivisation, to resolve these growing and new economic and political contradictions in favour of socialism.

So the October 1917 revolution was not about any sort of leap into 'instant socialism', as Tony seems to imply. It was about overthrowing the rule of the landlords and capitalists - ensuring the complete rout of the monarchical autocracy still in the background; ending the ruinous involvement in the imperialist war; and trying to develop Russia as an independent economy and society in favour of real democracy and socialism.

Of course, capitalism in Russia had not created all the requisite material and cultural preconditions for socialism by October 1917. Lenin's response to those critics at that time was: "If a definite level of culture is required for the building of socialism, why cannot we begin by first achieving the prerequisites for that definite level of culture in a revolutionary way, and then, with the aid of the workers' and peasants' government and soviet system, proceed to overtake the other nations? You say that civilisation is necessary for the building of socialism. Very good. But why could we not first create such prerequisites of civilisation in our country as the expulsion of the landowners and the Russian capitalists, and then start moving towards socialism?"

There was *no* bourgeois-democratic option available in 1917. The principal options were: national catastrophe, complete collapse of the state and society; an extreme rightwing counterrevolutionary military coup; or the radical, revolutionary option taken by the Bolsheviks in October - slicing through the Gordian Knot of capitalist, feudal and imperialist contradictions, in which Russia was then enmeshed.

Tony is opposed to the latter, so what should the Bolsheviks have done? Sit on their backsides and wait for decades for capitalism in Russia to 'evolve naturally' into a bourgeois democracy? Wait even

more decades for Russian capitalism to 'evolve naturally' into some form of 'democratic socialism'?

Meanwhile, 500 years later ...

Andrew Northall

Kettering

## Tusc and Sparts

I read with interest your report on the appearance of the Spartacists at the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's February convention ('Farcaical Labour Party mark two', February 8).

The assembled dignitaries may well have been impressed by Eibhlín McColgan's statement that "the Spartacist League supports Tusc" and asking that "other groups should do the same" (*Workers Hammer* supplement, February 9), but did any of the delegates peruse the front-page article in the latest issue of *Workers Hammer* (winter 2023-24)? It states in no uncertain terms that the "Socialist Party is desperately promoting Tusc, an openly reformist 'broad church' electoral coalition, to revive the Corbyn movement, oblivious to the fact that Corbynism already proved its bankruptcy precisely because of its reformist 'broad church' programme".

To add insult to injury, they even have a graphic drawn by their resident cartoonist, comrade Vincent, entitled 'Reformists in swimsuits', depicting one of the 'reformists' handing out a Tusc leaflet to a betrayed striker.

Did comrade Eibhlín experience a road-to-Damascus moment in the minibus conveying the 10 comrades to Birmingham?

Matt Kelly

email

## Counterrevolution?

Simple logic, based on the meaning of words, says that if there is a counterrevolution it must have been preceded by a revolution - or at least a perceived threat to the ruling order, as happened in Chile in 1973. Gerry Downing writes that there was a "US-sponsored counterrevolutionary coup in 2014" in Ukraine (Letters, February 8). But where was the revolution then?

And who were the revolutionaries? Were they Viktor

Yanukovich, the super-rich, super-corrupted then-president of Ukraine, and Vladimir Putin, leader of the Russian kleptocracy, who eight years later started a war of aggression against Ukraine? I've never heard anyone calling these characters revolutionaries.

Hannu Reime

Helsinki

## Close down Elbit

Activists from Palestine Action are blockading the Bristol HQ of Israel's largest weapons firm, Elbit Systems. By attaching themselves to each other using lock-ons, they are preventing access into the central hub of Elbit's lethal business.

Using Elbit's weaponry, Israel is committing a genocide in Gaza. Most recently, the occupiers have begun massacring Palestinians in Rafah, where 1.5 million Palestinians were told to go in order to be safe. Over the past few months, over 28,000 Palestinians have been killed, more than 12,000 of whom are children.

Elbit Systems produces military drones, munitions, combat vehicles, missiles and other Israeli weaponry. The majority of their arms are marketed as "battle-tested", as they've been developed by conducting bombardments of the Palestinian people. The Israeli weapons firm is crucial to the ongoing genocide in Gaza, as claimed by Elbit's CEO.

The owners of Elbit's Bristol HQ, Somerset council, were recently targeted by locals, who crashed their executive meeting in order to call for the council to terminate the lease with Elbit.

A Palestine Action spokesperson has said: "Whilst Israeli weapons companies operate on our doorstep, which assist in occupying, displacing and massacring the people in Gaza, it's up to the people to take direct action to shut Elbit down. Every other method, including marches, petitions and lobbying, has failed to end British complicity in the occupation. We have the power, the ability and the will to shut the war criminals down ourselves."

Palestine Action

email

## Fighting fund

## Play your part

Bad news, I'm afraid: with half of February already gone, we have only raised a total of £661 towards our £2,250 target - way behind where we ought to be this time of the month.

True, the second week of the month is always the least productive for us, when it comes to standing orders in particular. But, even allowing for that, the current running total is hugely disappointing - especially when you consider that our printing costs have shot up. (We've not yet come to any agreement with a permanent replacement following the fire at our previous printers.)

The disappointing amount received in the last week is particularly unusual, given that among the 11 contributors, three were from overseas - thanks very much, comrades PM (USA, £50), AM (Ireland, £42) and MZ (Italy, £10). Other donors via standing order, bank transfer

or PayPal were RL (£50), HN (£30), DV (£25), LG, PM and CC (£10 each), while two readers handed a cash donation to one of our team - thanks also, comrades Hassan (£5) and PB (£10).

But all that came to just £252 over the last seven days, so now we really need to step on the accelerator. Can you help ensure that the only paper that fights for a principled, democratic party able to unite all Marxists can raise the money we need?

Send us a cheque, make a bank transfer or use PayPal to play your part. Please go to the web address below, where you'll find all the details you need ●

Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are name: Weekly Worker sort code: 30-99-64 account number: 00744310 To make a donation or set up a regular payment visit [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate)

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday February 18 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)

Organised by CPGB: [communistparty.co.uk](http://communistparty.co.uk) and 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)



MEDIA

# Tucker in Putinland

A two-hour long interview with Vladimir Putin told us little new about anything, but stands in intriguing contrast to the routine media spin, argues Paul Demarty

A lot of stupid things are said by well-meaning bourgeois commentators about 'polarisation'. Yet it is undeniable that a very large number of media events nowadays seem to work like Rorschach tests. One subject sees a butterfly, another a bomb; a third, like Nick Frost in the sitcom *Spaced*, "a butterfly ... with a bomb".

What were the pundit class to make of Tucker Carlson's interview with Vladimir Putin? The majority - it has to be said, composed of 'sensible' liberals and never-Trump conservatives - saw proof that Carlson was either a paid asset of Russia or a willing dupe, or both. As for Putin, he was losing his marbles, raving about the ancient Russian-dominated giant state called 'Kjivan Rus' and apparently unable to answer any direct question (as and when Carlson dared to attempt inserting one). Putin's history was bunk. Perhaps it was not Putin at all, but some kind of body double. So it goes on.

Carlson's boosters could respond that he had, at least, bothered to take the trouble to conduct the interview - a feat denied to the general run of western journalists. He had not restricted himself wholly to softball questions. That said, he was clearly not in control of the occasion. He began by asking Putin why he had invaded Ukraine; having promised to give some background for "30 seconds or a minute", the Russian president embarked on a half-hour-long monologue that began with Kyivan Rus in the 880s and ended with that fateful day two years ago. Carlson repeatedly attempted to get Putin back on track, and was every time swatted aside with slightly menacing sarcasm. "Is this a talk show, or a serious discussion?" he asked the host repeatedly, before returning to the finer points of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

If Carlson is an agent of the Russian state, he was not treated very well at all by his 'boss'. When, inevitably, his soliloquy brought him to the subject of the Central Intelligence Agency, Putin noted that Carlson had been rejected by the agency years before: "They are, after all, a serious organisation." *Miaow!* That, perhaps, was the grain of truth in the hysterical criticisms of Carlson for agreeing to this. What he clearly agreed to - this "serious discussion" - was always intended, by Putin at least, to be more or less entirely a platform for his own views; and he did a better job of taking over this interview than he did of taking over Kyiv.

## Histories

So far as those views go, people who have followed Putin's statements over the last few years will have found precious little to surprise them. The point of this thousand-year long historical narrative is that there is a continuous Russian nation stretching from Kyivan Rus to the present.

Ukraine, meanwhile, is merely part of the borderland between Russia and the Tatars to the south and the rest of Europe to the west. Its territory has been chopped and changed so many times, between competing great powers adjacent to it, that it has, in reality, a very weak national identity. The present borders were largely drawn by the Bolsheviks after the revolution - Putin is very critical of the Soviet nationalities policy, and seems to blame Ukrainian nationalism, at least in its separatist form, on communist

encouragement of 'indigenisation'. There is no real sense in which the Donbass 'belongs' to Ukraine; it was a mere administrative division. Still less Crimea, which was reassigned to Ukraine by Nikita Khrushchev as a basically cosmetic measure.

In 1939-45, the Soviets reaped what their nationalities policy had sown. Ukrainian nationalists collaborated extensively with the Nazis. Only at enormous human cost was the Nazi onslaught beaten back - but the collaborators are the heroes of today's Ukrainian nationalists. With the break-up of the Soviet Union (initiated by Russia, he conceded, confessing not to understand why), and the breaking of western promises not to expand Nato, Ukraine's natural friendliness towards Russia was repeatedly disrupted by western meddling and ultra-nationalist madness. This culminated in the 2014 coup, the Donbas conflict, and finally the decision to invade.

None of this stuff, again, is new. It is the extended justification Putin has given for the war more or less since its outset. Much of the pearl-clutching has been attached to his criticisms of the claims of Ukrainian nationalism, but that is where he is on strongest ground. Ukrainian nationalism is concentrated in the west, in territories which were contested most frequently. It was never representative of much of the east of the current territory, which is why Russia had no problem essentially annexing large parts of it. It is not unusually fantastical for a nationalism, but fantastical it certainly is.

But what, then, of Putin's retailing of what amount to just-so stories about 9th century princes? (The English have our own such fairy tales, but still.) What about his decision that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was in fact Russian? It is not that no plausible claim can be made on this point, but simply that Putin, like many contemporary historians, is guilty of the cardinal sin of 'presentism'. The wars of five centuries ago are, somehow, the same war Putin chooses to fight today.

He returned at length to a more modern example of the same thing. "Have you achieved your aims?", Carlson asked him of the current state of the Ukraine war. "No, we haven't achieved our aims yet, because one of them is deNazification," he replied. In vain might one object that no greater fillip could be imagined for Ukraine's far right than this invasion. Both Putin's attempt at 'deep history' and his evocation of the fight against Hitler are, in the end, plainly part of a world view focused entirely on the matter of great power conflict, and the establishment of suitable security arrangements. The great betrayal of the 1990s and 2000s, in the end, was the west's refusal to build Russia's perceived interests into the post-cold war architecture. From there, every gambit of the liberal humanitarians and neo-conservatives began to look like a threat.

This outlook is typically dismissed as mad paranoia in the western media, but in western *foreign policy circles* it is merely the common currency. Containing Russia has exercised the great minds of this sphere since, at least, the 19th century. Orthodoxy has long been to break up the country into smaller and therefore more 'manageable' chunks. (Nowadays, this often goes under the name of "decolonising" Russia, in the rather grating fashion of contemporary academics.) It is

not clear that Putin even has much of an ideology beyond preventing any such outcome. 'DeNazification' - "this means the prohibition of all kinds of neo-Nazi movements", he further specifies - clearly amounts to reabsorbing Ukraine, or at least a lot of it, into Russia's sphere of influence, and therefore exercising some level of control over its politics.

Putin's focus on 'the great game' became more obvious, as the interview went on. He touched on the disastrous effects of the anti-Russian front on Europe's economy, which - he reasoned - ultimately made it economically infeasible to continue supporting Ukraine. He made some (perhaps over-optimistic) comments about dedollarisation. He notably resisted being drawn into US partisan politics (clearly some kind of subordinate aim on Carlson's part, as well it might be). He insisted that the coming multipolar world made it *more* important for major powers to cooperate and compromise, and recognise each others' interests. Who was president of the US mattered little, he said, since there was a permanent political and security apparatus - an assertion even Wikipedia calls a "conspiracy theory", but seems to be representative of the experience of a man who, after all, leads an openly securocratic state. He can talk to the CIA and maybe get results; but what on earth is the point of talking to secretary of state Antony Blinken?

## Mainstream

Leaving aside a closing exchange on the fate of US journalist Evan Gershkovich (Putin was happy to release him, if the price was right, but pointedly noted that this too could be resolved by the two countries' security services if the will was there), that was more or less it. It was, by the standards of Carlson's output since jumping ship to Twitter from Fox News, a success. Some 200 million views were recorded (though how many of those slogged through the whole thing is unknown).

Mainstream bourgeois commentators are, of course, correct that the interview was hardly the most adversarial ever conducted. Nonetheless, one is left at least with some picture of this quite important person's actual goals: a picture that is one *he* wants us to see, of course, but not useless for that. The contrast to the typical 'adversarial' interview in the west is not flattering to the latter. The Paxmanisation of the political interview leads inevitably to a purely defensive strategy on the part of the interviewee. The interviewer asks increasingly leading questions - of the 'When did you stop beating your wife?' variety - and the politician keeps to the safety of three memorised platitudinous soundbites.

Two hours of exposure to Putin-thought is rather trying, but at least gives us a somewhat rounded picture of his stances and objectives. A better interviewer than Carlson might have punctured his monologism; a better informed one might have pushed him harder on his dubious historical citations. The point of bourgeois political journalism is, however, to 'protect' ordinary people from serious political controversy.

Giving Putin two hours is dangerous, because it sets a precedent. Could Joe Biden offer a similarly detailed account of US strategy? Could Rishi Sunak do so for Britain? ●

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## ACTION

### Class war 2024: Palestine, strikes, anti-racism

**Saturday February 17, 11am to 5pm:** Day school, Pelican House, 144 Cambridge Heath Road, London E1 and online. For everyone who wants to see the end of capitalism. Registration free. Organised by Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century: [rs21.org.uk/event/class-war-2024-palestine-strikes-and-anti-racism](https://rs21.org.uk/event/class-war-2024-palestine-strikes-and-anti-racism).

### Ceasefire now - stop the genocide in Gaza!

**Saturday February 17, 12 noon:** Demonstration. Assemble Marble Arch, London W1. Israel is committing genocide in Gaza and is preparing to launch an assault on Rafah. Demand a ceasefire now! Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.facebook.com/palestinesolidarityuk](https://www.facebook.com/palestinesolidarityuk).

### Save Llanwrn steelworks

**Saturday February 17, 11am:** Demonstration. Assemble Gilligans Island, Cardiff Road, Newport NP20. March through city centre to the Chartist Memorial by Westgate Hotel. Organised by Unite, GMB and Community unions: [www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1115119496118296](https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1115119496118296).

### Save Port Talbot steelworks

**Saturday February 17, 1.15pm:** Rally, Civic Centre, Port Talbot SA13. Tell the government and Tata to save our steelworks! Organised by Unite the Union: [www.facebook.com/events/440148958336973](https://www.facebook.com/events/440148958336973).

### Revolution! Imperialism and the political crisis

**Sunday February 18, 12 noon to 5.30pm:** Conference, SOAS University of London, 10 Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Israel's assaults on Gaza and the West Bank have created a global crisis. Millions have taken to the streets and the risk of a wider war grows. Hear the causes and consequences of the crisis and how to strengthen resistance. Registration £15 (£5). Organised by Counterfire: [www.facebook.com/events/235140999630540](https://www.facebook.com/events/235140999630540).

### Apartheid off campus

**Tuesday February 20:** Student day of action on campuses nationwide. Sit-ins, walk-outs, teach-ins and other protests. An end to university research, commercial and institutional partnerships with Israel. Full divestment from weapons and tech companies arming genocide in Gaza. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [palestinecampaign.org/campaigns/apartheid-off-campus](https://palestinecampaign.org/campaigns/apartheid-off-campus).

### What it means to be human

**Tuesday February 20, 6.30pm:** Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. Author Angus McNelly discusses his new book, *Now we are in power: the politics of passive revolution in 21st century Bolivia*, with Matthew Doyle. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.facebook.com/events/1384784452477122](https://www.facebook.com/events/1384784452477122).

### Armaments and global trade

**Thursday February 22, 7pm:** Online and onsite lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker: Andrew Feinstein - writer, campaigner, ex-ANC MP and author of *The shadow world: inside the global arms trade*. Registration: £5 (£3). Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/451](https://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/451).

### Ukraine: how to stop this war

**Saturday February 24, 2pm:** Online rally. After two years of war hundreds of thousands are dead. The west is supplying Ukraine with weaponry to further Nato's expansion plans, with no end in sight. Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn, Boris Kagarlitsky and Lindsey German. Organised by CND and Stop the War Coalition: [cnduk.org/events/ukraine-how-to-stop-this-war](https://cnduk.org/events/ukraine-how-to-stop-this-war).

### Lakenheath: its role in the US war machine

**Monday February 26, 7.45pm:** Webinar. US nuclear weapons are returning, putting Britain in the front line in any future US-led war. How does the base - RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk - fit into the USA's wider military plans? How do we stop this? Organised by CND: [cnduk.org/events/lakenheath-its-role-in-the-us-war-machine-cnd-webinar](https://cnduk.org/events/lakenheath-its-role-in-the-us-war-machine-cnd-webinar).

### Stop bombing Gaza! Ceasefire now!

**Thursday February 29, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, School Lane, Liverpool L1. Speakers include Fran Heathcote (PCS), Libby Nolan (Unison) and Chris Nineham (Stop the War). Organised by Merseyside Stop the War: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](https://www.stopwar.org.uk/events).

### The world at war - a trade union issue

**Saturday March 2, 10.30am to 4.30pm:** Conference for trade unionists, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Building on the huge upsurge in anti-war trade union activity. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](https://www.stopwar.org.uk/events).

### 40th anniversary of the miners' strike

**Saturday March 9, 11.30am:** Assemble for entertainment at Broadway Hotel, Dunscroft, Doncaster DN7. March to Hatfield Main Colliery then Hatfield Main Club to hear Arthur Scargill. Organised by Doncaster Coalfield Strike Anniversary: [www.alt-sheff.org/events/miners-strike-commemoration-in-doncaster](https://www.alt-sheff.org/events/miners-strike-commemoration-in-doncaster).

### Screen Cuba: films to change the world

**Saturday March 9 to Friday March 22:** Festival of Cuban cinema since 1959, The Garden Cinema, 39-41 Parker Street, London WC2. Inspiring shorts to ground-breaking features and documentaries, plus discussions with Cuban film specialists. Tickets £12 per film. Organised by Cuba Solidarity Campaign: [www.thegardencinema.co.uk/festival/screen-cuba](https://www.thegardencinema.co.uk/festival/screen-cuba).

### 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.



## BY-ELECTION

# Thou shalt not criticise Israel

Socialists in Rochdale should vote for George Galloway on February 29. Not that we should suspend our criticisms, argues Carla Roberts

Who would have thought that it is thanks to the *Mail on Sunday* that George Galloway now has a very realistic chance of winning the February 29 by-election in Rochdale - considered a secure Labour seat since the present boundaries came into force in 2010. On February 11, the rag published parts of a secretly recorded speech given by Labour candidate, Azhar Ali, who was supposed to be a shoo-in to replace Tony Lloyd (the previous Labour MP, who had a majority of almost 10,000 votes, but died of leukaemia on January 17).

Ali looked like such a safe choice. A staunch careerist and supporter of Starmer's leadership, he had been working his way up the Labour ladder from a young age. He served a five-year stint as a government advisor under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, was first elected a Labour councillor in 2013, aged 24, and was leader of the Labour group on Lancashire county council till his current suspension.

But the issue of Palestine-Israel is clearly very emotive to many people from an Asian and Muslim background and that often transcends left-right divisions. Ali was secretly recorded at a Labour meeting "soon after the October 7 attacks" - ie, long before he was selected as a parliamentary candidate. His comments, which were published in dribs and drabs over a number of days, are - for the most part - reflective of debates taking place everywhere, including in Israel: what did the Netanyahu government know about the impending October 7 attacks by Hamas?

According to the initial quote published by the *Mail on Sunday* on February 11, Ali said:

The Egyptians are saying that they warned Israel 10 days earlier ... Americans warned them a day before [that] there's something happening ... They deliberately took the security off, they allowed that massacre ... it gives them the green light to do whatever they bloody want.<sup>1</sup>

It is factually true, of course, that Egypt had warned Israel of increased Hamas activity (though it was three days before October 7 rather than 10)<sup>2</sup> and that US intelligence too contacted Israel on October 6 to warn that a "Hamas attack was imminent".<sup>3</sup> We also know that the Israel security services believed that, rather than in Gaza, an attack might be launched in the West Bank, because illegal settlers had been mistreating and abusing Palestinians in a record number of incidents. In the run-up to October 7, the Israeli military "deliberately" moved many of its forces there and we know it took many hours before a large number of its security forces were deployed to counter Hamas fighters. Lastly, there can, of course, be no question too that the massacre gives Israel "the green light to do whatever they bloody want". One could argue over the claim that the Israeli government "allowed" the massacre to happen - but its army certainly seemed shockingly and surprisingly unprepared and inept.

Despite the usual suspects being up in arms, Starmer did not immediately jump in. Not because he suddenly thinks it is acceptable to have a free and open debate about the situation in Israel-Palestine - had Ali been on the left, he would have been mincemeat within minutes. But Ali is



George Galloway: in with real chance now

a supporter of the Labour leader and, crucially, it is now way too late for Labour to replace their candidate or even withdraw him. According to the Electoral Commission, a nominated candidate can only withdraw if they do so before the deadline, which is "by 4pm on the 19th working day before the poll".<sup>4</sup> So the *Mail's* immaculately-timed article was released with the aim of inflicting the biggest possible damage upon Starmer. The Tories will *lose* the next general election, so the only question is if Labour can *win* - ie, will it get enough MPs to govern outright and without having to consider bringing other parties on board?

## Gritted teeth

For about 48 hours, Labour publicly supported Ali through such gritted teeth that you could almost hear the enamel breaking off. Starmer, while assuring the media that Ali was merely "a victim of a conspiracy theory", would in all likelihood have suspended Ali straight after the election in any case, replacing him as the candidate for the impending 2024 general election.

But on the evening of February 12, the *Daily Mail* finally published the whole recording and it transpired that Ali had also talked about "people in the media from certain Jewish quarters".<sup>5</sup> That is, of course, a proper anti-Semitic trope, highlighting the amount of confusion on the issue in the labour movement and beyond. Not even the esteemed *Mail* journalists could tell that this was pretty much the only thing in Ali's comments that could actually be described as anti-Semitic.

This episode underlines how successful the right has been in redefining what anti-Semitism is - not hostility or hatred towards Jews, but criticism of Israel. So even without the quote about Jews in the media Ali was a goner. Thou shalt not criticise Israel - it maketh thee an anti-Semite.

The campaign to equate anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism would never have become as successful as it is today if the leadership under Jeremy Corbyn had mounted a

challenge to it. Instead, Corbyn rolled over and let one comrade after the other be thrown to the wolves, in the vain hope that the witch-hunters would eventually be satisfied. Good comrades like Chris Williamson, Tony Greenstein, Marc Wadsworth and Jackie Walker were smeared as anti-Semites. The right, of course, rather than shutting up, grew stronger and hungrier, spreading the anti-Semitism smear campaign into all areas of society.

Yet, the official Labour left still plays along. Pro-Palestinian MPs and councillors are being picked off one by one - and nobody says a thing. And, when they speak out in response, you wish they hadn't. Momentum's Mish Rahman, for example, currently standing to be re-elected to the Labour Party's national executive committee, describes Ali as "some sort of October 7 truther". In an interview with BBC Radio 4, he criticised Starmer for not acting quickly enough in ousting Ali: "Starmer had to be forced to do the right thing". In contrast, Diane Abbott and Kate Osamor had the whip withdrawn almost immediately. His solution: everybody needs to be treated equally badly. "The party's due diligence should apply to all candidates, but it isn't done properly."<sup>6</sup>

Andrew Fisher, Corbyn's policy advisor and John McDonnell's former right-hand man, had at least the decency to explain that "what Andy McDonald and Kate Osamor said wasn't even remotely anti-Semitic". But he too laments that "The rules aren't applied consistently at all. It's factional and that needs to be resolved."<sup>7</sup> The rules are fine, apparently. After all, it was under Corbyn that fast-track expulsions, for example, were introduced.

Even George Galloway could not resist a snide comment, despite having been in the witch-hunters' crosshairs for many years: "Labour's candidate has only been in Rochdale three weeks and he's dragged the town's name into the gutter."<sup>8</sup> I doubt gorgeous George has been in Rochdale for much longer.

He was expelled from the Labour Party back in 2003 for the catch-all charge of "bringing the party into disrepute" after he had urged British troops to defy illegal orders, "incited Arab troops to fight British forces", and supported non-Labour anti-war candidates.<sup>9</sup> Needless to say, he has also been accused of being an anti-Semite and in 2019 was sacked from *Talk Radio* for his "anti-Semitic comments": After the Champion's League final between Liverpool and Spurs (famously followed by many Jewish supporters) he tweeted "No #Israel flags on the Cup!"<sup>10</sup>

Leaving that aside, the Ali scandal has certainly opened up a real possibility that George Galloway might accomplish a bit of a political hat trick and become someone who has been an MP for three different political parties: Having served as a Labour MP for Glasgow Kelvin and Glasgow Hillhead between 1987 and 2005, he became Respect's only MP - first from 2005-10 in Bethnal Green and Bow and then from 2012-15 in Bradford West. He could now become the first MP for the Workers Party of Britain, which he founded in 2019.

## Dodgy policies

Galloway will no doubt now expand the politics of his campaign - until this week, he was concentrating his rhetorical appeal on winning over the large Muslim population - just over 30% of the electorate in Rochdale. We note, for example, the video of his "campaign launch" on February 2, which was filmed on the street outside a local mosque. He greets a couple of dozen Muslim men<sup>11</sup> with "*Salam Alaykum, wa alaikum alsalam wa rahmatu allah o barakatun*", which renders as "And peace be unto you, and god's mercy and blessings", before continuing:

I will be visiting the other mosques too, god willing. On February 29, the 29,000 Muslims in this constituency have an opportunity sent by providence, sent by the almighty, to be the voice for Gaza in the world.

You might be forgiven for thinking that Galloway had converted to Islam. But, no, to our knowledge, he is still a "practising Roman Catholic", who, for example, vigorously opposes the right of women to have an abortion - at any stage of pregnancy: "I believe that there is no other point at which life could be said to be created than the moment of conception, no other point at which it can be said, 'Life begins there'."<sup>12</sup> One might think that this makes him appealing to religious groups, but, while opinions among Islamic scholars differ over when a pregnancy can be terminated, there are no explicit prohibitions on a woman's ability to abort under Islamic law.<sup>13</sup>

His opposition to a woman's right to choose is, of course, only one of his many, many dodgy beliefs and policies. He supported Nigel Farage and the Brexit Party in the 2019 European elections and has now also attracted the support of one Nick Griffin, former leader of the British National Party, who tweeted: "The man is not perfect, but he's streets ahead of any other possible winner."<sup>14</sup>

During the 2021 Batley and Spen by-election, Galloway fronted a 'law-and-order' campaign for more bobbies on the beat and has been known for his opposition to "uncontrolled immigration", which has seen him support a points system to determine 'useful' migrants.

At first glance, the 'Ten-point programme' of his Workers Party of Britain reads like the bog-standard Corbynite platform of pretty much every single left-of-Labour organisation - including the telling demand to "rebuild *British* industry".

In other words, despite his departure from Labour, he remains a typical representative of the old Labour soft left: The WPB's programme brims with illusionary ideas of a national road to 'socialism' (there is a lot of talk about "our country" and "our nation"), a strong state and it displays pro-Soviet and Stalinist leanings. "Our country needs the state to guide the economic life of the country in such a way as to promote work, to respect the dignity of labour, and to serve the working people. All adults have a duty to work in a useful fashion ..."

Further down on the website we read:

We defend the achievements of the USSR, China, Cuba, etc... Our finest hour as a nation was when we stood side by side with Soviet Russia and defeated German Nazism ... We shall defend the positive historical legacy of the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup>

These paragraphs were probably written by the Stalinist Brar family, who left the WPB a few months ago - but it is telling that this still remains on the party's website.

Galloway and the WPB also make a big thing of dismissing "ID politics" and are clearly on the turf-side of the debate: "We share the frustration [of] many working class women at the ridiculous intersectional ideology of radical liberals."

It is all rather unpleasant and reeks of nationalism, bureaucracy and pomposity. We know that Galloway is also what we might call a typical male sect leader and needs to be in charge of any political campaign he is involved in.

Nevertheless, this election is now clearly all about the situation in the Middle East and Galloway has been a longstanding and outspoken campaigner for the rights of the Palestinians. We therefore urge all socialists in Rochdale to critically support Galloway in the February 29 election - hold your nose, if you must ●

## Notes

1. [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13069671/Outrage-Labour-candidate-claims-Israel-deliberately-allowed-1-400-citizens-massacred-October-7-order-green-light-invade-Gaza.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13069671/Outrage-Labour-candidate-claims-Israel-deliberately-allowed-1-400-citizens-massacred-October-7-order-green-light-invade-Gaza.html).
2. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67082047](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67082047).
3. [edition.cnn.com/2023/10/13/politics/us-intelligence-warnings-potential-gaza-clash-days-before-attack/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/13/politics/us-intelligence-warnings-potential-gaza-clash-days-before-attack/index.html).
4. [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/by-election-rules-azhar-ali-b2494375.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/by-election-rules-azhar-ali-b2494375.html).
5. [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13075993/anti-Semitic-comments-Labours-Rochdale-candidate-Sir-Keir-Starmer-ditch-man.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13075993/anti-Semitic-comments-Labours-Rochdale-candidate-Sir-Keir-Starmer-ditch-man.html).
6. [twitter.com/mish\\_rahman/status/1757172608754176304](https://twitter.com/mish_rahman/status/1757172608754176304).
7. [twitter.com/BBCNewsnight/status/1757179415409082818](https://twitter.com/BBCNewsnight/status/1757179415409082818).
8. [twitter.com/georgegalloway/status/1757073367314690530](https://twitter.com/georgegalloway/status/1757073367314690530).
9. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2003/10/23/galloway-expelled-as-blair-takes-revenge](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2003/10/23/galloway-expelled-as-blair-takes-revenge).
10. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-48498010](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-48498010).
11. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5g4mZuV06A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5g4mZuV06A).
12. [highprofiles.info/interview/george-galloway](http://highprofiles.info/interview/george-galloway).
13. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam\\_and\\_abortion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_and_abortion).
14. [www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/feb/11/the-ultimate-protest-against-labour-george-galloways-bid-to-win-rochdale](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/feb/11/the-ultimate-protest-against-labour-george-galloways-bid-to-win-rochdale).
15. [workerspartybritain.org/ten-point-programme](http://workerspartybritain.org/ten-point-programme).



## ANTI-ZIONISM

# Unqualified free speech

David Miller's tribunal case is a personal victory that ought to be celebrated. But, argues Mike Macnair, what is needed is a political victory to advance our rights

Last week we rightly celebrated David Miller's partial victory at the employment tribunal against Bristol University, and contrasted it with the useless and cowardly official Labour left ('A culture of apology', February 8). Rightly, in spite of our sharp political differences with Miller, which we have expressed previously - in particular, his apologetics for the Iranian regime, and his tendency to argue that the Zionist tail wags the US dog.<sup>1</sup> Any result that *in the slightest way* impedes the state-sponsored smear campaign about 'anti-Semitism' is unequivocally to be welcomed.

But it is still necessary to note the limitations of the decision. That is, *besides* the fact that an appeal may be made to the Employment Appeal Tribunal, then to the Court of Appeal, and from there to the UK Supreme Court - there are still plenty of opportunities for 'scorched earth litigation tactics' to exhaust Miller's resources, or for judges to be leaned on by other elements in the state core to get rid of even this limited victory. The problem is that the decision is grounded on *principles* that leave intact the opportunities for state-backed Zionist no-platforming/'cancel culture'.

### Religion

The tribunal decision<sup>2</sup> rests fundamentally on the ruling that "1. The claimant's anti-Zionist beliefs qualified as a philosophical belief and as a protected characteristic pursuant to section 10 Equality Act 2010 at the material times."

That is, that anti-Zionism is a *religious or philosophical belief*, since this section says:

(1) Religion means any religion and a reference to religion includes a reference to a lack of religion.

(2) Belief means any religious or philosophical belief and a reference to belief includes a reference to a lack of belief.

In consequence, by sacking Miller for expressing these beliefs, the University of Bristol directly discriminated against him.

In essence, this is the only ground on which Miller succeeded, and in order to reach this conclusion it was necessary to find that anti-Zionism is *not* an opinion grounded upon evidence (which would not be protected by section 10), but comparable to unfalsifiable beliefs like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism or atheism. The university argued, in contrast, that anti-Zionism is grounded on evidence and therefore not protected by section 10.

On this point, the tribunal commented that, under the test in the case-law, the belief "must be a belief and not an opinion or viewpoint based on the present state of information available". As applied to David Miller,

During his evidence the claimant explained that his research into Zionism followed, but helped to reinforce, his beliefs about Zionism. The claimant is and was a committed anti-Zionist and his views on this topic have played a significant role in his life for many years. His

views were deeply held and not amenable to change (p51).

It is, therefore, *only* by virtue of being questionably rational that Miller's anti-Zionism is protected from employment discrimination.

This is a pretty tortured piece of reasoning. It is made necessary because of the way Miller's case was posed - as discrimination, rather than as a violation of the university's duties in relation to free speech and academic freedom - and because the tribunal concluded that everything *less* than the actual dismissal was justified by the fact that "Preservation of reputation is a legitimate aim which rationally corresponded to an intrusion into the claimant's rights under article 9 and 10" (p65), and because:

The relationship between academics and students is much more than a transactional one of education provision. Universities and academics provide not only education, but a safe space for young people to explore different viewpoints. To my mind, singling out students and their societies in the way you did was an abuse of the significant power differential between you and students (quoting the dismissal letter in paragraph 299).

'Safe spaces' at work!

### Contributory

In addition, the tribunal ruled that:

8. In relation to the unfair dismissal claim, the basic and compensatory awards are reduced by 50% in accordance with sections 122(2) and 123(6) respectively of the Employment Rights Act 1996. This is because the claimant's dismissal was caused or contributed to by his own actions and it is just and equitable to reduce the said awards by 50%.

The alleged 'contributory fault' was that:

What the claimant said and wrote about students and university student societies contributed to and played a material part in his dismissal. For the reasons set out above, we find that his conduct in this regard was culpable and blameworthy. Irrespective of the truth or otherwise of such comments, any concerns he had ought to have been pursued via the university's internal procedures.

The claimant was not in a position of equivalence with the students. There was a significant power differential. The fact that students may have breached confidentiality in relation to internal disciplinary and complaint processes did not give the claimant licence to vent his concerns in the way he did. It is not appropriate for professors publicly to aim aggressive discourse at students or student groups. Although it may not

always be the case, in this

instance it clearly had an adverse impact on not only the university's reputation, but also on sections of both the student and academic body.

It was clearly open to the claimant to articulate his views about Zionism without reference to students and university societies. We have no doubt that the claimant was both frustrated and concerned about the continued allegations of anti-Semitism being levelled against him (p96).

This argument amounts, in substance, to the claim that an academic attacked by a student group, which has the backing of the national press, the government and a foreign state, is duty-bound to keep silent and *only* make complaints to the university administration. Consider the case of a pro-Uighur academic targeted by pro-China protestors in the period when the Cameron government was enthusiastic for better relations with China and concerned to characterise pro-Uighur protests as potentially 'Islamic extremist'. Would the tribunal, presented with such a case, apply this duty to keep silent? The decision involves clear double standards.

Double standards are, in fact, already apparent in the decision, in the discussion of Bristol University's radically different treatment of the complaint of Islamophobia made against professor Steven Greer (pp33-37, and pp80-82), which the university rejected, published its rejection, and did not impose confidentiality restrictions on Greer. The tribunal hand-waves away the relevance of this radically different treatment by reference to the different procedures adopted by the university making the cases not

**David Miller: a legal victory, but with lots of ifs and buts**



comparable. Again an example of refusal to consider the principles of free speech and academic freedom.

### August 2023

The tribunal ruled: "There is a 30% chance that, had the claimant still been employed, the respondent would have dismissed him fairly two months after comments the claimant made on social media in August 2023."

The supposed ground for this ruling was Miller's August 2023 tweets (issued, it should be noted, *after* he had been dismissed, following a prolonged campaign for his dismissal):

... the August 2023 tweets were of a different order to the February 2021 comments set out above. The claimant does not suggest any sensible or coherent link to his protected beliefs. Instead of saying Judeophobia was "not a serious problem", the claimant tweeted that "Jews are not discriminated against". In his own supplementary witness statement, drafted to deal with these further tweets, he accepted that this was wrong and incorrect. Instead of saying that Jews were "well represented" in positions of cultural, economic and political power, he wrote that they are "overrepresented". When put next to comments about the absence of discrimination, it is highly likely that "overrepresented" will be interpreted as having negative connotations and that it is somehow problematic.

Ordinance 28 provides that gross misconduct "includes misconduct which in the university's opinion is likely to prejudice the university's business or reputation or irreparably damage the working relationship and trust and confidence between the university and the employee". It is likely that, had the claimant not been dismissed, comments such as these would have led to further concern both within and outside the university (p99).

The original complaints against Miller concerned his teaching. These complaints were thus legitimately connected to the employment relation, though the media was campaigning against academic freedom and freedom of speech and the university, by entertaining these complaints, was arguably in violation of the freedom of speech duties under the Education (No2) Act 1986, section 43. Tweets are, in principle, speech *outside* the employment relationship. If dismissal is allowed for reputational damage due to conduct outside the employment relationship (falling short of imprisonment for an offence), there can be no freedom of speech and the right employers and landlords used to have

(before the secret ballot) to control their employees' or tenants' votes, is halfway to being restored.

It is part of the art of the advocate to offer the court, among other options, *minimalist* grounds for a decision that will allow the court to find in favour of their client without entering major areas of legal or political controversy. This art presupposes that the client is *only* interested in the practical outcome, not in defending any issue of principle, nor in the adverse consequences that a narrow ruling may have for other people in the same position.

### Legal services

This is understandable, given the House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha-Windsor's routine sale and denial of justice, in violation of Magna Carta, chapter 29, through allowing the development of the 'free market in legal services'. The effect is that only government, corporations and the very wealthy can afford to pursue 'test cases'. This, in turn, has the effect of producing legal creep. Anti-democratic, pro-corruption, or otherwise highly undesirable, legal rules, are gradually insinuated, precedent by precedent, because no-one can afford to challenge them: until the practice has become so extensive that they are unchallengeable because they are 'long-established'. It was partly in this way that the anti-union laws crept into English law.<sup>3</sup> They have now become almost the common sense of the labour movement, with no-one to the right of the revolutionary left prepared to propose going back to the legal position of the 1950s.

Not dissimilarly, 'safe spaces', 'conflicts of rights' to be managed by quasi-judicial processes, and confidentiality of these processes, have crept not only into the law, but also into the 'common sense' of the left. The result, however, was to *set up* the conditions of the anti-Semitism smear campaign and witch-hunt.

Defending the victimised is a necessary task. But the legal defence run in David Miller's case before the employment tribunal concedes so much to this regime that it sets up the conditions for other people to be victimised in similar circumstances.

Fighting for unqualified freedom of speech against these conceptions is a fundamental task. For the reasons I have just given, this is a job that cannot be done by leftist legal practitioners or by individual defence campaigns. It needs *political* action and a *party press*. Which means, in turn, the need for an actual Communist Party ●

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### Notes

1. On Iran, see 'A year of defiance' *Weekly Worker* September 21 2023 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1459/a-year-of-defiance). The previous articles on Miller are: 'Defend David Miller', March 18 2021 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1339/defend-david-miller); and 'Anti-Semitism of useful idiots', August 31 2023 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1456/anti-semitism-of-useful-idiots).  
2. www.judiciary.uk/judgments/miller-v-university-of-bristol.  
3. See, for example, my article, 'Free association versus juridification' *Critique* Vol 39 (2011), pp53-82.



## USA

# Coming apart at the seams

With Biden's senility all too obvious and Trump looking likely to win a second term, Daniel Lazare sees this as part of a long-term shift to the far right

**G**rowing old is not for sissies, as Bette Davis once said. But it is especially painful if you are a US president up for re-election at the age of 81!

Joe Biden is in trouble these days for two reasons. One is that his all-too-visible deterioration is now front-page news from coast to coast. The other is that he is too pig-headed to admit that he is in no shape for a second term - a refusal to face reality that spells disaster for Democrats in November.

Reason number two flows inexorably from reason number one, because increasing stubbornness is often a by-product of the aging process - as are crankiness, memory loss and an ossified world view. These are qualities that America's over-the-hill commander-in-chief has long displayed in abundance. But they only became official when a federal prosecutor named Robert K Hur issued a 400-page report explaining why he had decided not to charge Biden with unlawful possession of classified documents.

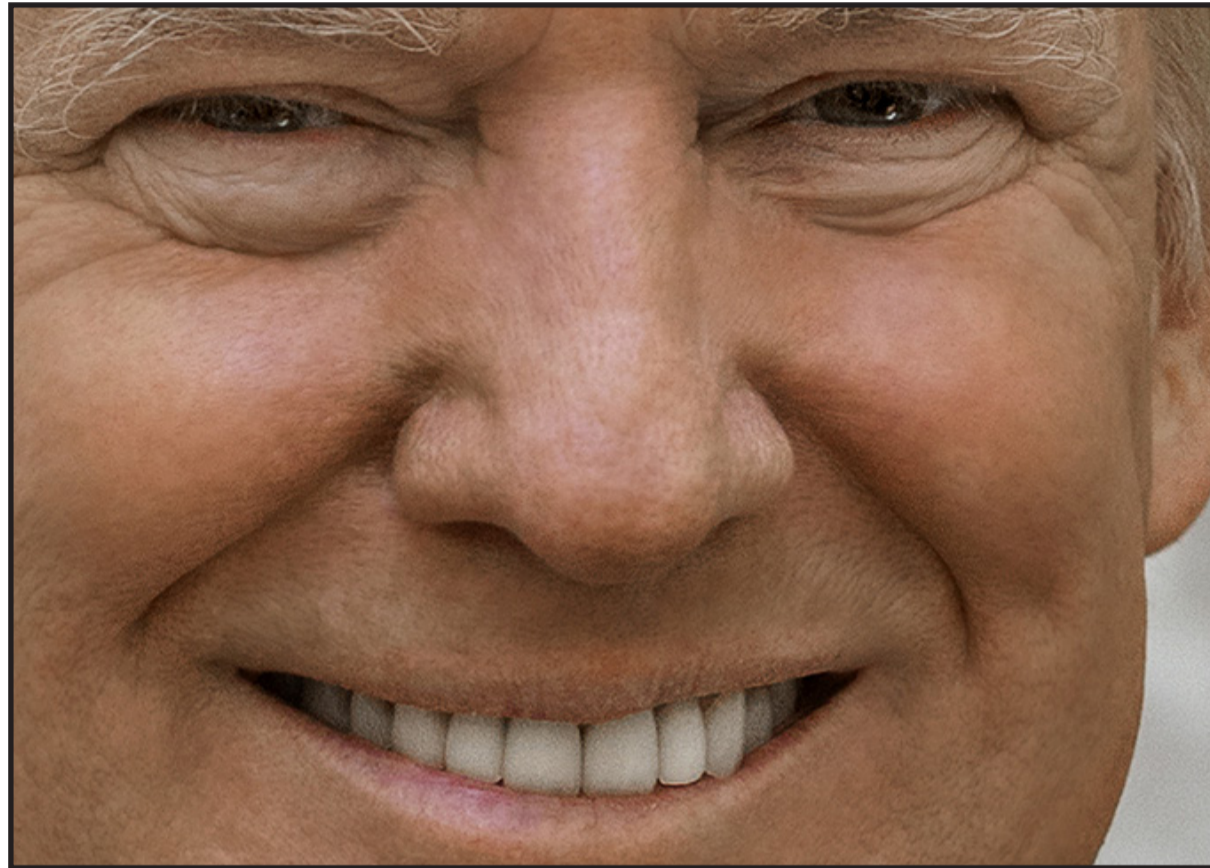
It is not that Biden did not do it. On the contrary, investigators found a box of top-secret documents in his Delaware garage, prima facie evidence that he is guilty of the crime. Rather, it is because he is too old to persuade a jury that he is mentally capable. As Hur put it, jurors would likely see Biden "as a sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory" and would therefore not be inclined to convict him of "a serious felony that requires a mental state of wilfulness".

The president, in other words, could not knowingly commit a crime because he does not know what he is doing. This is something that Donald Trump has been saying for months, to mounting Democratic fury. But denialism is now wearing thin - not only because of what Hur says, but because voters can see it with their own two eyes. The more Democrats insist that Biden is fine, that he is as sharp as ever, that he is fully up to the job, etc, the more voters suspect a cover-up. The result is irritation, impatience and a falling standing in the polls.

## Caving in

But it is not just Biden who is coming apart at the seams - rather, the entire enterprise is. Last week was particularly hellish for Democrats, because it saw the roof cave in on multiple fronts. The process started on February 5, when Donald Trump effectively vetoed a \$118-billion bill combining Ukrainian military aid with stepped-up border controls. "It takes the *horrible job* the Democrats have done on immigration and the border, absolves them, and puts it all squarely on the shoulders of Republicans," he said on Truth Social, his personal social-media platform. "Don't be stupid!!!"

Although Biden urged Republicans to "show some spine" by standing up to Trump, they had no choice but to go along. After all, Trump is the party's *lider maximo*, so who are they to say no? On Tuesday February 6, the disarray on Capitol Hill deepened when a \$17.6 billion Israeli aid package went down in defeat due to opposition from both conservatives, who want budget cuts in return, and Democrats, who fear that passage would reduce pressure on Republicans to vote for Ukrainian military assistance.



Grinning from ear to ear

February 7 was relatively uneventful, but Thursday February 8 was even worse. The day dawned with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz warning on the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page that a Russian victory in the Ukraine "would deal a severe blow to the liberal world order" and urging that Nato members "move in a strategic lockstep on both sides of the Atlantic" - something Biden would dearly like to see happen, but which he is increasingly incapable of bringing about. A few hours later came the release of the Hur report with its devastating description of the president's mental deficiency.

Finally, there was a disastrous White House press conference, in which Biden denounced Hur for reporting that he could not even remember when his own son died. (Beau Biden passed away from a brain tumour in 2015.) "How the hell dare he raise that?" a visibly upset Biden declared. "Frankly, when I was asked the question, I thought to myself, it wasn't any of their damn business."

Although Biden's subsequent mix-up of Egypt and Mexico - he thought Abdel el-Sisi was the president of the latter (!) - got more press, the earlier comments were more revealing, since they showed that he is unable to comprehend what the prosecutor is saying on even the simplest level. Hur was not disparaging the president or suggesting he did not love his son. Instead, he was merely explaining why he was reluctant to charge someone whose mind is obviously defective.

"Mr Biden's memory ... appeared to have significant limitations," Hur's report states. Recorded conversations with a ghost writer helping with his memoirs in 2017 "are often painfully slow, with Mr Biden struggling to remember events and straining at times to read and relay his own notebook entries." A 2023 interview was even worse:

He did not remember when he was vice-president, forgetting on the first day of the interview when his term ended ("If it was

2013 - when did I stop being vice president?"), and forgetting on the second day of the interview when his term began ("In 2009, am I still vice-president?"). He did not remember, even within several years, when his son, Beau, died.

The report went on:

In a case where the government must prove that Mr Biden ... chose to keep those documents, knowing he was violating the law ... we expect that, at trial, his attorneys would emphasise these limitations in his recall.

A prosecutor would have a hard time countering such arguments for the simple reason that they are true.<sup>1</sup>

As if all this was not bad enough, Thursday February 8 brought another zinger in the form of a long-awaited Supreme Court hearing on whether Colorado can bar Trump from the state ballot on the grounds that the US constitution's 14th amendment, adopted in 1868, forbids anyone who has "engaged in insurrection or rebellion" from holding office. A long list of Democratic luminaries had come out in favour of the ban on the grounds that insurrection was exactly what Trump engaged in when he sent a rightwing mob rampaging through Congress on January 6 2021. They included Yale historian Timothy Snyder, Harvard constitutional law professor Laurence Tribe, plus 25 top US historians, including such academic stars as James McPherson and David Roediger.

With a line-up like that, one would have thought the justices would at least give the Colorado case a respectful hearing. But, while no-one quite laughed out loud, the reception could not have been more sceptical. Based on the questions they posed, it appears that not only will the conservative majority vote no, but at least two of the court's three remaining liberals will too. If so, it marks an ignominious end to a last-ditch Democratic effort to short-circuit the election before Americans get a chance to vote.

How humiliating! Marxists, of course, view such events with a jaundiced eye. They will hardly object that Congress is balking at aid for Israel or Ukraine or that it is saying no to a reactionary border bill that could forcibly return thousands of migrants per day without so much as a chance of applying for asylum.

If they have any sense, Marxists will cheer on the judiciary for upholding the right of Americans to vote for the candidate of their choice even if it is someone as odious as Trump. As for a special prosecutor concluding that Biden is too senile to stand trial, even gray-haired veterans of the 1960s will see nothing to complain about in that regard either. Whether or not they are too old to make a revolution, Biden is certainly too old to run an empire.

## Downhill

But what matters is not Biden as an individual, but as a symptom of a mounting political crisis. When the Soviet bureaucracy chose Konstantin Chernenko - an aging alcoholic who could barely hold himself upright - as the fifth general secretary of the Communist Party in 1984, it was a sign of a late-Stalinist structure entering into the final stages of decay. And, when Barack Obama anointed Biden as his successor during the 2020 Democratic primaries, it was more or less the same - an indication that the US was also sliding downhill with growing rapidity.

Biden's performance on the 2020 campaign trail was stunning - and not in a good way. "Poor kids are just as bright and just as talented as white kids," he declared in Des Moines, Iowa.<sup>2</sup> A question about lagging educational performance at a Democratic debate brought forth a verbal torrent:

We bring social workers into homes of parents to help them deal with how to raise their children. It's not that they don't want to help: they don't want ... they don't know what to do. Play the radio, make sure the television, excuse me, make sure you have the record player on at night, the-the-the phone - make sure the kids hear

words, a kid coming from a very poor school, uh, a v-v-very poor background, will hear four million words fewer spoken by the time they get there.<sup>3</sup>

What it meant was anybody's guess. But it did not matter. Biden was respectable, a member of the Democratic establishment, and a household name. Most important of all, he was not Bernie Sanders. So he got the nod.

Which is why it is now all falling apart, just as it did in the USSR. Democrats have been in a growing panic ever since Trump's smashing victory in last month's Iowa caucuses. The latest polls show him up five points over Biden despite 91 felony counts hanging over his head, yet everything they do in response only makes matters worse. An election-interference case against Trump in Georgia is on hold thanks to outrageous misconduct on the part of local Democratic prosecutors. While an appellate court has turned thumbs down on Trump's claim that he is immune from prosecution, even if he commits murder, the decision means that a January 6 federal case could conceivably go to trial in May or June, just as electioneering switches into high gear. Even hardened anti-Trumpers quail at the prospect.

Vice-president Kamala Harris's statement that she is "ready to serve - there's no question about that," if Biden withdraws adds to the Democratic jitters. Harris is so unpopular that she had to withdraw from the 2020 presidential primaries when her poll numbers plunged into the low single digits. As bad as Biden's prospects are, a Democratic ticket with her at the head would be even worse. As much as Democrats might like to edge her out, there is apparently no way of doing so without a bruising political fight. So they are staring down the barrel of a loaded gun, whether Biden pulls out or not.

Shock waves are spreading. With Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky on increasingly shaky ground, Kyiv is beginning to resemble Saigon in 1973, as the realisation sinks in that American largesse is at an end now, as Trump says no to more military aid. His statement at a recent campaign rally that he would encourage Russians to do "whatever the hell they want" to any European country that doesn't increase military spending means that Nato must now face up to the very real possibility of an American pullout.

Hungary's Viktor Orbán, France's Marine Le Pen and a host of others are a quiver over the prospect of a fellow ultra-rightist once again sitting in the Oval Office. Where Democrats once thought they had seen the last of Trump, it is now looking more and more likely that the Biden administration will go down in history as a brief interregnum in America's long journey to the radical right.

Nothing is certain, of course. But, the more embarrassing Biden's performance grows, the likelier a second Trump administration becomes, with all the chaos that goes with it ●

## Notes

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## ECONOMICS

# Isabel Schnabel's last mile

Central bankers are determined to keep interest rates high in an effort to dampen down inflation. But, as **Michael Roberts** explains, the reason why there has been a spike in inflation is down to supply issues and excessive profits, not excessive demand

**H**eadline inflation rates in the major economies have nearly halved since they peaked back in 2022. Average consumer price growth across the advanced capitalist economies has dropped from more than 7% in 2022 to 4.6% in 2023, according to the International Monetary Fund.

The reason for the acceleration of consumer price inflation from 2020-22 has now been well established.<sup>1</sup> It was caused by a sharp fall in the supply of basic commodities and intermediate products, which drove up prices of these suddenly scarce goods. This was compounded by a breakdown in the global supply chain of goods transported and trade internationally.

The inflationary spiral from the end of the pandemic slump in 2020 to the peak in 2022 was not the result of 'excessive demand' caused by too much government spending or wage increases driving up costs for companies. Study after study has shown that it was supply issues, not wage demands, that generated the price rises (an average of 20% over two years). Indeed, if anything, it was excessive profit rises that contributed, as companies with any 'market power' - ie, a monopolistic position - took advantage of rising input costs to raise their 'mark-ups'.<sup>2</sup> This was particularly the case from the energy and food majors which control the pricing in those markets.

### Policy Target

And yet central bankers continue to insist that inflation rates well above their policy target of 2% a year were caused by 'too much' demand or 'excessive' wage rises. They have to say this, because it is their *raison d'être*. Central banks are here to manipulate interest rates and money supply, supposedly in order to 'control' inflation and the economy. They rest their policies on the monetarist theory that it is money supply growth and the cost of borrowing (interest rates) that control price inflation. But the experience of the post-pandemic inflationary 'shock' exposed (yet again) the nonsense of monetarism.

Do we need to control inflation? For workers, the answer is clearly yes; because no inflation and even deflation means that their weekly or monthly pay cheques are worth the same and any increase would mean better living standards. But that is not the same for companies. They like and want some 'moderate' inflation, as it allows room to preserve profitability, when costs of production rise or wage rises offer more demand. That is why central banks do not have a target of zero inflation, but instead something like 2% a year.

But setting a target of 2% a year is really admitting that central banks cannot control price inflation. Indeed, if we look at the history of monetary policy and its ability to achieve the (arbitrarily fixed) inflation target of 2% a year in the major advanced capitalist economies, it has been a total failure. Take the European Central Bank's record. In the 25 years of the existence of the euro, the ECB has only got close to achieving the 2% target once (in 2007). In every other year, inflation has been either well above or well below 2%.

Just by chance the 25-year average inflation rate is 2%, but there was a multi-year streak of undershooting that from the end of 2013 (with



Isabel Schnabel: monetarist dogmatism

annual average inflation at just 0.7% to 2020); and then the current overshoot (the annual average inflation since end-2020 has been 5.7%). And before 2013 the inflation rate was always well above target, despite hiking interest rates and keeping money supply growth down. In the 2010s, despite quantitative easing (monetary injections) and low and even zero interest rates, inflation did not reach 2% a year. Overall, it had a standard deviation from that target of 1.8 times.

It is the same story with the US Federal Reserve Bank. The Fed was close to its target in only two years out of the last 24, and with a standard deviation of 1.2 times. It failed to keep inflation down to 2% in the 2000s and failed to get it up to 2% in the 2010s. Neither tight monetary policy worked in the 2000s nor 'loose' in the 2010s.

And, when it comes to the Bank of Japan, it totally failed to get inflation up to 2% a year until the recent inflationary shock, despite zero interest rates and massive quantitative easing (bond purchases). What the BoJ record confirms is that it is activity in the 'real' economy and the decisions of banks and companies regarding their profits (including whether to 'hoard' money) that decides the rate of inflation, not central bank monetary policy.

### Futility

Despite the futility of their policies, central banks have ploughed on with trying to control inflation in the last two years by raising interest rates and tightening money supply. Now they are claiming it is because of their policies that inflation rates have dropped in the last year and are still falling (for now). And yet it is clear that it is the sharp fallback in energy and food prices, as well as for various intermediate products, that has driven average inflation down. At the same time, global supply chain pressures have been reduced. Central bank monetary policy has had little to do with any of this.

Isabel Schnabel is the most hawkish member of the ECB's six-person executive board. The German economist has become one of the most influential voices on euro zone

monetary policy. She continues to argue that monetary policy has been effective in controlling inflation. She states:

Monetary policy was and remains essential to bring inflation down. If you look around, you see signs of monetary policy transmission everywhere. Just look at the tightening of financing conditions and the sharp deceleration of bank lending. Look at the decline of housing investments or at weak construction activity. And, importantly, look at the broadly anchored inflation expectations in the wake of the largest inflation shock we have experienced in decades.<sup>3</sup>

Even Schnabel has to admit that "It's true, of course, that part of the decline in inflation reflects the reversal of supply-side shocks" (only "part"?). But, she continues, "monetary policy has been instrumental in slowing the pass-through of higher costs to consumer prices and in containing second-round effects". By "second-round effects", she means inflation expectations.

But most of these signs are of tightening monetary policies with no causal connection to inflation. The claim that inflation was curbed by central banks 'anchoring inflation expectations' is really a psychological theory of inflation.<sup>4</sup> Inflation expectations by consumers and companies only vary because of what is actually happening to prices. Inflation expectations have fallen because price inflation has slowed.

According to Schnabel, the war against inflation was "at a critical phase, where the calibration and transmission of monetary policy become especially important, because it is all about containing the second-round effects". This was what she has called "the last mile" in the battle to get inflation down to 2% a year.

And what is the difficulty here? Yet again, it is not supply issues or even profit mark-ups, but "the strong growth in nominal wages, as employees are trying to catch up on their lost income". For Schnabel, it is wage demands that are stopping inflation from falling further.

But Schnabel has to admit that, if productivity growth (output per worker) was rising too, then wage costs per unit of output would not rise and profits would be secure. Unfortunately, for corporate profits, "we've seen a worrying decline in productivity", so "the combination of the strong rise in nominal wages and the drop in productivity has led to a historically high growth in unit labour costs". And indeed there is a strong inverse correlation (0.45) between productivity growth and inflation rates over the last two decades.

Without sufficient productivity growth (more exploitation of labour), all this could drive down profitability, unless wage demands are curbed. "How are firms going to react? Will they be able to pass through higher unit labour costs to consumer prices?" worries Schnabel. This is where central bank monetary policy comes in - namely to curb spending and investment by raising the cost of borrowing, she argues.

Schnabel is worried that the inflation beast has not been tamed yet and so high interest rates must be sustained. She refers to an IMF study that claims to show that, when interest rates are kept high until the pips of the economic orange squeak, this not only stops inflation coming back, but also eventually gets the economy going quicker afterwards.<sup>5</sup> This is the Volcker policy of the late 1970s in the US. Paul Volcker was the Fed chief then and to 'cure' the economy from inflation he maintained high interest rates until the US economy dropped into a slump. Inflation then subsided - along with the economy and jobs. But this supposedly 'cleansed' the economy for faster growth later in the 1980s.

But the 'cleansing' solution comes at a price (sic). The IMF report's key finding is that the successful resolution of inflation shocks was associated with more substantial monetary policy tightening. It states: "But those that resolved inflation with high interest rates experienced a larger decline in GDP growth than those that did not."

### Reality

The problem with Schnabel's monetarist theory is that it does not hold with the reality of capitalist production. Within this theory is the neoclassical concept of an 'equilibrium rate of interest' called R\*,<sup>6</sup> which is the interest rate level that supposedly keeps inflation to the set target, but also avoids unemployment and a slump. Schnabel claims:

The problem is it cannot be estimated with any confidence, which means that it is extremely hard to operationalise ... What we really care about is the short-run R-star, because it is relevant to determine whether our interest rates are restrictive or accommodative. The problem is we don't know where it is precisely (!).

Indeed, as Minneapolis Fed president Neel Kashkari recently explained,

The concept of a neutral stance of monetary policy is critical to assessing where policy is now and what pressure it is having on the economy. While we cannot directly

observe neutral, economists have models to estimate it, which are imperfect even under normal economic circumstances. Our various workhorse models for the economy have struggled to explain and forecast the pandemic and post-pandemic periods, given the extraordinary changes and disruptions the economy has experienced. So I also look to measures of economic activity for signals to try to evaluate the stance of policy.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, the monetarist theory cannot be applied to reality, and the reality is that economic activity drives inflation and money circulation, not vice versa.

Schnabel recognises the past failure of monetarist policies:

One is the period after the launch of the ECB's asset purchase programme in 2015. That was a time when a lot of central bank reserves - base money - were created. But we did not succeed in lifting the economy out of the low-inflation environment. Why was that?

The reason was that:

the balance sheets of banks, firms, households and governments were relatively weak. You remember, after the global financial crisis and the euro area sovereign debt crisis, there was little willingness to grant loans and to invest. Inflation did not come back as much as the ECB would have hoped.

Exactly. It was the state of the real economy - in particular profitability of capital and the low demand for credit to invest - not the price of money, not the mythical R\*, that drove the economy. The ECB was 'pushing on a string', to use Keynes's phrase, and getting nowhere in reaching its arbitrary 2% inflation target. Schnabel again: "the ECB's asset purchases before the pandemic were not as successful in bringing inflation back to our target as we would have hoped, because their effectiveness depends on the economic environment."

Indeed. The truth is that central banks have little or no influence over the investment decisions of companies - it is the profitability of investment that matters, and from that flows how much inflation emerges in an economy. Given that profitability of capital currently remains low, investment growth is weak and productivity is not recovering much, this suggests that Schnabel's "last mile" is more like a 'horizon' that she will never reach ●

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

### Notes

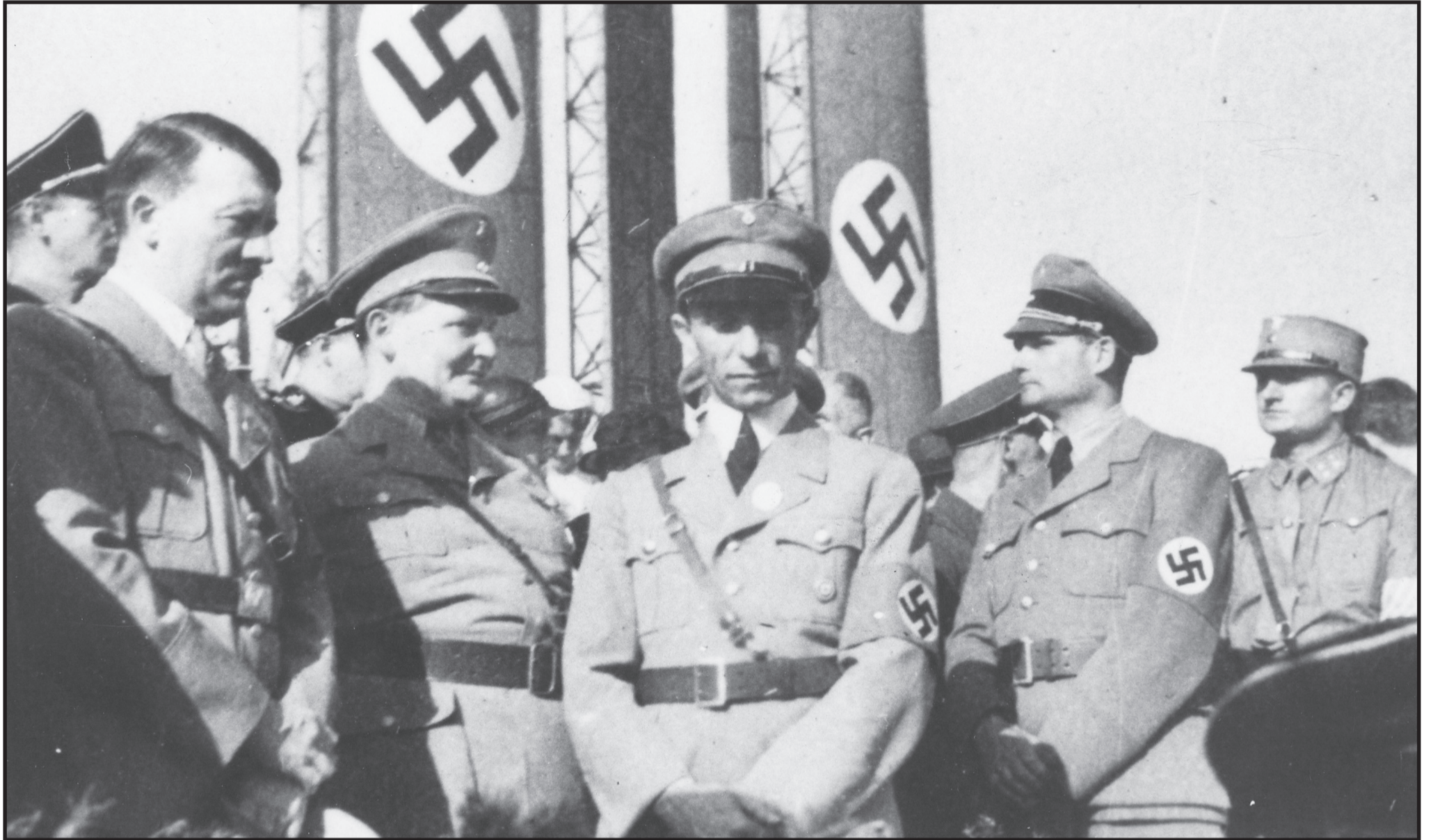
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**DISCUSSION**

# Where next for Germany?

**Thomas Klikauer** paints a picture of 'democracy' being saved from neo-Nazism because of AfD's lack of business, army, bureaucratic and judicial support and the absence of non-state fighting formations. The working class is only seen as an electoral group



In just one month's time, Germany's newest, most powerful and highly successful neo-Nazi party - the deceptively labelled AfD (Alternative for Germany) - will be 11 years old. Seemingly unstoppable, Germany's neo-fascist party has gone from strength to strength in election after election. Something wicked this way comes.

It gets worse: most observers believe the AfD's upward trend will continue in 2024, with European elections set for Sunday June 9, as well as upcoming state elections in the east German states of Saxony and Thuringia on September 1, and in Brandenburg on September 22 - if the AfD is not banned by then.

Geographically, the former East Germany (German Democratic Republic) remains the heartland of the AfD, with voter support in the region of 35% - compared to between 12% and 20% in the western parts. But the AfD's demographic problem is that 67 million people live in the western parts of Germany, where the AfD is weak, while just 16 million live in the former GDR. In other words, without winning in the west, the AfD will remain just a regional party.

Virtually all election polls and public polls in 2023 and early 2024 see the AfD heading toward a historic high. Simultaneously, a radicalisation within it is taking place. In other words, while the AfD goes from success to success, it also goes from extreme right to *more* extreme right. Even the recent 'Wannsee 2' scandal that broke in January 2024 did not dent

its popularity. Wannsee was the location where the Nazis made their plans to exterminate Europe's Jews - ie, the original Wannsee conference of January 1942.

Despite its move into rightwing extremism there appears to be a 'normalisation' of the AfD. As is also happening in the United States, Hungary and other countries around the world (eg, India). In other words, the mainstreaming of fascism. This will have stark consequences for the future of Germany's party system. 2024 is set to be the year in which the rightwing-extremist AfD will become a real force in Germany's political landscape, undermining from inside the democratic system it hates.

## Origins

In 2013, the AfD was formed from three rather diverse ideological currents, all of them to the right of Germany's traditional conservatives (the CDU): the reactionary wing (formerly of the CDU); the neoliberal wing; and the outright neo-Nazi *völkische* (read: racist-Aryan and white supremacist) wing: 1. The reactionary wing (now declining) is nationalistic and chauvinistic. Its *Führer* back then was Alexander Gauland, but today, it is Beatrix von Storch of old Nazi stock. Storch's maternal grandfather was Lutz Graf Schwerin von Krosigk. When this monarchist became a Nazi, he was promptly awarded with the Golden Nazi Party Badge. He was Hitler's finance minister until the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945.

**Adolph Hitler, Herman Göring, Joseph Goebbels and Rudolf Hess attending a military parade in 1933. The Nazis came to power because of the threat of working class power, but also the failure of the working class to take power**

**Simple-minded AfD potential micro-Führer, Tino Chrupalla**



Beatrix Storch once advocated the shooting of refugees at the German border. But today this part of the AfD is in terminal decline.

2. The neoliberal wing was once centred around economy-oriented figures, such as Bernd Lucke. Today, this wing of the AfD is almost completely extinct. But neoliberal ideology has not disappeared.

3. The original neo-Nazi wing is at the centre of power within the party and is rising: There is also the *völkisch* (read neo-Nazi) wing that only came together after the AfD was formed. Its most prominent and most powerful *Führer* is Björn Höcke. In the beginning, the neo-Nazi-Aryan wing was marginal - both in terms of quantity and quality. Over time, however, it developed into a very strong current inside the party - eventually dominating the AfD. Today, it runs the show.

Ever since the AfD's congress in 2022 in Riesa, there is no longer any doubt that the *völkisch*-neo-Nazi wing has taken over the leadership. Apart from the AfD's neo-Nazi wing, only a fragmented remaining part of the reactionary wing continues to exist, but it too must subordinate itself to the über-authoritarian neo-Nazi wing. Any AfD official who fails to spit out racist buzzwords and adjacent conspiracy fantasies in speeches - like, for example, that of a 'great replacement' and the *idée fixe* of 'national identity' (read a race-based *Herrenrasse*, now called *bio-Deutsche*) - has next to no chance of getting anywhere in the AfD.

Interestingly, the rapid radicalisation of the AfD towards neo-Nazism has not harmed the party - on the contrary, it gives it muscle. Today, the AfD is more rightwing-extremist than ever before. At the same time, it is also *stronger* than ever before.

In 2022, the AfD somewhat replicated Hitler's Night of the Long Knives - albeit with no killings that we know of. The cleansing of the party came in the east German city of Riesa. This party congress eliminated the neoliberals and severely weakened its reactionary wing, but at the same time it strengthened the radical right wing. The success at the party convention sharply increased the self-confidence of the party's neo-Nazis: most members noticed the swing of the AfD towards rightwing extremism and either caved in - eg, the 'Nazi *Schlampe*' ('Nazi bitch'), Alice Weidel - or happily joined it.

Unsurprisingly, Höcke praised the party's ideological consolidation. The AfD's European candidate, Maximilian Krah - who hallucinates about immigration as the "colonisation" of Germany and about "oriental land-grabs" - spoke of a post-Riesa AfD. It is a kind of 'fascistisation' - the process of adopting proto-fascism.

Meanwhile, in terms of public polling, the AfD's 10.3% achieved during the last federal election in 2021 (down from 12.6% in 2017), has now increased to 23.6% in polls (January 2024). This is a very strong leap, which shows that the strategy of the right is working out rather splendidly.

At the same time, the high public



polling figures for AfD are not unconnected to the unpopularity of Germany's current progressive 'traffic-light' government. The current disapproval has been aided through the sustained media (read tabloid) barrage. It all adds up to a seemingly unstoppable normalisation, from which the AfD has been able to benefit. Despite debates about the legality or illegality of the AfD and police investigations, the party is increasingly perceived as a 'normal party'.

According to a recent public poll, a whopping 27% consider the AfD to be a "normal party". The mainstreaming of fascism is goose-stepping forward. This is further supported by the fact that the AfD appears - at least to the outside world - to be disciplined. Having eliminated the neoliberal wing and undermined its reactionary wing, it can pretend to be a unified force.

However, there are still some remaining power struggles between different factions. Beyond that, there is also the issue of the AfD's current, rather non-charismatic mini-Führer and the many malignant narcissists waiting in the wings to replace Höcke. Temporarily suppressing these new potential dictators allows the AfD to unify the party which is further abetted by the AfD's anti-migration and nationalistic stance - the most commonly approved policy.

## Aided by CDU

Most recently, the AfD has also been aided by Germany's traditional conservatives. The CDU is fighting a USA-style culture war - in other words, it is taking up AfD causes, even though it does not help the CDU at all. The traditional conservative party has been stagnating in recent polling, because it has no agenda which shows a clear way towards future prosperity.

Nevertheless, the CDU remains powerful and is either unknowingly or cynically seeding the political ground for Germany's rightwing extremists. The fruits of this seeding will be harvested by the AfD, because nationalism and racism remain its core business.

In the ideological positioning of the AfD, and for tactical purposes, right now - at least officially - the party claims to be against billionaires and predatory capitalism. Nevertheless, its staunchly neoliberal ideology ensures it is dead against any tax increases. Surprisingly, perhaps also for them, the party's economic policies have recently been rebuked most sharply by the think tank of Germany's business owners, factory directors, companies and corporations (in short, Germany's capitalism) known as the DIW (German Institute for Economic Research). Worse, the DIW analysis shows that AfD voters will be those who will suffer the most from the party's neoliberal economic policies.

In any case, the AfD is not about class warfare: it is about the *Volksgemeinschaft* (a 'people's community'). Therefore the party needs to camouflage its true intentions, which it has done by focusing on national identity, race and migration.

To achieve *Volksgemeinschaft*, the AfD aims to unite very different electoral groups:

1. Workers: many are fighting against socioeconomic devaluation, as the cold intimacies of neoliberalism push ever more unskilled workers into the 'precariat';
2. Petty bourgeois: those who, above all, do not want to pay taxes, reject state interference in their business, are not friends of environmentalism

and other progressive policies;

3. The elite: Germany's radical rightwing-extremist non-oligarch rich.

As far as the voter groups are concerned, the core clientele of the AfD remains inside Germany's petty bourgeois middle class (or what is left of it in the eastern states). They are neither elite nor lower class. They are mostly skilled workers and people with mid-range formal education.

After the '*Wirtschaftswunder*' (economic miracle) of the 1950s they were transformed into the petty bourgeoisie and then exposed to the possibility of losing their social standing under the plague of neoliberalism. This is the group made up of the self-employed, skilled craftsmen and those with a one-person or other small business. Such people have begun to identify with the non-charismatic and simple-minded AfD potential micro-Führer, Tino Chrupalla.

Of course, even before the 1920s there were always rightwing skilled and unskilled workers for whom simple solutions - racism, anti-feminism, anti-environmentalism, hatred of progressives and simple nationalism - outshone everything else. But today most AfD voters seem to fall into the ideological trap of being dominated by something that Gramsci once described as a "diffuse sense of everyday life" - a rather chaotic collection of disparate views and interests that do not clearly fit into any neatly tailored party programme.

For workers with rightwing ideological tendencies, the fear of losing out is big - whether that is real or constructed. On the other side of the coin is the fading notion of being able to make gains under neoliberal capitalism. In short, they see themselves as losers, or at least as potential losers, and this is no longer linked to class-consciousness. Instead, it is linked to petty bourgeois aspirations, with individualistic solutions to economic problems. The AfD will never admit that the real problem is the super-rich: no, it is the foreigners and the unassimilated. This is the nationalism and racism that the AfD thrives on.

It is this, unfortunately, that emotionally overwhelms the class struggle, especially since everyone these days has basic consumer goods - cell phones, computers, fridges, washing machines, cars, etc. The AfD lullaby for the poor is 'You can't do anything against the rich anyway', because they have all the resources. Redistribution policies by progressives have failed. The AfD is for those who have no faith in the feasibility of progressive redistribution policies and are ready to support a strong authoritarian who can bring those recalcitrant rich folks to heel.

## Alternative?

The comprehensive destruction of any alternative to neoliberal capitalism is - paradoxically - one of the core ideologies of the AfD. In other words, the 'Alternative' for Germany is no alternative at all, because the ultimate goal of those vying for AfD leadership is to eventually ally themselves with the super-rich: in their 'boss' way of thinking, they like the idea of an autocratic leader keeping their workforce quiet and in line.

Linked to that is the fostering of the fear of losing out. This hopelessness can be attributed to the successful subversion and subsequent failure of progressive politics, but also to the corporate mass media that has - over decades - assured us all that a pro-business atmosphere must prevail and that

capitalism is not the problem: socialism is.

Importantly, it cemented the *idée fixe* that there is *no alternative* to capitalism. That means that 'Alternative' for Germany is also an alternative to open-mindedness, and it wants to convert the populace into a racist mob: ie, the old and new Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*. As a consequence, it has increasingly become possible to speak of a general shift to the right in Germany. In the past few years not only a rightwing radicalisation has taken place, but also a 'normalisation' of the extreme right.

Perhaps optimistically, it is not entirely clear whether more people today carry rightwing attitudes than, for example, a decade ago. The most recent so-called Mitte-Study by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation comes exactly to this conclusion.

Meanwhile, forms of (mostly online) public discourse in Germany have become more unconstrained. Aided by online platforms, there is a marked rise of hate speech. If one compares recent statements by politicians with those of, for example, eight years ago, there is a clear shift to the right in the language they use.

The CDU plays a particularly unsavoury role in this. For example, it calls its 'official' position on the AfD a "non-engagement policy" - the *Brandmauer* (fire wall). Yet in the east German town of Pirna an ex-CDU and now AfD-supported candidate won the local mayoral election.

Many observers have underestimated how quickly the AfD has become normalised. Grimly, not many people had expected, until recently, that the conservative CDU would fold so quickly and aid the AfD. Even more problematic is that, both under the 'moderate' Angela Merkel and today under the staunchly conservative Friedrich Merz, the CDU has been wavering and flip-flopping. In reality, it has been reiterating AfD positions. Not long ago, Merz suspected Ukrainian refugees of being "social welfare tourists" - the xenophobic language of AfD. He also described middle-Eastern youths as "little pashas" - also the language of AfD.

It needs to be pointed out that the CDU's flip-flopping over the AfD will mainly benefit the latter, not itself. Publicly, the CDU facilitates the impression that the AfD is covering important topics.

Perhaps the real background of the whole thing is also a crisis of ideological hegemony. Germany's established parties, democratic institutions and their political convictions seem to be losing their binding force. This is evident, for example, in the position of German conservatism. The CDU always had the (self-appointed) task of capturing Germany's right, but those days are over. Today, the AfD woos voters who are to the right of the CDU and this creates a problem: there is now a real possibility of a split in the CDU, which applies even more in eastern states.

Of course, such a split would benefit the AfD. A break-up of the CDU would be the most serious implosion imaginable for Germany's party system. Although a split is unlikely right now, it can no longer be excluded further along the line.

## No 1933 repeat

In conclusion, 2024 is not 1933. Even though the neo-Nazi AfD is set to make gains in some significant elections, particularly in three east German states, it is unlikely that it will be in the government this year or in 2025, when the next federal election is due. There are three reasons for this:

1. No business support. Unlike in the 1930s - and this is the biggest problem for the AfD - Germany's business leaders, its elite, the rich, its companies and corporations - do not support the AfD. The opposite is the case. Business strongly rejects the party. This is largely because of the AfD's über-nationalistic and anti-EU stance. German capitalism depends on the European Union as its biggest market. Losing this - as Brexit has shown very instructively - would hit German capital extremely hard. This time around, German capital is not behind the new neo-Nazis and its parliamentary cohort.

2. No state support. The AfD cannot - unlike the Nazis during the 1930s - rely on an authoritarian state with anti-democratic civil servants that hate, reject and seek to abolish democracy. Today, Germany's institutions are democratic through and through. Unlike during the 1930s, Germany's court system has no Roland Freisler (or only a few). In other words, neither the German state nor its judiciary, police, army and public administration will support the AfD.

3. No movement. Thirdly, the AfD does not yet have the equivalent of the SA. There are no troops of Brownshirts beating, torturing and killing political opponents at will. Put simply, the AfD has no '*die Strasse frei, die Fahne hoch ...*' groups roaming the streets. Unlike Hitler and Mussolini, the AfD has no paramilitary fighting force and no death squads lurking in the shadows, like the rightwing forces in the USA and perhaps Italy.

In order to ascertain what will happen in Germany in 2024, it is useful to look at the 2023 election in the bellwether state of Hessen. In 2023, the CDU became a mid-30% party, but, as the strongest party in Hessen, it can run the show. This is set to be replicated at Germany's federal level in 2025. The Social Democratic Party and Green Party will probably both win around 15%.

The neoliberal FDP and Germany's most progressive party, Die Linke, will struggle to enter any parliament because they will most likely drop below the 5% hurdle that allows a party to enter parliament. What remains is the AfD. Polls indicate that the AfD will hover at around 15%-20%.

Beyond the projected success of the AfD in the European parliament elections in June, those in Saxony and Thuringia on September 1, and the Brandenburg election on September 22, one of the more interesting questions will come to the fore in 2025 - the year of the next federal election. The key question then will be: with whom will the CDU enter into a coalition to form the new government? If what happened in the bell-weather state of Hessen is replicated, the CDU has two options: it can govern with the SPD or with the Greens.

The horror scenario would be that it could, at least potentially, also govern with the AfD. This would be a deadly carbon-copy of Hitler's first cabinet from 1933, when conservatives switched sides, running away from conservatism to support Hitler's Nazis.

For the quite logical and therefore optimistic reasons outlined above, this is unlikely to happen. In other words, history will not repeat itself. We all know what came after Hitler rose to power in 1933. Germans know and the world knows. Catastrophe on a much larger scale this time around can be avoided ●



**BOOK**

# World without colonisation

Robbie McVeigh and Bill Rolston *Ireland, colonialism and the unfinished revolution* Chicago 2023, pp480, £19.99

In 1966 a book by a journalist called Colin MacInnes was published in the UK. This book, entitled *England, half English*, registered, so to speak, the arrival of numbers of immigrant families that made a distinctive contribution to the national scene.

MacInnes apologised, in this context, “for using the odious word ‘half-caste’ to describe the *English* children of Africans or West Indians and of our women” (p32, his emphasis). As he puts it eloquently,

These boys and girls - thousands of them have now been born and bred among us - are, and feel themselves to be, as ‘English’ as anyone is. They represent (together with the children of other immigrant groups of the 1940s and 1950s - chiefly Poles, Cypriots, Maltese and Pakistanis) the New English of the last half of our century: the modern infusion of that new blood which, according to our history books, has perpetually recreated England in the past and is the very reason for her mongrel glory [sic]” (*England, half English* pp32-33).

This means, he notes, that “A coloured population - and this means a growing half-caste population - is now a stable element in British social life” (p24).

Our authors focus on this interbreeding, using the Latin American term, *mestizaje* (the half-caste condition, life as a *mestizo*) and show that it applies to Ireland:

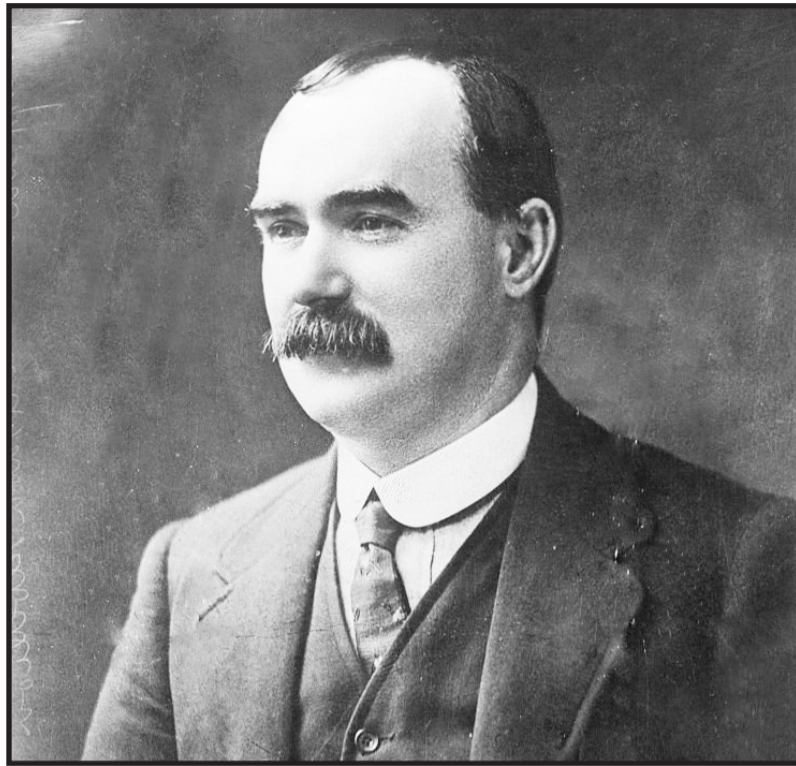
Irish history is a definitive example of *mestizaje*. This is patently obvious in the north, where a unionist prime minister can have a Gaelic family name [Terence O’Neill], while the founder and leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party [John Hume] that of Scots Planters (*Ireland, colonialism and the unfinished revolution* p26).

They ask us to imagine a world without colonisation:

What appears little more than an abstract fantasy in our contemporary postcolonial world was ‘pre-contact’ recently in the history of humanity. Most of us - peoples, cultures and continents - were ‘uncolonised’ before the ‘age of discovery’ ... Thus, the future must be faced from the perspective of the *decolonised* rather than the *uncolonised*. Crucially this means that the whole world is characterised by *mestizaje* ... [which] frames the challenge for contemporary anti-imperialism: what is to be done? (pp65-66).

This state of affairs relates to the last century’s determining conflict, World War I. McVeigh and Rolston write:

It bears emphasis that this conflict was definitively an *imperial* choice rather than a democratic one ... The human cost was, however, enormous - with over one million military deaths across the armies of the British empire alone and an additional two million wounded. Lenin made sense of this dynamic in his *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism*. He argued that the Great War was “an annexationist,



**James Connolly: carnival of reaction**

predatory, plunderous war among empires” (p53).

World War I led to the Irish war of independence (aka the Sinn Féin rebellion) and the partition of Ireland. I find it difficult to resist the conclusion that partition has been a disaster, wherever it has been imposed. Our authors reproduce James Connolly’s prescient remarks on Ireland’s case:

The partition of Ireland would mean a carnival of reaction both north and south, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements while it endured” (p135).

## Two states

As McVeigh and Rolston point out, the legislative means used by the British state was the Government of Ireland Act 1920, which created two states on the island: Northern Ireland continued to be framed by the 1920 act, while the 26 remaining counties acquired further autonomy following the treaty which came into force in 1922:

Now styled a ‘free state’, it became a white dominion of the British empire - like Australia, Canada and South Africa. Despite this enhanced autonomy, however, it was a far remove from the republic proclaimed in 1916 and endorsed by the Irish electorate in 1918. Northern Ireland was, of course, left even more unambiguously locked within a colonial context - still in the double bind of union and empire (p138).

When the southern taoiseach, Seamus Costello, announced that the free state was to call itself the “Irish Republic” in 1948, which led to the (26-county) Republic of Ireland Act, the UK government under Clement Attlee accepted this *fait accompli*, but replied with the Ireland Act 1949, which ruled that Ireland *would not be treated as a foreign country for the purposes of British law*.

Furthermore this act effectively reinforced partition, since it declared that Northern Ireland would continue to remain part of the

United Kingdom and of the British Commonwealth (successor to the empire), unless the parliament of Northern Ireland decided otherwise. The working party report declared that “it [had] become a matter of first-class strategic importance... that the north should continue to form part of His Majesty’s dominions” (quoted p168). Not surprisingly, Dáil members expressed their displeasure over this.

The question now is: how much has the situation changed following the 1998 Good Friday Agreement? The GFA entailed abandoning the constitutional claim to sovereignty over the whole island, as expressed in the southern constitution. This means that the 26-county state is now a junior partner in the management of continuing conflict in the north, alongside the UK.

Moreover, despite the lurching of the post-GFA state from crisis to crisis, no-one nowadays in the political establishment of the 26 counties is suggesting that the reunification of the national territory ‘could provide the only permanent solution to the problem’ (pp186-87).

McVeigh and Rolston see the hand of the European Union in the GFA: “On June 11 2004 the referendum was held [in the south] on the proposal to remove the constitutional entitlement to citizenship by birth”, confining that right to individuals having “at least one parent who is an Irish citizen”:

This change was supported by the two Irish government parties, Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats - as well as Fine Gael, the largest opposition party. It was opposed by the Irish Labour Party, Sinn Féin and the Green Party. In the event, voters elected to change the *jus soli* basis of Irish citizenship. On a turnout of 59.9% of the electorate, 79.2% voted ‘yes’ and 20.8% voted ‘no’.

In effect, therefore, Irish citizenship law had become completely determined by the implications that it was deemed to have for EU citizenship. The outcome ... was potentially a ‘problem’ for the UK and the EU, *but not for the Irish state*.

Yet changes driven through by the Irish government and almost completely justified in terms of concerns about the ‘abuse’ of EU citizenship had profound implications both for the GFA and Irish citizenship and nationality.

This supine acceptance of the logic of being ‘Good Europeans’ had a clear racial undertow. For all the government disclaimers, the population was quite clear that the referendum was about race and migration. The RTE exit poll following the referendum made clear the “spontaneous reasons for voting yes”: “Country being exploited by immigrants” - 36%; “Too many immigrants” - 27%; “Being in line with other EU countries” - 20%; “Children should not be automatically Irish citizens” - 14%. Aggregating the first, second and fourth of these, we can suggest that the insistence that the referendum had “nothing to do with racism or immigration” [comment by Mary Hanafin, FF chief whip - see p195] rang more than a little hollow (pp195-96 - see also references to the ‘Chen case’, pp191-97).

## Six Counties

Having brought readers up to date with 26-county developments, our authors then give a summary of political history to date in the Six Counties. With the northern political establishment having asked in 1922 to opt out of the newly established Irish Free State by petitioning King George V to that effect (as they were entitled to do under Article 12 of the Anglo-Irish Treaty), administration of the Six Counties was duly handed over to the Ulster Unionists. Once this had happened, as the authors say, “the issue of Northern Ireland [and indeed Six County matters in general] was barely discussed in Westminster for the next half century” (p234). For example, the 1967 Abortion Act specifically stated that its provisions did not apply to Northern Ireland.

However, convulsions within the Six Counties from 1964 to 1970 and beyond brought ‘direct rule’ into play. As a result, partition, as the last significant act of colonisation in Ireland, is still alive and well: “The state formations on the island remain those framed by the Government of Ireland Act 1920. Moreover, the artificial border that separates them threatens to become more contested, more militarised by Brexit” (pp390-91). Ending partition means the dismantling of the two partitionist states. “In this phase of decolonisation, this is the target: everything else is tactical or strategic in relation to this goal” (p403).

The situation is all the more anomalous, given the decision that Northern Ireland should cover only six Ulster counties. The reasons for this are well known, but our authors usefully underline the precise nature of the problem unionists faced: viz. the need for the area under their control not to be too small as to be unviable, yet not too large to prevent their controlling it effectively.

McVeigh and Rolston allude in one passage to the notorious ‘two nations theory’, writing:

... arguably the state had to *make* people Protestant. Certainly, it had to create a context in which the categories, ‘Protestant’ and ‘Catholic’, were principal determinants of identity within the state.

This is not as silly as it sounds. In 1920, Protestants were Irish. The Unionist Party and the Orange Order were both Irish. Even in more formal religion terms, the term ‘Protestant’ was less than precise in 1920 ...

In other words, while the term ‘Protestant’ became an ethnic label with real and immediate meaning in the context of the Northern Ireland state, it was never a simple reflection of religious, political or cultural identity. The new state made people ‘Protestant’ in an entirely new way. In this sense, the closest parallel is with the function of ‘whiteness’ in apartheid South Africa: in both cases unifying identities were constructed in novel form in order to transcend all the tensions and contradictions within the settler polity.

Thus, while Northern Ireland never succeeded in achieving dominion status within the empire, here was what Protestant dominion looked like (pp209-10).

The authors deserve praise for mentioning the important figure of Aimé Césaire, poet and politician of the island of Martinique, who pointed out the parallel between fascism in Europe and the practices of colonial administrations outside that continent. They quote from an article by Vijay Prashad, which says of Césaire:

He wanted to judge colonialism from the ashes of Nazism - an ideology that surprised the innocent in Europe, but had been fostered slowly in Europe’s colonial experience. After all, the instruments of Nazism - racial superiority, as well as brutal, genocidal violence - had been cultivated in the colonial worlds of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Césaire, the effervescent poet and communist, had no problem with the encounter between cultures. The entanglements of Europe’s culture with that of Africa and Asia had forged the best of human history across the Mediterranean Sea. But colonialism was not cultural contact. It was brutality (p324 - see also the bibliography, p433).

Brexit, as the authors point out, has not changed fundamentals - only intensified them. The border is still a bone of contention: should it be the Irish Sea, or “the incongruous and illogical international boundary meandering between Newry and Derry and Dundalk and Bundoran - separating people and communities for no good reason”? (p283).

A few minor quibbles:

1. The important figure of Walter Rodney (1942-80), Guyanese author of *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*, could have been mentioned.
2. More could have been said about the ‘two nations theory’, as it still has its supporters today.
3. Brexit is not just a project of excluding people of colour, but also an attack on the social democratic tradition of the EU - as exemplified by the one-time commission president, Jacques Delors.

In conclusion, the analysis offered by Robbie McVeigh and Bill Rolston would appear to reinforce the political conclusions drawn in the CPGB *Draft programme*. Personally, I think that is a plus ●

**Chris Gray**



TV

# Continuing the false narrative

Tom Barrow (director) *The miners' strike 1984 - the battle for Britain* Channel 4

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the miners' Great Strike - a pivotal event in British politics and trade unionism. As such it was always going to be of interest to television producers (as was the 20th anniversary back in 2004). The first new documentary to be aired was this three-part series.

Being a young miner at the time (having begun work for the National Coal Board in 1978 as a 16-year-old,) I watched this series through the filter of someone who was there from start to finish - someone who many times stood in front of the massed ranks of policemen (sometimes they were wearing body armour, sometimes they were on horseback). So I watched the three episodes with great interest and measured the accounts and the narrative against my memories of that desperately long, hard year.

Episode 1, entitled 'On strike', focused on the community of Shirebrook, a pit village in Derbyshire. This would have been a good point to outline the lead-up to the strike: particularly the votes taken before the strike to give the National Union of Mineworkers a mandate to take action if the NCB closed a colliery on purely economic grounds. Or indeed it would have been useful to explain how many pits were on the closure list and, perhaps more importantly, where those pits were. The official number was 20, but the NUM claimed that the accurate figure was actually 70. This was something that was denied by the NCB and the then prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, many times, but was later proved to be correct, when documents with annotations from Thatcher, in her own handwriting, contained that figure.

So the programme proceeded as if no votes were ever taken and there was no preamble or campaign in the year before the strike. It focused on several workers in the local community and at the start of the action all were on strike. Picketing at this particular colliery had been minimal, but that situation ended when one man, said to be new to the village, started scabbing on his new community. This led to a few others doing the same, and we were shown the man who began the scabbing phoning other miners who he claimed "wanted to work". There was no mention here of how he transitioned from being a miner to a 'back to work organiser', but this was briefly covered in episode 3.

The community reacted with fury, as one would expect. But it was not just the miners: their wives and families were introduced at this point, reminding us all that this fight was about working class communities and generations of mining families. The programme proceeded to follow the slow build-up of scabs and a growing divide within the community, plus the growing deployments of police to ensure the scabs were able to cross those picket lines.

The barrage of propaganda issued by the NCB and the daily onslaught of incredibly biased media coverage were only hinted at in a short interview with Anna Soubry, former journalist and Conservative MP. Inevitably the programme concluded with the miners and their families who had stuck out the year-long strike returning to work, in line with the NUM call to end the action. Nothing was said about the damage to the community and to many individual families.

The scab organisers were to return in the final episode, where a



**Battle of Orgreave: police were ready to trigger a riot**

little more light was shone on their backers and activities. Shirebrook Colliery was closed in 1993 - to the surprise of many of the men who had crossed those picket lines.

## Orgreave

The second episode was actually much better than the first. This may have been due to the conclusion of the events at Orgreave - the site of a mass picket over several days - with the high-profile trials that would follow.

The police and the government characterised what happened at Orgreave as a riot and the pickets as 'vicious thugs', intent on conflict with the police. What actually happened was a punishment beating *instructed* by the government and *planned* by the South Yorkshire police (and carried out by police from across the whole country). This was filmed from behind police lines and then disseminated as propaganda after careful editing, with a scripted voice-over telling the story from the police's side only.

But one of the reasons why this episode was better than the first was the inclusion of a video from the NUM's own film crew - one that has been available for 40 years, but rarely seen publicly. The NUM had called for a picket at the Orgreave coking plant in Sheffield to disrupt steel production, and pickets from all coalfields answered the call.

During the strike flying pickets were often stopped from reaching their destination by roadblocks and threats from the police of arrest for whatever the reason of the week was, but this was not the case at Orgreave. Here the pickets were marshalled to the site by the police themselves, who showed them where to park and where the picket line was. This raised suspicions immediately. It was clear that the police response was something very different than experience up to that point - just the sheer number of them on site and ominously the mounted police, who were waiting in the wings, made this obvious.

The programme reasonably showed the events and individual accounts from a few of those who were there on both sides of the police line. Of particular note was a policeman from Hertfordshire stating that they were instructed only to use truncheons on arms, legs and the body, but never to the head - despite the fact that footage was shown where precisely the opposite happened. More than 50 pickets were arrested over the course of the

Orgreave events. The police found a way to raise the charges to include riot - an offence that carried grave penalties for those found guilty.

Here we heard from one of the solicitors who represented arrested pickets. She recounted finding seriously injured pickets in the cells of Rotherham police station and being told they had "fallen down some stairs". She spoke about having not seen this level of corruption in a police force before Orgreave, referring to the almost identical police statements presented as evidence, but clearly dictated by one police officer to all the others.

This was confirmed by an ex-officer from Hertfordshire on camera, while Michael Mansfield KC, who was defending the pickets, highlighted the same issues, when the police offered as evidence a collection of would-be weapons, but could not link them with anyone in the pickets' ranks or locate them anywhere in the hours of police videos of the events. He also pointed out the failings in the police statements - and in particular that of the deputy chief constable, which read as fiction.

The trial collapsed spectacularly due to the sheer weight of police fabrication, but none of the officers faced disciplinary action. In contrast, many of the men charged had to live with the damage inflicted upon them - physically by the police at Orgreave and mentally by the justice system afterwards.

## Useful idiots

The final episode was just a hatchet job on the NUM, aimed at reinforcing the myth that the Conservative government built with help from the media. Bear in mind that this was 1984 - a long time before the current scale of social media, the internet or mobile phones. All we had was the pro-establishment mass media, plus a few leftwing papers with their relatively small readership.

Clearly the programme was to continue the anti-democratic storyline developed by the government during the strike, while ignoring or underplaying the votes held before the mass action. The myth produced by the government was that large numbers of those taking action were only striking due to intimidation from their workmates. This, of course, ignored the fact that the vast majority of miners took part in the strike, having voted in national ballots and individual branch meetings to proceed with the action.

We were shown again the scab organiser from the first episode, but now he was seen as part of a wider group, funded by very rich associates of the Conservative Party. The main focus of this was David Hart, a property developer, but there was actually a network of very wealthy individuals funnelling money to the 'Working Miners Committee'. These useful idiots proclaimed to be non-political, while being funded by friends of the prime minister, and to be democrats, while crossing picket lines, where the vast majority of the workforce had voted to strike.

WMC was guided by people who saw trade unions as the enemy or - as Thatcher called the striking miners - the "enemy within". It would be this group that took legal action against the NUM, leading to the sequestration of its funds.

The programme then moved on to the Libya funding debacle, when the government tried to smear the NUM and its leadership as friends of terrorists. This was an odd affair, which, although presented as very secret, was photographed by the security services from start to finish. I believe no funding was actually forthcoming, but there was a deluge of very bad press built upon this smear. And, of course, this would not be the last time leaders of the left would be victims of a smear campaign.

As the strike came to an end, there were celebrations in Downing Street, while miners who had stuck it out for a year returned to work - defeated, but defiant still. Members of the Working Miners Committee, which, as I have said, claimed to be non-political, were rewarded with dinner at Downing Street with Thatcher - someone not known for entertaining workers socially.

For its part, the WMC would morph into a breakaway union - the ironically named Union of Democratic Mineworkers - or, as it came to be known when pits began to be closed and the immensity of its foul actions were realised, 'DUM'.

The series overall missed the mark, but it did include some individual stories that were well in line with my experiences of the strike. The inclusion of the NUM video from Orgreave was worth the watch, as was the admission of mass acts of perjury by the police. But the definitive story of that year is still to be told on our TV screens.

The next documentary on the strike anniversary will be aired on BBC2 - as I write it is scheduled for 9pm on February 18. Perhaps they can do better? ●

Will Moore

# What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly worker

**Capitalism  
is a system  
of unlimited  
exploitation**

## Climate socialism and climate breakdown

Despite global warming, the slowing down of the Amoc system would paradoxically see Britain much colder and wetter. But any solution to the climate crisis, writes **Eddie Ford**, must lie outside of capitalism

**F**or a while now, there have been alarming media reports about the possible breakdown of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (Amoc) - a vast system of ocean currents that is a key component in global climate regulation, of which the Gulf Stream is a part.

Most people brought up in Britain know all about the Gulf Stream, as they were probably taught it at school like this writer. This is what keeps Britain with a mild climate: stopping us from freezing in winter and making things somewhat cooler during the summer. Essentially, Amoc is a vast marine conveyor belt, where one current gets buried under the other, as it carries heat, carbon and nutrients from the tropics towards the Arctic Circle, where they cool and sink into the deep ocean. This constant churning helps to distribute energy around the planet and modulates the impact of human-caused global warming.

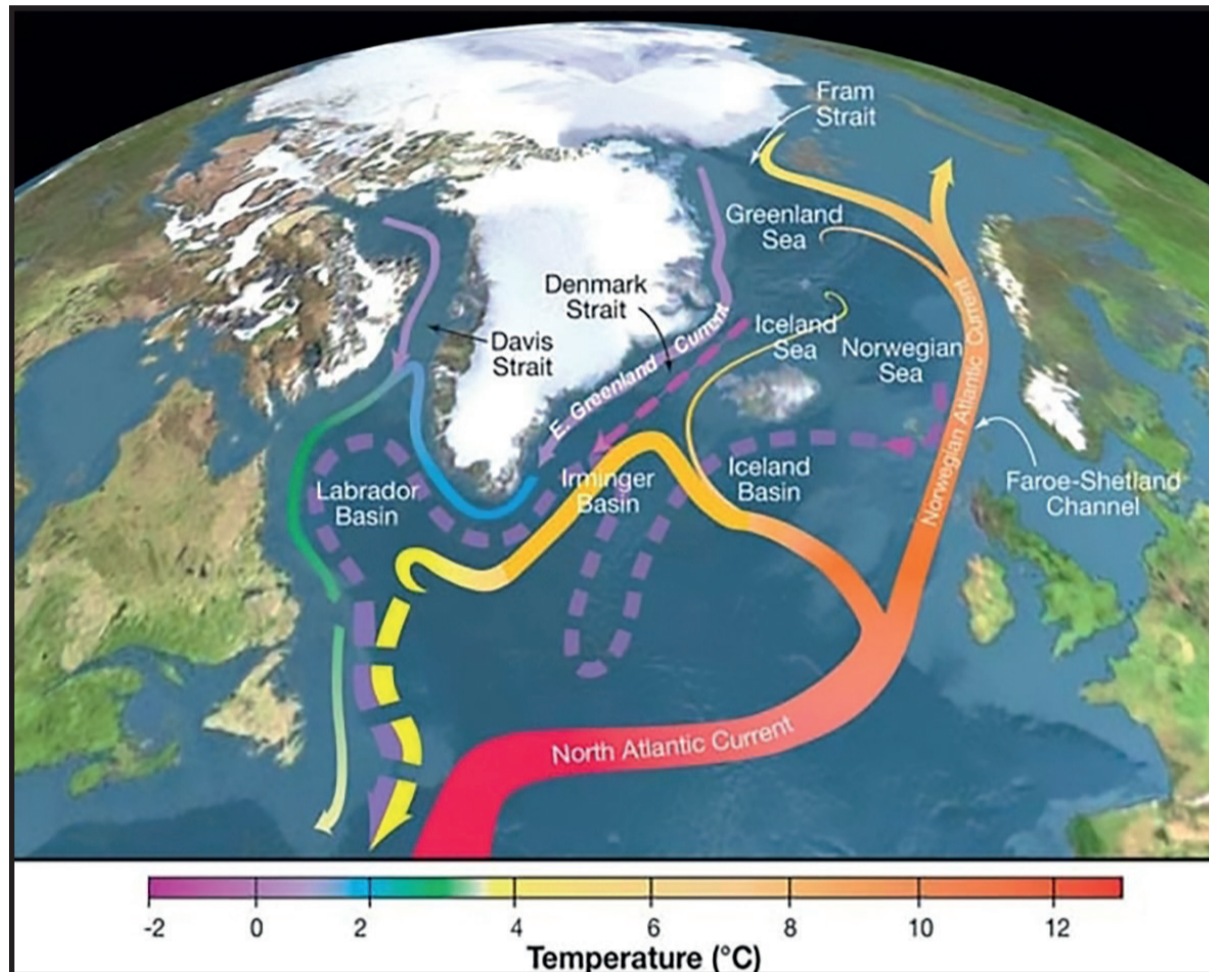
But what has been going on for about the last 100 years, certainly from the 1950s, is Arctic melting, which is releasing non-salt and colder water into the Atlantic and changing the density of surface waters. For example, analysis of satellite records has shown that over the past three decades an estimated 11,000 square miles of Greenland's ice sheet and glaciers have melted - an area equivalent to the size of Albania and amounting to 1.6% of its total ice cover. As ice has retreated, the amount of land with vegetation growing on it has increased by 33,774 square miles - amounting to a near quadrupling of wetlands across Greenland, which, of course, are a source of methane emissions. As a consequence of such climate behaviour, Amoc has declined 15% over this time period and is in its weakest state in more than a millennium - which could prove particularly disastrous for marine life and the communities that depend on it.

Hence we have had a new report from the University of Utrecht published in the *Science Advances* journal that says we stand on the cusp of a dangerous slowing down of Amoc - not a "collapse" as talked about in some media reports, which is sloppy talk. But it is what you will read in a lot of headlines, especially in sensationalist tabloids like the *Daily Mail*, often accompanied by images from the 2004 Hollywood blockbuster, *The day after tomorrow*, that depicts a catastrophic new ice age following the disruption of Amoc, with New York freezing over in a mere weekend or so.

### Tipping point

No, that is not what will happen. But what the Utrecht study says is that there is a distinct possibility of slowdown sometime between 2025 to 2095. That is, *this century* and would represent a climate tipping point.

Of course, any Marxist worth their salt knows all about tipping points - the change from quantity to quality. That is something now accepted in all sorts of different fields, but it used to be a big controversy in biology, and also - for that matter - in climate science until relatively recently. In this context, it is worth reading the



**Slowing down: ocean currents in the northern Atlantic**

last chapter of Charles Darwin's *On the origin of species*, where he warns his readers against this 'leap' question, because this is Marxism - even if he does not explicitly say that. But he thinks that with a leap comes social revolution and Darwin, being a committed liberal reformist, did not want a repeat of Chartism. This attitude is adopted by bourgeois science, to use shorthand, when it comes to the climate question.

However, anti-leap prejudice has been overturned and increasingly scientists have come around to the view that the climate does develop qualitatively - it does go through leaps, shifting from one pattern to another. It can shift from Amoc, almost overnight into another system. No-one knows exactly what the system will be like, but they are saying that Britain, for example, would get a lot colder and wetter. Naturally, some climate sceptics think they are on to something by pointing out that Britain getting colder in the midst of global warming is a paradox. Yes, they are right, but it is not as simple as saying global warming means the temperature will increase everywhere. Rather, we are talking about *complex and chaotic* climate patterns, and therefore a change in weather patterns.

Breaking new ground, the Utrecht papers makes various predictions by looking for warning signs in the salinity levels in the southern Atlantic Ocean between Cape Town and Buenos Aires - using a computer simulation of changes over a period of 2,000 years. Of course, some scientists dispute the findings and the various theoretical models,

which is the very nature of science - the open contestation of different and contrasting views. The UK Met Office, for instance, believes that large, rapid changes in Amoc are "very unlikely" in the 21st century.

### Sea levels

Anyway, the study mapped out some of the consequences of an Amoc slowdown. Sea levels would rise by a metre, inundating many coastal cities like New Orleans, Amsterdam, Bangkok, large parts of London, etc on a permanent basis. Therefore these cities have to be defended by ever higher barriers or abandoned - like Jakarta (Indonesia is building a new capital city more than 1,000 kilometres away).<sup>1</sup> The wet and dry seasons in the Amazon would flip, potentially pushing the already weakened rainforest past its own tipping point - the jungles turning to something more like the Serengeti in Africa. Temperatures around the world would fluctuate far more erratically. The southern hemisphere would become warmer, whilst Europe would cool dramatically, with a country like Britain becoming a rather unpleasant place to live.

Yes, true, Amoc has collapsed and restarted repeatedly in the cycle of ice ages that occurred from 115,000 to 12,000 years ago. But, according to the Utrecht paper in *Science Advances*, Amoc is on track towards another major shift - this time largely human created. The precise point is that this shift would not occur over a protracted period between 2025 and 2095, perhaps giving us time to adapt, but would happen quickly at some point in this time band - an abrupt

qualitative shift with dire implications for large parts of the world. And, when it happens, the changes will be irreversible on any reasonable human timescale.

In other words, the Utrecht scientists and others are saying we do not know when this will happen, but, if something urgent is not done right now about reversing CO<sub>2</sub> and other emissions, this is the sort of thing that can happen - the total degradation, if not destruction, of existing agricultural and habitat patterns. All this at a time when the European Union's Copernicus climate change service, along with others, showed that for the first time global warming has exceeded 1.5°C for an entire year. Of course, the Paris agreement was not about one year over 1.5°C, but an established pattern over many years. But we have breached that 'target' now and if we carry on in that direction, this is what will happen - runaway global warming, more extreme weather, a weakened Amoc, untold millions on the move, and so on.

The world's sea surface is also at its highest ever recorded average temperature, another ominous sign of climate crisis - especially worrying, given that ocean temperatures do not normally peak for another month or so.

### Ruling class

Clearly, the solution has to lie outside capitalism. But, having said that, we have to point out that the ruling class, or at least sections of it, know this - something has to be done; business as usual is not an option. It is hard to believe that they are all stupid or criminally self-interested.

Yet that does not mean proletarian socialism, of course, which is the most democratic and logical thing to do - you actually have to overcome the profit drive, production for the sake of production. But tragically the working class at present is hardly organised on an international basis: it has not readied itself to become the ruling class.

Therefore expect sections of the ruling class to act - maybe the army or the secret state - to impose radical and draconian measures to avert the crisis. Far from it being a humane outcome, expect the opposite, some sort of horrendous outcome, a form of *climate socialism* - communists use the term in the same way that the German high command in World War I talked about war socialism (*Kriegssozialismus*).

That was not heaven - it was hell for the working class. This is a danger that we should be acutely aware of. The big problem with protest politics by groups like Just Stop Oil and Insulate Britain is that they could be easily recruited to such a project - such a regime would be attractive to celebrities, the rich and powerful, demagogues, chancers, etc. Sections of the capitalist class would resist, naturally, but others would welcome it on the grounds that it is either climate socialism or social breakdown.

Admittedly, talking about the possible far-sighted nature of some sections of the ruling class might sound a bit fanciful, when you have the drive by Rishi Sunak to 'max out' the extraction of North Sea oil and gas. Then we have the Labour Party abandoning its pathetic £28 billion-a-year green package of investment. Pathetic - because it goes along with the idea that you can be both 'green' and pro-business, since there is lots of money to be made with electric cars, solar panels, battery technology and suchlike. True, but this is a perverse argument, as capitalism is inherently anti-ecological. Indeed, you could not devise a more anti-ecological system, even if you wanted to. As for things like electric cars, the idea that they are 'green' is absurd - how do you think they are made?

So, while Labour says it is still committed to the same green aims and aspirations, do not believe a word of it - such aims and aspirations would mean breaking with capitalism. Indeed, everything at the moment is pointing to the likelihood that we will burst through 1.5°C and beyond on a permanent basis. Where we end up is impossible to predict, but the crucial point is that the global climate is like the proverbial oil tanker - it takes a long time to turn around.

The ice in the Arctic and Antarctica will continue to melt for at least the next 100 years, even if we were to magically have immediate *zero* net CO<sub>2</sub> emissions on the planet - adding to the momentum of increasing temperatures in an appalling negative feedback loop ●

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### Notes

1. [aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/9/hldwhyindonesia-is-abandoning-its-capital-jakarta-to-save-itself](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/9/hldwhyindonesia-is-abandoning-its-capital-jakarta-to-save-itself)