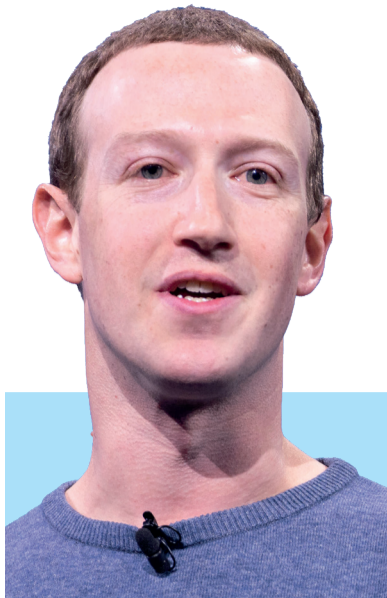


weekly **worker**



Mark Zuckerberg bet the farm on the metaverse being the next big thing and lost big-time

- Letters and debate
- Labour's flailing official left
- Lukács: 100 years of muddle
- CPGB members' aggregate

No 1443 May 18 2023

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

SIR KEIR PUMPS UP ON STEROIDS



LETTERS



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

Better offer

There have almost never been good guys, but when have the people who have suppressed peaceful protest been the less bad guys? Why enact the Public Order Act, or the Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Act, or the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act, or the Nationality and Borders Act, or the Elections Act, or the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act? Why seek to enact the Online Safety Bill, or the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill, or the National Security Bill? Why empower the home secretary to strip people of their British citizenship without having to give any reason, even if that rendered them stateless (and now without even having to tell them)?

The only possible reason is so that those powers should be used. Where they already exist, then they are already being used. Wayne Couzens could not now be arrested. He used his valid warrant card, and his police-issue handcuffs, so nothing that he did with them could ever now be a criminal offence. That is the Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Act, on which Labour abstained and which it would not repeal. It would not repeal any of the measures listed above. It would use them to their full extent, and it would turn a blind eye when they were exceeded, if they could be.

Thankfully, there is going to be a hung parliament next year. To strengthen families and communities by securing economic equality and international peace through the democratic political control of the means to those ends, including national and parliamentary sovereignty, we need to hold the balance of power. Owing nothing to either main party, we must be open to the better offer. There does, however, need to be a better offer. Not a lesser evil, which in any case the Labour Party is not.

David Lindsay
Lanchester

Next election

Labour is on course to make gains in the general election next year. Its leader likes to make comparisons with the party's successes in 1945, 64 and 97, but a result like 1974 seems more likely. A broken economic model and a global conflict have combined to cause high inflation, a 'cost of living' crisis and consequent industrial unrest. Unlike in 1974, no-one on the left has any illusions as to what Labour will do in government, and its leadership will immediately move to a deal with the Liberals to freeze out any influence of the left in parliament.

In his report on the local elections in England, Kevin Bean passes over the left-of-Labour candidates other than those of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (Tusc) and thus misses commenting on the remarkable fact that for the left - both reformist and 'revolutionary' - there is near-unanimity on the hopelessness of intervention in Labour ('On course for No10', May 11).

To their credit, the comrades of the Socialist Party again acted within Tusc to ensure that all candidates with left-of-Labour politics - notably those of the Communist Party of Britain and newer post-Corbyn formations - were included on Tusc's list of recommendations to electors. Its draft report on the local election results says that, although Tusc candidates mainly were drawn from the ranks of the

Socialist Party, individual members of the Socialist Workers Party and Anti-Capitalist Resistance stood as part of the coalition.

The decision to carry out electoral work independent of the Labour leadership is to be applauded, even if we may be critical of the groups to which they belong. These comrades are to be commended for putting themselves forward in their communities, speaking to other members of our class as communists, socialists and trade unionists who are critical of the Labour leadership and resolute in siding with workers in struggle.

While it is true that Labour is and has always been a bourgeois workers' party, engagement with it on the part of the vanguard of our class - active trade unionists and class-conscious proletarians - has returned to the transactional approach of the New Labour years. The lack of enthusiasm for Starmer is somewhat indicative of the widespread realisation of the kind of government he may lead.

It seems unlikely that sufficient numbers of active members will be able to get the big unions to split before a general election and Labour proving itself a failure to the movement when in office. Instead, most affiliated unions will continue to have a scaled-back relationship with the party. So there will be no big 'Labour Party mark two' effort on the part of trade unions themselves.

Some class-conscious workers may - if not forced to vote tactically to stop or remove the Tories - increasingly back Green candidates as a protest, given their occasional left-reformist positioning. Thousands may join or donate to the Greens if nothing else presents itself.

This does leave open the political space for the left to put forward a more radical workers' list of candidates rather than a blanket endorsement of the official Labour candidates. John Smith's suggestion that *Weekly Worker* comrades stand as Communist Alternative candidates is perhaps not so outlandish (Letters, May 11). If the aspiration is the formation of a mass Communist Party, why not do electoral work in preparation?

Ansell Eade
Lincolnshire

Gold and paper

Michael Roberts correctly says that the current policy of central banks, of raising interest rates, will not reduce inflation ('Rates up, economy down', May 11). But, Roberts' argument as to why that is the case is totally fallacious. He gives us simply the bourgeois economics explanation of the determination of prices by the interaction of supply and demand. His explanation is basically the Keynesian theory - except, where the Keynesians are usually to be seen arguing the case that it is wages causing costs to rise, Roberts argues that it is supply bottlenecks that have been responsible.

In other words, according to Roberts, as with the bourgeois/neoclassical economic theory, prices are determined by the interaction of supply and demand. It is the theory expounded by Lord Lauderdale, and dismissed by Ricardo, as set out by Marx, in *The poverty of philosophy*. The only difference is that Roberts applies this to the general price level, rather than to the prices of individual commodities. In other words, where the bourgeois theory explains prices of individual commodities on the basis of the demand for and supply of those commodities, Roberts seeks to explain the general level of prices on the basis of the interaction of aggregate demand and aggregate supply for all commodities.

In fact, he is not consistent even in

that, because what he gives is not an explanation of changes in the *general* price level (inflation), but only an explanation of changes in the prices of *certain* commodities - primarily energy and food. It's quite true, as Marx explains in *A contribution to the critique of political economy*, that the prices of *some* commodities can rise, because their costs of production/value rise: ie, more universal labour is required for their production as a result of a fall in productivity, but that is not the same as inflation nor a rise in the prices of *all*, or the majority of, commodities. For one thing, social productivity generally *rises* each year, so *reducing* the aggregate value of all commodities.

For it to explain a rise in the *general* price level - ie, a rise in the prices of *all*, or at least the large majority of, commodities - it would have to be the case that social productivity as a whole, fell: ie, the universal labour required for the production of *all* commodities rose. Even then, that would not explain a rise in *prices*, as against a rise in *values*. If we take Marx's explanation of what *price* is, as against *value*, it is the value of a commodity expressed *indirectly* in terms of a quantity of the money commodity, say gold.

If we call all commodities A, and the universal labour required to produce one million units of A is 1 million hours, and the value of an ounce of gold, as the standard of prices, is equal to 10 hours of universal labour, then the money equivalent/price of the one million units is 100,000 ounces of gold/standard of prices £1, is then equal to £100,000. If, as a result of a fall in social productivity, the value of A rises to 1.2 million hours, this same fall in social productivity would increase the value of an ounce of gold/£1 to 12 hours and, consequently, the money equivalent of the one million units of A remains 100,000 ounces of gold/£100,000, with the average unit price of a commodity remaining as £0.10.

In fact, Roberts talks not of a general fall in social productivity, but of a rise, albeit "*low productivity growth*". But any productivity growth, low or not, should result in values, in aggregate, falling, not rising. The only basis upon which prices could rise, then, is if there is a difference in the change in the value of commodities in aggregate, as against the value of the standard of prices, which indirectly measures those values, in the same way that a metre or a yardstick measures lengths.

Marx set out two ways that could happen. Firstly, the value of gold itself might fall, and so the value of the standard of prices would fall, causing all prices to rise; or, alternatively, the quantity of gold represented by the standard of prices could be reduced, thereby reducing the value of the standard of prices. But today, with fiat currencies, the standard of prices is not determined by any quantitative relation to gold or any other precious metal. The standard of prices, in each country - be it dollars, pounds, euros, yen - is simply a direct representative of a certain quantity of universal labour/social labour-time, and what that quantity is determined by is the quantity of these money tokens thrown into circulation.

As Marx put it, "Whereas, therefore, the quantity of gold in circulation depends on the prices of commodities, the value of the paper in circulation, on the other hand, depends solely on its own quantity."

Roberts says that he and others have argued "with evidence" that "this monetary tightening policy will have little effect on getting inflation down, because its causes do not lie in excessive money supply". But that is

not what Marx's analysis and theory suggests - nor is it what the evidence itself suggests. Raising central bank interest rates does not constitute monetary tightening, particularly where real interest rates (nominal rates minus inflation) remain significantly negative, in conditions where liquidity continues to be expanded, either as a result of continued QE or other central bank liquidity or as a result of expanding credit.

In May 2021, Roberts' model of inflation, he told us, predicted US inflation rising above 3% that year and next. Well, of course, strictly speaking, it did go above 3%, but the implication of his statement was that it was not going much above 3%, especially in conditions in which he was also predicting that the ending of lockdowns was going, yet again, to result in a slump. In fact, even by the time Roberts' words appeared in print, US inflation had risen to 5%, and, as I predicted at the time, were set to rise much further. My prediction that US inflation was set to hit not Roberts' 3% figure, but 9.6%, was more or less spot on, as it came in at 9.1% a year later, in June 2022.

Marx's theory and analysis that inflation is a monetary phenomenon - caused by an excessive amount of liquidity thrown into circulation, devaluing the standard of prices - has again been entirely vindicated. In the period from the 1980s that excessive liquidity caused a huge inflation of asset prices, and now, as it has been fed into the real economy, following the ending of lockdowns, it has created the current commodity price inflation.

Arthur Bough
email

Baby's bathwater

During the debate over Mike Macnair's evaluation of György Lukács at the May 14 Online Communist Forum, I made the point that Martin Heidegger, with whom Lukács had debated, was a card-carrying Nazi from 1933 to its dissolution by the Allies in 1945 and that it was impossible to separate his politics from his philosophy - both were equally reactionary. Not so, Daniel Lazare protested - I was "throwing the baby out with the bathwater". So here, presumably, the bathwater is his Nazism - a secondary feature of his entire persona, practically unrelated to his real historical essence, his philosophy, from which humanity apparently still has a lot to learn.

This was certainly Lukács's position; it was the line taken by Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and other semi-Stalinist, anti-Trotskyist French philosophers after the war. There once was a magazine in Ireland called *The Heidegger Review*, edited by a close friend of mine who was later a Maoist and then a member of Brendan Clifford's British and Irish Communist Organisation. It went to three issues and had articles from many of the great and good of Irish society. I attacked it ideologically in the above terms and I think this may well have contributed to its demise. This is John Minahane defending Heidegger:

"Gerry Downing misrepresents the philosophy of Martin Heidegger by saying that it 'found its logical expression in the death camps'... I have shown that this idea is a misrepresentation... What found its logical expression in the death camps was high technology linked to the modern ideology of conquest, exemplified by Great Britain, which was Hitler's model... Heidegger's thinking did not cultivate aggression. There is no logic in connecting him with death camps. It would be more logical to make that connection with John Locke, whom Downing cites favourably, since he was an important

ideologist of colonial plunder."

György Lukács's *History and class consciousness* endorses Heidegger's *Dasein* and its irrational idealism. Here is my take on this from a 2015 article:

"This is one more illustration of how reactionary was the mysticism of the famous *Dasein* ('being', 'self'), supposedly lodged in the distant past of pre-Socratic philosophy..., lost in the intervening centuries by false interpretation of the 'self' and what it is to be yourself, now rediscovered by himself alone. If that seems ridiculous, it is because it is ridiculous. But apparently in Nazi mysticism some traditions did preserve this ancient 'self' or 'being' in a true form and one of these was the Cathars of the Languedoc in the south of France, who were apparently the keepers of the Holy Grail. The last of them perished in the mass fires of the Inquisition in 1244 at the end of the so-called Albigensian Crusade.

"So we are told: 'On March 16 1944, on the 700th anniversary of the fall of Montségur [the Cathars' last redoubt - GD], Nazi planes are reported to have flown patterns over the ruins - either swastikas or Celtic crosses, depending upon the sources. The Nazi ideologist, Alfred Rosenberg was reported to be on board one of the airplanes.'

"And that emphasises to what a dead-end the 'greatest philosopher of the 20th century' has led modern philosophy: existentialism, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstructionism and postmodernism - all petty bourgeois opponents of Marxism and dialectical materialism - developed to keep the middle classes on the side of finance capital against the global working class in its revolutionary mission to overthrow capitalism and forge a communist future."

In 1980 Cliff Slaughter published his book, *Marxism, ideology and literature*, with chapter 4 consisting of 35 pages on György Lukács. Here he spells out that the essence of the man is his rejection of the Russian Revolution ideology of world revolution and his adherence to socialism in a single country, the rising bureaucracy's self-defence against Trotskyism and that heritage. He explains that Lukács's 1928 'Blum theses' - advocating the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, rejected by Lenin in his April theses - was merely his Stalinism spelled out before Hitler's victory in 1933 and the adoption of the popular front. Bela Kun and Stalin were then applying the Third Period social-fascist ultra-leftism, which divided the German working class and allowed Hitler to take power without a shot being fired.

The popular front was the abandonment of the class independence of the working class. This is the point at which Stalinism as an ideology ceased to be communist in any meaningful sense of the world.

I note that Lawrence Parker attacks Zinoviev from the right in his *Weekly Worker* article, 'Scenes from history' (April 27), at the point when Zinoviev tacked briefly to the left against the alliance between Stalin and Bukharin from 1925, while the rightist, capitalist-restorationist Bukharin was supporting the Kulaks and the NEP men ('enrich yourselves'), when the dissolution of the communists into the Kuomintang was obviously now endangering the Chinese communists.

When the inevitable outcome of the appalling policy resulted in the massacre of the Shanghai Soviet in April 1927, Zinoviev commented to Trotsky that now we will win: we

have won the argument and “you have been proved correct”. No, said Trotsky, “the revolution never wins by defeats”.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Personal analysis

I take exception to Tony Greenstein’s representation of the Combahee River Collective - a political organisation which was active in the 1970s on the east coast of the US (Letters, May 11). Notwithstanding the political aspects which might be opposed from a 21st century perspective, their basic politics consisted, categorically, of a socialist analysis.

They had a keen understanding - incompatible with current identity politics - that the embodiment of the enemy oppressor is in the capitalist, imperialist and patriarchal systems: “We realise that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe the work must be organised for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses.” The collective made an attempt to correct and push back on the white racism and class nature of second-wave feminism. Tony, in his criticism, quotes them as saying “radical politics come directly out of our own identity” - this is to their credit and is a trenchant example of ‘Marxist identity politics’ to be celebrated, not criticised.

One can arrive at a class analysis via “one’s own oppression” without succumbing to identity politics - one way to view and understand the world is precisely “via the prism of one’s own oppression”. The personal and political spheres, in terms of theory, are not mutually exclusive, but are often coequal principles which work in tandem; the social and political should not always be emphasised at the expense of the personal, and politics shouldn’t be counterposed to personal consciousness. Many of us are living witnesses to the transformative nature of personal issues, related to gender oppression, when these issues are politicised in the process of an internationalist understanding of class. Additionally, an awareness can develop from personal oppression that other people’s oppression doesn’t need to be experienced in order to fight against it: this doesn’t characterise

identity politics.

The genius of the women’s movement of the 60s and 70s in the US, despite its pitfalls, was its distinctive concepts: ie, ‘The personal is political’, which led to prolific political evolution (or counterrevolutionary separatism, as the case may be). The defining issues which were examined included: psychology and consciousness; bodily autonomy; sexual and erotic expression (which led to the anti-pornography movement with its proponents and critics), etc. Personal experience was the fundamental lynchpin of political practice and theory, and it made feminism a potentially revolutionary and liberatory project.

There’s an important personal dimension to politics, which is often downplayed. The Marxist approach is to combine the subjective organisation - in essence personal resistance - with the objective goal: namely the conquest of state power. Tony is right to say (to paraphrase) that identity politics prioritises the individual situation over a change in society and has the effect of preventing change - I would concur that there are no individual solutions to structural problems, but I want to keep in mind the notion that personal forms of awareness and struggle can lead to socialism as well as to bourgeois individualism.

The importance of political circumstances shouldn’t automatically take precedence over the personal elements. It doesn’t contradict Marxism: it in fact explains it - to advocate for a fight against oppression which is not subordinated to a fight against exploitation. The struggle for gender rights, racial justice, etc in a multiracial, socialist organisation is not ‘identity politics’ and is not oppositional to Marxist class struggle. Marx wrote in 1844: “Workers formed a class which cannot emancipate itself without ... emancipating all other spheres of society.”

The personal identity struggles within a socialist movement can only strengthen that movement and make it possible, viable and necessary.

GG
USA

London recruits

Comrades may remember the 2012 book, *London recruits*, edited by Ken Keable, which told the story of a group of young comrades, mainly from Britain, who went to South Africa to help out the African

National Congress - the entire operation directed from London by the ANC’s Oliver Tambo and the South African Communist Party’s Joe Slovo. A private showing of the film of the same name, directed by Gordon Main of Barefoot Rascals, was held last weekend for the recruits and those who took part in its production, along with their friends and families.

The recruits went because the ANC had been decimated by the apartheid government, their secret police and stool-pigeons. The young people were to bring with them leaflets from activists in exile to let those who were suffering under apartheid know that the ANC was still there, still active, ready to regroup and continue the struggle.

The recruits were mainly from the Young Communist League, as well as from other left groups. They were to fly in as innocent tourists, leave a pack of leaflets in devices which would explode in a place where many black South Africans would be leaving their workplaces. No-one would get hurt, but people would know that the ANC was still there.

The film follows several of the recruits as they go about their clandestinity. In one case, four leaflet bombs were to go off at the same time, while two recruits were arrested in another clandestine operation, and spent several years in prison. The filming is wonderful - young actors are juxtaposed with the real (now much older) recruits giving some background. And the exquisite South African scenery adds to the lustre of the emotional tenor of the story.

Although told to keep the information secret from everybody, one recruit, Tom Bell, felt he had to tell his mother. While she was washing the dishes, he came into the kitchen and said: “Mum, I’m going to Cape Town to do some underground work for the ANC. We could get caught.” Not even turning around, she said, “Oh, okay. Let me know when you will go.”

Another scene had the audience totally silent. Sean Hosey, in solitary confinement after interrogation, could hear the other (black) prisoners in a nearby cell. Every Wednesday night eight men from that very crowded cell were given notice of their hanging the following day at 6.30am. The prisoners stayed up all night singing with the men who were going to be hanged, and the singing got louder and gained strength as the night went on. The determination of the men singing together was truly awe-inspiring.

Every person involved in this work, which went on for several years, was sworn to secrecy. And it remained completely secret until Ken Keable decided, around 2000, that the time had come to reveal what happened. He wrote his own story, then contacted other recruits and had them each write theirs.

Apparently the film will be shown to other private audiences and, assuming that all goes well with the film festival, it should be more widely released in October. Where, nobody knows yet - whether in art houses, on Netflix, etc is still to be decided.

In the meantime the book is still available and it is a thumping good read. Both the book and the film show how the best of committed people are willing to put themselves in danger for the sake of international solidarity. The recruits can be proud of what they contributed to a struggle for freedom.

Gaby Rubin
London

ACTION

World at war and the movement for peace

Saturday May 20, 10am to 4pm: Conference for union members, Brunswick Methodist Centre, Brunswick Place, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1. Working people are the main victims of war. The slogan, ‘Welfare, not warfare’, should be taken up by the whole of the trade union movement. Tickets free (registration required). Organised by Newcastle Stop the War: www.facebook.com/events/563473509218535.

Nazis out of Newcastle

Saturday May 20, 12 noon: Counter-protest against the neo-Nazi ‘North East Frontline Patriots’. Assemble at The Blue Carpet, New Bridge Street West, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1. Organised by Stand Up To Racism - North East: www.facebook.com/events/884124336148416.

Stop US nukes coming to Lakenheath

Saturday May 20, 1pm: Rally and workshops outside RAF Lakenheath, Brandon Road, Lakenheath IP27. Oppose the presence of US nuclear bombs at Lakenheath, which increase global tensions and put Britain on the front line in a Nato/Russia war. Coach travel available. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: cnduk.org/events/lakenheathmay20.

Support Erskine anti-racists

Sunday May 21, 11am: Demonstration and community solidarity event, Muthu Glasgow River Hotel, Riverfront, Erskine PA8. Fascist groups Patriotic Alternative and Homeland Party have been running a campaign of intimidation and hatred against refugees in Erskine. Organised by Stand Up To Racism Glasgow: www.facebook.com/events/537164575283976.

Emergency protest: protect the right to strike

Monday May 22, 6pm: Protest, Parliament Square, London SW1. Multi-millionaire Tory politicians are attacking your right to strike. They’re planning to sack workers who take action to improve pay and conditions. Reject and repeal the strikes bill. Organised by the Trades Union Congress: www.tuc.org.uk/events/emergency-protest-protect-right-strike.

Show me the bodies - how we let Grenfell happen

Tuesday May 23, 6.30pm: Online and in-person book event, Bookmarks, 1 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1. Peter Apps, deputy editor of *Inside Housing*, discusses his acclaimed book, which covers the horror of the fire and how housing, economic and political systems facilitated the tragedy. Entrance free (registration required). Organised by Homes for All: www.axethehousingact.org.uk.

What it means to be human

Tuesday May 23, 6.30pm: Series of talks on social and biological anthropology. This talk is online only, via Zoom: ‘Mimetic performance, cognitive evolution and mixed creatures’. Speaker: Deon Liebenberg. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/130309339881181.

The world at war: a trade union issue

Meetings organised by Stop the War Coalition.
Wednesday May 24, 12.30pm: PCS conference fringe meeting, Syndicate Room 3, Conference Centre, Kings Road, Brighton BN1. Speakers include Claudia Webbe MP, Austin Harney (PCS), Lindsey German and Andrew Murray (Stop the War). www.stopwar.org.uk/cities/brighton.

Saturday May 27, 12.30pm: UCU conference fringe meeting, Pacific Room, Hilton Garden Inn, Finnieston Quay, Glasgow G3. Speakers: Andrew Murray (Stop the War), Sean Vernell (UCU). www.stopwar.org.uk/cities/glasgow.

Jesus: a life in class conflict

Thursday June 1, 7pm: Online and in-person book launch, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. James Crossley and Robert Myles discuss their new book, which provides a materialist take on the historical Jesus. Registration £5 (£3). Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/429.

50th anniversary of Critique

Saturday June 10, 10am to 5pm: Online and in-person conference, Thai Theatre, New Academic Building, 54 Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London WC2. Celebrate 50 years of *Critique journal of socialist theory*. Organised by Critique, www.facebook.com/critiquesocialistjournal.

Oppose Nazis in Leeds

Saturday June 10, 12.30pm: Counter-protest against the neo-Nazi ‘Yorkshire Patriots’, Victoria Gardens, The Headrow, Leeds LS1. Organised by Leeds Stand Up To Racism: www.facebook.com/events/3455053531400025.

Jarrow rebel town festival

Saturday June 17, 10.45am: Parade, speeches and musicians. Assemble pedestrian tunnel, Tyne Street, Jarrow NE32. Led by Felling Silver Band. Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn MP, Kate Osbourne MP and Alex Gordon (RMT). Organised by Follonsby Miners Lodge Banner Heritage and Community Association: www.facebook.com/southshieldstuc.

National Shop Stewards Network

Saturday June 24, 11am to 4.30pm: Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Bringing together active rank-and-file trade unionists from across the movement. All union members are welcome to attend and to participate in the discussion. Registration £6. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/events/1595519607615141.

CPGB wills

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

Fighting fund

You can do it!

The last seven days saw a slight improvement in terms of donations to the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund, with £527 coming our way, taking the running total for May up to £982.

But that is no cause for celebration, because, as regular readers of this column will need no reminding, our monthly target is for £2,250. In other words, with over half the month now behind us, we haven’t even reached the first grand yet. So we really do need to move into top gear very soon.

Not that there weren’t some very handy donations over the last seven days. Topping the lot was KB’s fantastic £170, while other excellent bank transfers/standing orders came from MM (£75), PB (£70), TR (£40), SB (£20), SS (£15) and CC (£10). Thanks very much to all those comrades!

In addition there were PayPal

contributions to the fund from RL and US comrade PM (£50 each), plus £10 from comrade MZ in Italy. Finally there was that regular banknote received from comrade Hassan - this time for a tenner.

But please let me make my usual appeal to other readers: we really do need to step up the pace. We’ve fallen short of that target for the last two months, so we must make sure we get there this time round. The *Weekly Worker* absolutely relies on its readers not only to keep publishing, but to improve and expand our reach through social media.

So please ensure we don’t miss out for three months in a row. You can do it! ●

Robbie Rix

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

LABOUR

Lowering the stakes

Starmer's promise to be 'New Labour on steroids' is not about being exciting, but boring. Eddie Ford offers some thoughts on mainstream politics

Sir Keir Starmer must be pleased with the reaction to his speech to the Progressive Britain conference on May 13, which attracted a lot of media attention. Now that the Labour Party is the largest party in local government for the first time since 2002, with the Tories losing more than 1,000 seats on May 4, he must increasingly feel that the only way is up - unless he does or says something extraordinarily stupid. No10 is tantalisingly close for a man who, as some on the left stupidly argued, did not really want to beat the Tories and become prime minister. He only wanted to defeat the left.

Of course, Progressive Britain is the perfect venue for such a speech. It has been a rightwing incubus within Labour for decades, founded precisely to support the New Labour leadership of Tony Blair and provide training for like-minded people seeking selection as Labour candidates. The party is prepared for a "dirty and nasty" campaign ahead of next year's general election, Starmer said - something that is hard to doubt. Therefore, according to him, the project of reforming the party root and branch in the aftermath of the Jeremy Corbyn era - a traumatic disaster never to be repeated - must go much further than anything Tony Blair was able to do. For Sir Keir, reforms were urgently necessary because an incoming Labour government will have bigger tasks. That is why Starmer thinks his government would have to be 1945, 1964 and 1997 all rolled into one (and then some more).

Naturally, as it has totemic status amongst the Labour right (our 'finest hour'), he highlighted Blair's move in 1995 to rewrite clause four. True, from a Marxist perspective the original formulation was a Fabian nonsense anyway, but the rewrite was an open love letter to the bourgeoisie and its media about how Labour was now a sensible party fully committed to capitalism - so stuff like mass nationalisation represented the dreadful 'old Labour' past. Anyhow, Starmer told the conference that "this is about taking our party back to where we belong and where we should always have been" (indeed, about "back doing what we were created to do" - which is more than arguable, but leave that aside for now). Getting into his stride, the Labour leader declared that the task ahead is about "rolling our sleeves up, changing our entire culture, our DNA" - this will be like Tony Blair's "clause four on steroids". Extra claps, please!

In a not particularly original line of thought - but that is Starmer all over - he went on to attack the Tories for being "unconservative" and failing to understand people's need for "stability, order, security". Rishi Sunak's party, he said, does not stand up for "our rivers and seas, not our NHS or BBC, not our families, not our nation" - but "we must understand there are precious things in our way of life" and "in our environment". However, Starmer reassured everybody, it is Labour's "responsibility to protect and preserve and to pass on to future generations" - before coming to what might have been the big sales pitch: "And if that sounds conservative, then let me tell you: I don't care" - after all, "somebody has got to stand up for the things that make this country great, and it isn't going to be the Tories". *Conservation*, not *Conservatism* - get the message?

Inevitably, given Labour's



Perfect platform for Sir Keir

impressive gains in the local elections, but also the strong showing for the Liberal Democrats, there was much speculation about a possible hung parliament, coalitions, and so on. But Shabana Mahmood, Labour's national campaign coordinator (ie, election chief), popped up on the media to shoot down such chatter - insisting that the party was on course for an *absolute majority*. Yes, she remarked, there was "polite disagreement with some of the psephologists" who extrapolated the local election data to predict a hung parliament, given that last week's voting did not take place in Scotland, Wales or London. Yet, if you look at the "fuller picture", with Labour especially confident of making gains in Scotland - which is a reasonable expectation - Mahmood believes that Labour is on course for victory without any grubby deals with the Lib Dems or anyone else.

Defeat

On this it is quite conceivable that the media will run an updated version of Cleggmaina in order to boost the possibilities of a coalition government, the de-Labourisation of Labour and a return to the wonderful days of the 19th century, when Tory governments replaced Liberal governments and vice versa ... and the working class was mere voting fodder. Whether or not they can do it with Sir Ed Davey is another matter. Labour is certainly counting on Lib Dem voters in the local elections going over to Labour in a general election when it is about choosing a government (the same applies with disorientated SNP voters in Scotland).

Almost as Sir Keir had just finished speaking came the leaking of 86 pages of National Policy Forum proposals for debate - including measures such as day-one rights for workers, billions of pounds of green investment, reform of childcare, and a huge expansion of NHS staffing, as well as votes at 16.¹ In other words, early work on Labour's manifesto.

Was it a cunning leak by Sir Keir and his team? Was it sabotage? Was

it cock-up? Obviously, we do not know. But the chances are this was cock-up - because it resulted, as would be expected, in mixed messages, when it came to both the liberal and conservative media.

Described as an "initial draft - subject to amendment", it covers six key policy areas. Policies will first be "debated, amended and agreed" by those involved in the NPF, with its members able to submit amendments until June, and then a key meeting in late July. The proposed policies are then "subject to approval" at Labour's annual conference. Ahead of an election, 'stakeholders' will hold a further "clause five meeting" to decide which parts of the programme reach the manifesto. Whatever the fine details, we should expect a bonfire of proposals.

With the stakes now high, Labour is under pressure from trade unions, business, media pundits, etc, to set out its killer policies in the months running up to the Liverpool conference in the autumn. But it will be Sir Keir and his team who will finally decide on the manifesto - and the chances are that it will be anodyne to the point of 'boring'. Far from being stupid, that is in actual fact a clever approach to take ... well, if you discount global warming, overshooting the 1.5°C target limit and the threat of civilisational collapse (and perhaps generalised nuclear exchange).

Remember, Sir Keir wants to win. He wants to become prime minister. In that sense he is a consummate bourgeois career politician fully in the spirit of a Tony Blair, who did everything he could to ratchet down expectations and triangulate deep into traditional Tory territory. Sir Keir will do exactly that. The official Labour left will predictably wail and gnash their teeth. Just what Sir Keir wants. It will boost his standing with the rightwing media and maybe help dispel any lingering doubts that in some strange way he remains a Pabloite deep entryist bent on a secret mission to bring about the red revolution.

In government it might be different.

Under both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, Labour talked *right* but then went on to spend shedloads of money on the NHS, education, welfare, etc. This caught out some leftwing journalists, who, flying on mental autopilot, produced articles about New Labour's "cuts", despite record levels of spending - dumbly assuming that governments always cut. Yes, sometimes, but they can also spend big as well. Of course, Blair and Brown inherited a 'booming' economy from John Major (in no small part thanks to the 'creative destruction' of British industry wrought by the Thatcher government, the smashing of trade union power and the shift to the City and financialisation).

Rishi Sunak will leave no such legacy. With UK growth rates registering a barely perceptible 0.1%, bottom of the G7 league, with the self-inflicted disruption caused by Brexit, with the UK once again talked about as the 'sick man of Europe', with inflation over 10% and an ongoing strike wave, a Starmer government will be more 1929 or 1974, than 1945, 1964 or 1997. Nothing is certain though - struggle decides. If the left, the trade unions and the forces of anti-capitalism got their act together - a big ask - it could be another matter.

We certainly need to understand what Sir Keir and his front bench would *like to do*, if only they could. To get a handle on that we should take a look at the leaked NPF draft. Amongst many things, the NPF proposals talk about rail nationalisation ("public ownership") and abolition of non-dom status, not to mention how executives of private equity firms will also lose tax breaks - vowing to close a loophole that allows them to minimise how much tax they pay on their "carried interest" in their firm's profits. There is a commitment to the *insourcing* of services instead of compulsory outsourcing, and how Labour should "remove the tax loopholes that private schools enjoy" (even if the specifics remain unclear).

This kind of talk goes down badly with the likes of *The Times*,

Telegraph, *Express* and *Mail*. Which is exactly why the eventual general election manifesto will be way to the right of such handovers from the dark days of Corbyn. Already, though, the knives are out. An equals sign is placed between Starmer and the NPF. We read that "Starmer's plans" would "make it easier for workers to strike" by repealing the Trade Union Act 2016, which introduced higher thresholds for the number of union votes needed for a strike to be legal. And "Starmer wants" to give people "the legal right to work from home", despite the "growing fears that Britain's low productivity is undermining the economic recovery".

Tut-tuttingly, the *Telegraph* says Starmer's Labour will "support a full investigation" into the Battle of Orgreave on June 18 1984 - when phalanxes of riot cops attacked striking miners (reported the other way round in the media, the *unbiased* BBC included). The *Torygraph* also has it that Sir Keir's Labour is proposing to "release documents held by government relating to the historic Cammell Laird prosecutions and carry out a review into the jailing of striking workers". This refers to when workers in Birkenhead were sentenced to a month in prison for contempt of court in 1984 after taking part in industrial action.

But the chances are that Sir Keir and his front bench will be hard pressed to deliver what should be expected to be a famished general election manifesto in 2024. The world economy could easily nose-dive, especially if the Ukraine war takes a turn for the worse with a major escalation or even a full-out war between the US/Nato and Russia (or China over Taiwan). Either way, if only by intention, a Labour government fronted by Sir Keir will be the most rightwing in British history. This is not the inevitable product of Pabloism, but four decades of defeat for the working class in the UK and beyond.

Picture

The overall picture is complex, contradictory, but still going to the right with only a few partial exceptions (like the pink tide in Latin America). Globally, there is a movement towards greater state intervention and protectionism - look at the measures the US is taking against China on a near daily basis. This movement can certainly be found in the Tory Party too, as reflected in the recent and sometimes deeply weird National Conservatism conference (one of the guest speakers being no less than Frank Furedi, former leader of the Revolutionary Communist Party). There was an open clash between those defending Sunak's version of boring and those advocating deregulation and a 'Thatcherism on steroids' agenda - thus the attacks on Kemi Badenoch over her "massive climbdown" on scrapping all European Union laws by December 31.

Chances are that Liz Truss is forever toast. But, seemingly, Priti Patel, Suella Braverman and even Boris Johnson are looking for their chance - not this year for sure, nor the next, but the year after - of replacing Rishi Sunak as leader of the opposition ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. labourlist.org/2023/05/labour-manifesto-2024-election-what-policies-npf-party.

LABOUR LEFT

Witch-hunt grows

While some on the disorientated left will support 'anyone but Labour', writes Carla Roberts, Momentum and what remains of the official Labour left beg Sir Keir for unity

Labour did well in the local elections - but not well enough to avoid the potential of a hung parliament at the next general election. For John McDonnell this presents a golden opportunity to once again bang on about the need for Labour to become - you guessed it - "a broad church", where "there is respect for a whole range of views across the political spectrum within the Labour Party".¹ He rather amusingly describes how "young left radical MPs have appeal across the board. If we don't use that resource, we lose the opportunity of mobilising some of the key votes".

Who are those mysterious 'young left radical MPs' that he wants to see on the front benches? Well, there is Nadia Whittome (fellow traveller of the pro-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty), the tame Bell Ribeiro-Addy, the middle-of-the-road Olivia Blake and - last not least - Zarah Sultana. The latter is the only one of this bunch who could be described as *potentially* radical - but *Realpolitik* in parliament has certainly made her a very quiet warrior. All of these 'radical' MPs are members of the so-called Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs - which has still not managed to put out a statement in support of its own Diane Abbott, now suspended from the party. Clearly, none of them fancy ending up next to Diane Abbott or Jeremy Corbyn. Better to keep heads down then.

From a careerist point of view, this is entirely understandable: the swift disciplinary action taken against Abbott for her admittedly extraordinarily stupid letter to *The Observer* shows that Sir Keir continues to be on the warpath against the left. Politically of course, the despicable opportunism of the SCG is exactly what has put the left in the position it is today - entirely defeated. Instead of at least *trying* to take on the right, the official Labour left has tried to appease it, begging for forgiveness for the entirely fake 'mass anti-Semitism problem' of the party. It is now so weak that Starmer can pick the remaining 'left' MPs off one by one, without little or no opposition.

Royalism

Last week's coronation stressed this fact once again - not only did the Labour Party's official social media outlets sycophantically declare that "Labour celebrates the coronation of His Majesty The King", while crying "God save His Majesty The King"; we were also reminded that the anti-monarchy group, Republic, is part of Labour's new blacklist of 12 organisations that Constituency Labour Parties have been banned from affiliating to "without approval from the NEC", since "To do so would breach party rules."

The email goes on to list the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Labour Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Stop the War Coalition, London-Irish Abortion Rights Campaign, Jewish Voice for Labour, Somalis for Labour, Sikhs for Labour, All African Women's Group, Health Campaigns Together, the Campaign Against Climate Change Trade Union Group, the



Official position of official Labour left

Peace and Justice Project - and Republic (more on the latter below).²

This list clearly contains a few innocent bystanders who are being hit by 'friendly fire', so to speak. It is chiefly Jewish Voice for Labour and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign that had to be dealt with, because they continue to be a thorn in Starmer's side by challenging the big lie that 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism'. As both contain large number of Jewish members, Starmer probably felt that he could not simply add them to the growing list of organisations that have been proscribed outright, which means that members, sympathisers or anyone liking one of their Facebook posts are automatically expelled: he could and would have been accused of anti-Semitism (something that JVL has pointed out many times). This blacklist is a more 'elegant' weapon.

Though the other groups on the list are mostly quite harmless they do have a symbolic value. Stop the War Coalition, for example, stands for social-pacifism in the midst of a Nato proxy war in Ukraine that is supported just as much by His Majesty's loyal opposition as his government ... and it is only a step, a logical one, from suspending branches affiliated to StWC to expelling MPs speaking on StWC platforms, signing petitions or acting as sponsors. Having CLPs sign up to Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project would, of course, be a minor embarrassment for Starmer, but if Corbyn stands as an independent it sets the stage for witch-hunting anyone who dares to leaflet, canvas, post or even speak in his support.

Labour CND and Abortion Rights, are, of course, run by the shadowy Socialist Action sect, which also effectively steers

the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. It might strike some as curious that, just like Momentum, they have both been left off any blacklist ... so far.

Localism

The Guardian quotes a "Momentum source", who says that the organisation "is making a 'strategic' retreat to local government, focusing less on the parliamentary party and more on a 'growing appetite for change and ambition in local communities'." According to the article, Momentum also wants to "focus on renewing a broader alliance of the left and soft left within Labour". If Whittome and Blake are the "left", we shudder to imagine which MPs they might consider on the "soft left".

Momentum is, of course, picking up on the fact that most leftwingers have now left the Labour Party, with some celebrating 'anyone but Labour' candidates winning seats in the local elections (or even standing against Labour). The political confusion on the left following the defeat of the Corbyn movement is so immense that it matters not that most of these candidates stood on a localist programme which can only aspire to the heights of 'motherhood and apple pie'.

Mandy Clare - former leading lady of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy before jumping ship to join Chris Williamson in the Socialist Labour Party - has won a council seat as part of the 'Winsford Salt of the Earth' group - which has campaigned on the slogan, "People before politics". It has taken control of the local town council, wiping out Labour.³ Let us see what 'non-political' things our 'Salt of the Earth' friends do with their clear majority.

Jo Bird, the well-known former JVL member and a supporter of Labour Against the Witchhunt, has

won a seat in the Wirral council on the Green ticket (she now wears only green clothes instead of red ones!). She is one of many former Labour members who have joined the Green Party, especially in the wake of Corbyn's suspension from the Parliamentary Labour Party. This is, sadly, an indication of the lack of appreciation on the 'left' of the Green Party's role as a pro-capitalist, pro-business organisation.

We might also take issue with Alan Gibbons, who, together with Sam Gorst (another former supporter of LAW) and Lucy Williams (who has not been known for her leftwing politics), won council seats as Liverpool Community Independents. As a former CLP secretary of Liverpool Walton, Gibbons was known for keeping his mouth firmly shut during the witch-hunt of the Corbyn years and refused to speak out (or even table motions) in support of the Wavertree Four, who were expelled on fake anti-Semitism charges. When he was the leading member of Momentum's national constitutional committee on the Forward Momentum ticket, he refused to stand in solidarity with those expelled over the anti-Semitism smears and only criticised the *suspensions* of those who were victims of the 'second' wave of the witch-hunt, after Corbyn's defeat. And, when he himself was finally expelled, he had to, of course, leave Momentum because of the witch-hunting rule he himself had continued to enforce! He now says he left Momentum because it was becoming 'ineffective'! The man is clearly no hero of the left.

Of course, socialists and communists engage in local politics. But without a UK-wide, mass Marxist party of the working class that can effectively tackle bigger issues and engage coherently with national and international politics, such local

'leftwing' councillors are likely to end up focussing on issues that do not go much beyond the 'litter-picking and dog-poo' category. Even the much-celebrated 'Preston project', while useful in some respects, suffers by necessity from severe limitations.

Republic

The inclusion of Republic in Labour's blacklist deserves a closer look. It is rather puzzling, seeing as it is hardly a radical organisation or one which has caused Sir Keir any problems whatsoever. Perhaps he is trying to overcompensate for his former republican views by stressing his monarchist credentials - which is rather tricky when there are video clips out there of him calling for the abolition of the monarchy.⁴

In the wake of the coronation, Republic happily reports a massive growth in membership and donations. No doubt fuelled by the heavy-handed approach of the police, which arrested almost a dozen Republic organisers (as well as at least one royalist bystander), the group's membership has almost doubled from 5,000 to about 9,000 in a few days, with donations of over £100,000 coming in.⁵

The fact that Republic has a chief executive, Graham Smith, and no democratic structure shows what kind of organisation it is - more like a charity. Its website has a cross in the patriotic colours of the Union Jack. Tame campaigners like citizen Smith might have learnt a sharp political lesson over the police arrests of them and other anti-monarchist protesters, but the group's programme is very limited indeed, focussing its critique on the cost of the monarchy and replacing the king with a president, as in the US and France - ie, an elected monarch - while leaving pretty much the rest of the state and the capitalist mode of production untouched. If *The Guardian* were to launch a party, it would look like Republic.

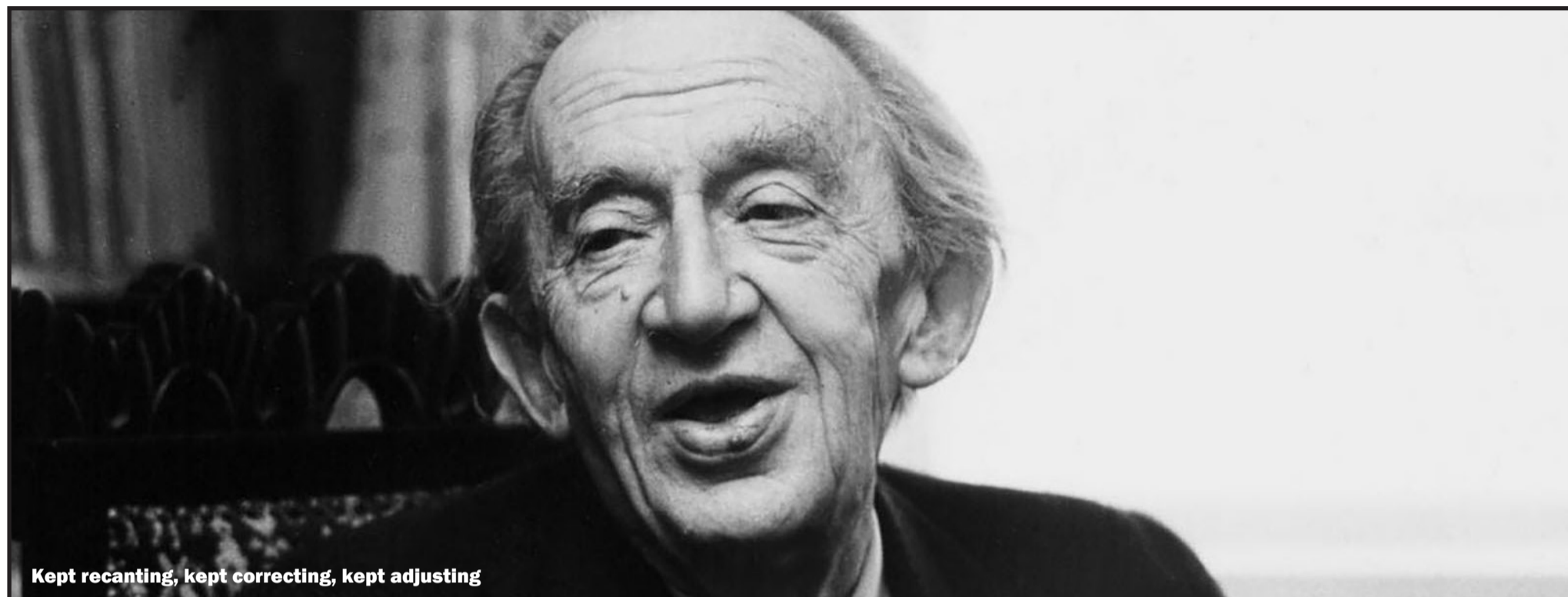
Nevertheless, its recently published short statement on 'Why we protest' is interesting.⁶ It starts, sickeningly enough, with the platitude that "This great country of ours is full of creativity, potential and possibility" and that democracy is important "in creating a prosperous and fair society". Capitalism would just work a lot better without the preposterously expensive and irrational monarchy, you see.

However, the next sentence is interesting: "The campaign for a republic is about democratic reform, democratic principles and ridding the country of an institution that serves itself and those in power - *the few, not the many*" (my emphasis). Now where have we heard that one before? It is, of course, based on Percy Shelley's poem, 'The mask of anarchy', but has gained immense popularity by its use by a certain Jeremy Corbyn in Labour's 2017 and 2019 election manifestos. Perhaps this explains the inclusion of Republic in Labour's 'naughty list' ●

Notes

1. *The Guardian* May 15.
2. *The Guardian* May 4.
3. www.northwichguardian.co.uk/news/23503873.winsford-salt-earth-takes-control-town-council.
4. www.express.co.uk/news/royal/1389273/keir-starmer-news-labour-party-royal-family-latest-abolish-the-monarchy-uk-vn.
5. *The Guardian* May 14.
6. www.republic.org.uk/why_we_protest.

OUR HISTORY



Kept recanting, kept correcting, kept adjusting

A hundred years of muddle

Marking the centenary of György Lukács's hugely influential *History and class consciousness*, Mike Macnair spoke to an Online Communist Forum on May 14 about the book, the man and the politics

Let me start by saying that I spoke on this issue less substantially and at less length at the Platypus convention in Chicago on April 1, and this talk expands on what I said there.¹ I should add that there are two really useful articles on Lukács by comrade Lawrence Parker in *Cosmonaut* in January, and in the *Weekly Worker* in April.² I have also written at length on related issues in the *Weekly Worker* between 2003 and 2014.³

There are two major directions in which the use of Lukács is taken by the left. One is by the Trotskyist and near-Trotskyist left to justify what is very broadly a Bakuninist political perspective, in which, essentially strikes are central and the basic way forward is from strikes to the generalised mass strike. This perspective is (probably partially falsely, but certainly not completely) attributed to Rosa Luxemburg, and equally so to Lukács.

On the other hand, there is an enormously wide section of the left - particularly the academic left - for which *History and class consciousness* (HCC) is a starting point for the 'Frankfurt school', for 'western Marxism', and for the narrative, which is extraordinarily widespread among 'new left'-influenced academics, that Engels vulgarised Marx. This argument was not original in Lukács: it was already present in Georges Sorel, writing around 1900, and in Parvus's arguments in 1914-15 justifying support for the German war effort, among other places.⁴ That line of approach takes us into a whole new world of the 'dominant ideology thesis' and so on.

Perspectives

I will discuss here mainly the politics of HCC and of some of Lukács's related writings, and to a lesser extent how the philosophy bears on the politics. We start with Lukács. He was born in 1885. At university in 1905-06, he was influenced by the Sorelian revolutionary syndicalist, Ervin Szabó (1877-1918).⁵ Following Sorel, Szabó and other revolutionary syndicalist writers basically considered Bernstein's critique of 'Kautskyian' (or Engelsian) Marxism as being broadly correct: that the 'orthodox' Second International perspective was scientific and led to automatism and gradualism. The alternative was a radical shift in mass consciousness, which could only take place in the

form of mass action: and hence the syndicalist, as opposed to the partyist, perspective.

After his undergraduate years Lukács went to Heidelberg and became heavily influenced by Max Weber and Georg Simmel, as well as other contemporary neo-Kantians.⁶ In this period, he wrote on several aesthetic matters. During the war he was influenced by 'Russianism' in the sense of the ideas of Dostoevsky. As late as early 1918, he was still very much an anti-Bolshevik, but in December 1918 jumped into the Hungarian Communist Party (HCP) - very unexpectedly to people who had read his previous work.

The immediate context was the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy and the Hungarian revolution. In March 1919, the Hungarian Socialists invited the HCP to join them in a 'soviet' government;⁷ Lukács served in this government as deputy commissar of public education, and as a political commissar with the short-lived Hungarian Red Army. After the revolution was defeated, he did clandestine work for a while, before he finally had to flee to Vienna in October 1919.

In Vienna, Lukács worked with the collective which produced the journal *Kommunismus* with Ruth Fischer - later one of the leaders of the left wing of the German Communist Party - and other lefts. In that capacity he was personally targeted by Lenin as an ultra-left in a June 1921 review of *Kommunismus*.⁸ This character is strongly visible in the articles from this period collected in English translation in *Tactics and ethics: political writings 1921-29*.⁹

HCC was published sometime in spring 1923. The preface is dated Christmas 1922, which is the point at which the text went off to the printer. So Lukács was finalising the text closely contemporaneously with the fourth congress of Comintern (November 5 - December 5) and is unlikely to have taken into account anything decided at that Congress. The first hostile review of the book, by Hermann Duncker, is dated in late May, so it must have come out long enough earlier for Duncker to have skim-read it.¹⁰

Most of the chapters in HCC are separately dated. 'What is orthodox Marxism?' in March 1919¹¹; 'The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg' in January 1921; 'Class consciousness'

in March 1920. The central essay, 'Reification and the consciousness of the proletariat', is undated, so probably goes back to autumn 1922. 'The changing function of historical materialism' is June 1919; 'Legality and illegality' July 1920. 'Critical observations on Rosa Luxemburg's "Critique of the Russian Revolution"' is January 1922; and 'Towards a methodology of the problem of organisation' September 1922.

These dates confirm the point that the book is, as comrade Parker has argued, transitional between, on the one hand, the ultra-leftism of *Kommunismus* (and Lukács's support, along with Fischer, for the March Action in Germany, against its critics) and, on the other, a response to Lenin's 'Leftwing' communism (LWC) published in July 1920, and the decisions of the second (July 19 - August 7 1920) and third (June 22 - July 12 1921) congresses of Comintern. Relatively little of it was written after the 1921 March Action, and the book came out well before the German 'failed October' in October 1923.¹²

These events are relevant (and the date of publication was unfortunate for Lukács) in two ways. First, Karl Korsch, who solidified with Lukács, continued to maintain the 'theory of the offensive', which underlay the March Action, as did Ruth Fischer and her co-thinkers. In this sense HCC could appear as an immediate intervention on the side of the 'lefts' in the KPD.

Second, Lenin had his third stroke, which completely disabled him, on March 10 1923, and died on January 21 1924. In connection with the struggle for power after Lenin's disablement, Trotsky countered the campaign against 'Trotskyism' and his own Menshevik history, by arguing that the *troika* of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev were guilty of resisting Lenin's call to struggle for power in 1917, due to residual 'Second international Marxism' - and that the same errors underlay the KPD's failure in October 1923. Although *Lessons of October* was not published till October 1924, this debate had already been running for some time. In that context, by spring 1924 HCC would have appeared as an intervention on Trotsky's side of this debate - as, also, could Korsch's *Marxism and philosophy* - though what in both cases is involved is

trying to hold on to elements of what the old *Kommunismus* group had been arguing. Hence its violent denunciation by Zinoviev and those close to him.¹³

Lukács wrote *Tailism and the dialectic* in 1925 or 1926. This stayed in manuscript until it was published in Budapest in 1996 and then in translation by Verso, with an introduction by John Rees, and a postface by Slavoj Žižek, in 2000.¹⁴ Comrade Parker argues that *Tailism* is not a defence of HCC, and Lukács certainly disavows it as being such a defence. But the 'tailism' he denounces is, in essence, the failure to take revolutionary initiatives. So, in this sense, Lukács in *Tailism* is still defending the 'leftist' aspect of HCC. It is also a deeply factional document - philosophy addressed to the factional combat within the HCP.

Loyal

It is generally accepted that Lukács later became a 'Stalinist' - meaning that he was for practical purposes a supporter of the majority of the Comintern leadership. It is not clear that this was an actual change. I do not think Lukács was trying to be oppositional or even state a markedly distinct line to that of the Comintern leadership when he wrote HCC; and this is a phenomenon which actually is displayed throughout his political activity in the 1920s.

In the *Kommunismus* period Lukács is attempting to defend the idea of the absolute present possibilities of revolution and the immediacy of soviet power, as opposed to parliamentarism, reforms, etc - which is actually characteristic of the first congress of Comintern and the 1918-19 debate on soviet power. LWC and the second congress of Comintern represented a *partial* shift against this perspective, but that shift only became fully clear with the third congress. HCC partially tries to follow this shift, but without conceding to the right social democrats and centrists who had argued that revolution was not on the agenda.

To some extent HCC slavishly follows the arguments of LWC and the second congress. In particular, 'Reification and the consciousness of the proletariat' is distinctly neo-Kantian and Weberian: but it is also intimately related to the second congress's *Theses on the role of the Communist Party in the proletarian revolution* with its explanation of class-consciousness

as taking form in the party as a minority.¹⁵ 'Towards a methodology of the problem of organisation' has the same characteristics, and also follows Lenin's claim in LWC that the Bolsheviks were 'steered' by long experience and had existed as a distinct party with a radically disciplined regime since the split of 1903. This is just false, involving retrojection of the split from a much messier history to 1903, and retrojection of the militarisation of the party from 1919 back to 1903.

After Lenin's death, the initial Comintern leadership role was taken by Zinoviev. But in 1925 Stalin broke with Zinoviev and Kamenev, forming a bloc instead with Bukharin and Rykov round a much more cautious and 'peasant-friendly' policy, which was also associated with the line of 'socialism in a single country'. Zinoviev and Kamenev went into opposition - initially independently (the 'Leningrad opposition') and then jointly with Trotsky and his co-thinkers 'left opposition' (the 'joint opposition'). The sixth congress of Comintern, at which Bukharin took the lead, happened in July-August 1928. Contemporaneously, Jenő Landler, who was the leader of the faction Lukács supported in the exile HCP, died (February 25 1928) and Lukács was commissioned to draft the HCP perspectives. This draft, the 'Blum theses' (from Lukács's then cadre name), written some time in autumn 1928, is carefully and loyally adapted to the political line of the sixth congress of Comintern.¹⁶

However, at the same time (July 1928) Bukharin and Rykov fell into disagreement with Stalin about the question of more aggressive exploitation of the peasantry, the promotion of collectivisation and a crash industrialisation programme. Stalin made a zigzag. By this stage both the left and the Leningrad oppositionists had been excluded, and Stalin proceeded to steal a version of their political clothes. In April 1929 Bukharin was sacked as editor of *Pravda* and Stalin announced the existence of a "right deviation in the party". The Comintern leadership threw its support behind Bela Kun's faction in the HCP and denounced Lukács's 'Blum theses' as opportunist. Lukács duly recanted them (though he later retracted this recantation as merely tactical). When they were written, the 'Blum theses'

were not oppositional, nor were they 'premature popular frontism': they were simply an application of the line of the sixth congress of Comintern, but Lukács was caught short by the turn in Moscow - as he had been in 1920-21 and again in 1923-24.

HCC, then, has a history in the 1920s of Lukács's attempts to catch up with the Soviet leadership and attempts to do grand-theoretical justifications for particular factional positions in relation to Russian, German and Hungarian Europe politics of the time.

Reception

The history of the subsequent reception of HCC is complicated. We start with the German, which is that it leads into what becomes the Frankfurt School. Karl Korsch welcomed HCC in a postscript to his *Marxism and philosophy*, though by 1930 he disliked being tarred with the brush of Lukács's rejection of dialectics of nature. HCC also influenced Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse - from the earliest days of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. The book was reportedly also engaged, in a coded fashion, by Martin Heidegger, while Karl Mannheim in his 1929 *Ideology and utopia* used HCC's arguments as a reason for rejecting Marxism as utopian.¹⁷

This reception reflects the fact that HCC was *academically respectable*, where other Marxist writing on philosophical issues was not: both because Lukács had an academic background in Heidelberg neo-Kantianism; and because the whole book is consistent with the Weberian and marginalist critiques of Marxism being true. 'What is orthodox Marxism?' concedes that all of Marx's substantive claims could be wrong, several arguments about 'rationality' and points of history are explicitly Weberian, and none of the book's arguments are inconsistent with the (supposed) truth of marginalism. In 1933, in his 'Mein Weg zur Marx' article, Lukács largely repudiated the book; and, though this text might be considered a mere formal recantation, Lukács took broadly the same view of HCC in 1957, and refused to authorise republication of the German text till 1967.¹⁸

In 1955, nonetheless, HCC was picked up in France by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his book *Adventures of the dialectic*. The purpose of the book was to argue that Jean-Paul Sartre had become too close to the French Communist Party; and for this purpose, Merleau-Ponty invents 'western Marxism' - by which he means the Marxism of HCC. 'Western Marxism' is, I think, a meaningless category, and becomes more meaningless when we add other authors to it - for example, the Gramsci of the *Prison Notebooks* (as opposed to the Gramsci of *L'Ordine Nuovo*).

I think not wholly disconnected from this background, Michael Harrington (the later founder of the Democratic Socialist Organising Committee) translated 'What is orthodox Marxism?' in 1959 for the Shachtmanite Young People's Socialist League.

Lukács in 1967 authorised a reissue in German, in which he wrote a long critical preface, in which he recanted some important aspects, but not others. It is this reissue which was translated into English in 1971; and the translation into English is in essence the basis of the influence of HCC on the Socialist Workers Party and others - though there was also the indirect influence of Michel Löwy's 1976 *Pour une sociologie des intellectuels révolutionnaires - l'évolution politique de Lukács 1908-1929* in the 1979 English translation retitled *Georg Lukács - from romanticism to Bolshevism*.¹⁹

Where this 'left' reception comes from, I think, is partly from Lukács's participation as junior minister in the short-lived Nagy government in Hungary (October-November 1956), with the result that, although he avoided execution, he was exiled in 1956-57 and excluded from the party until 1967. Lukács now appears as an oppositionist in spite of the fact that he has been a loyal 'official communist'. Indeed, in the 1967 introduction to HCC he says he was never a Trotskyite; he agreed with Stalin on the question of socialism in one country - which was, indeed, clearly plausible to the overwhelming majority of the existing communist movement.²⁰

The point is not that Lukács is a Stalinist, but that he does not construct an independent line of march or political line for the movement - not just unlike Trotsky and his co-thinkers, but also unlike Ruth Fischer and Arkadi Maslow on the left, or Heinrich Brandler and August Thalheimer on the right. He *appears* as an oppositionist because modern leftists staple together HCC - read as being a work of 'classical Marxism' of the early Comintern or of 'western Marxism' - with Lukács's role in the Nagy government, leaving the middle bit out, and hence identify Lukács as a critic of Stalinism. He was, indeed, a critic of the bureaucratic dictatorship as such: but not of the *institutional and political grounds on which this bureaucratic dictatorship rested*.

Comrade Parker correctly states that we should not say this means that Lukács's work while he was an 'official communist' is to be ignored. Really important historical work - and, for that matter, philosophical work - was done by people who were more unambiguously 'official communists', which we have to read and take seriously.

New left

But reading Lukács as an oppositionist is also reading HCC as an additional argument for the politics of the 'new left' which developed after Hungary 1956. The problem is that the 'new left' emerged into a world in which the core 'official communist' ideas - the people's front, socialism in one country and national roads to socialism, and the concept of the party as a militarised monolith - all appear to be categorically proved by events between 1941 and 1949.

'New left'-ists were repulsed by the crushing of the 1956 Hungarian uprising and the character of the political regimes in the east - and they were repulsed in a different way by the gradualism of *The British road to socialism* and the equivalent documents of the French Communist Party, the Italian Communist Party, and so on. They thought this perspective non-revolutionary. This is in a sense the same symptom as the guys in today's Young Communist League wanting to celebrate Stalin, or indeed the Maoists of the 1960s and 1970s wanting to celebrate Stalin as a way of combating revisionism and gradualism, and the scientism of Khrushchev; but to do so without falling into 'Trotskyism'. because to fall into 'Trotskyism' would be to reject the people's front, national roads and the party monolith (and 'Trotskyism' is taken to be disproved by the course of events between 1941 and 1949).

On this basis, on the one hand, we get, from around 1960, forms of Maoism; and, on the other hand, picking up HCC, leftists could use it as a foundation for a Frankfurt School approach to politics, which is centred on culture and ideology and is third-campist (or indeed first-campist in the sense of seeing Nato as the defence of civilisation against 'totalitarianism', whether Nazi or Stalinist).

Or you could use HCC in support of 'Luxemburgism' (the chapter, 'The

Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg'), mass-strikism (by this route and by way of 'Reification and the consciousness of the proletariat') and bureaucratic centralism (by way of 'Reification' and of 'Towards a methodology of the problem of organisation' and the false narrative of Bolshevik history). This latter was the path travelled by the Cliffites (*Socialist Review* group, International Socialists, Socialist Workers party), and, it seems, by the Japan Revolutionary Communist League (Kakumaru).

Philosophy

As previously stated, I am going to say little about the substantive philosophical content of HCC. Some of what I have to say, Lukács himself says in 'Mein Weg zu Marx' and in the 1967 preface to HCC. He makes the point that he overstated the relative significance of grasping the totality as such. He thought it was correct to reject "mechanistic fatalism", but at the same time makes the point that "praxis" is intervention into the material world, not simply intervention into the social world. And praxis in this context depends on a correct perceptual reflection of reality (If I don't look where I'm going, I'm going to walk into a lamppost or a tree). Equally if I want to fit a speedometer into a car on the assembly line, I have to actually see that I have the right parts and the right screws in the right spot.

I think this is, however, a more fundamental question than Lukács makes of it even in 'Mein Weg' or the 1967 preface. The problem is the idea that dialectical reasoning involves *essentially* the grasp of 'the' totality (a totality which is closed, not open) carries with it the question *how* you grasp 'the' totality. And the answer - given in 'Towards a methodology of the problem of organisation' - is that it is only possible through the collective action of an organisation. Indeed, for Lukács (faithfully following the Comintern second congress *Theses*) the proletariat can only be class-conscious through the party.

But then the consequence is that he quite clearly has fully internalised the notorious idea that you cannot be right against the party, which was a common idea of the 'capitulators' - the people who went over from opposition to Stalinism and at the end of the day laid down to be massacred by the secret police (GPU) without fighting back. This is a *foundational* error.

Secondly, Lukács in 'Mein Weg' and the 1967 preface *half-breaks* from the proposition in HCC that the physical and social sciences are radically separate and that giving physical (or biological) foundations to the social sciences is to fall into a 'contemplative' method. (In this half-break, incidentally, he parts company with the Frankfurt school.) But he does not break *completely* with this idea, and equally he does not break with the idea that the dialectic is something which is really only applicable to capitalism; he does not break with his insistence that to be historical is to insist on radical discontinuity and the determination by the totality of the present.

In my opinion (and this is just my opinion), that conception of historicity also carries with it the impossibility of actually grasping the historical dynamics at work in the inferences from the recent past to the near future, which we call 'the present' (a concept which Lukács seems not to interrogate), in a way which will allow you to make serious proposals for action. In my view it is partly *because* of the things which he objects to in 'Second International Marxism' - the tie to physical science, the concept of history in the *longue durée*, and so on - that Lukács is in the 1920s unable to formulate *his own* perspective, or fight a corner (any corner) with any degree of persistence against the Comintern leadership.

Finally, 'What is orthodox Marxism?' starts with the proposition that orthodox Marxism "refers exclusively to method" and continues:

Let us assume for the sake of argument that recent research had disproved once and for all every one of Marx's individual theses. Even if this were to be proved, every serious 'orthodox' Marxist would still be able to accept all such modern findings without reservation and hence dismiss all of Marx's theses *in toto* - without having to renounce his orthodoxy for a single moment.

And in the 1967 preface, this text is one of the things Lukács still maintains.

But, as I have argued elsewhere²¹, this is no more than a closure of argument against adverse evidence (reflecting the influence of Sorel via Szabó and of Weber, Simmel and co): that Lukács was explicitly unwilling to defend historical materialism in its 'Engelsian' or *German ideology* and *Contribution to the critique of political economy* sense, and implicitly unwilling to defend the labour theory of value and the related arguments. But the result of this closure against adverse evidence *must be*, at the end of the day, intellectual sterility.

I am certainly not saying, 'Don't read this book'. It has an important role in its historical reception. But I think it is certainly a mistake to treat Lukács's philosophical arguments in HCC as foundational for a future Marxism ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAGkjsbOxQ (at 22.06).
2. cosmonautmag.com/2023/01/two-souls-within-his-breast-georg-lukacs-1925-29; 'Scenes from history' *Weekly Worker* April 27 2023 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1440/scenes-from-history). Add comrade Parker's April 3 blog comment on the Platypus panel: communistpartyofgreatbritainhistory.wordpress.com/2023/04/03/100-year-gyorgy-lukacs.
3. The earlier articles are referenced in 'Fantasy history, fantasy Marx' *Weekly Worker* December 18 2014 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1039/fantasy-history-fantasy-marx); and add to this list my 'Against philosopher kings' *Weekly Worker*

- December 11 2008 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/749/against-philosopher-kings).
4. Sorel: in several places in the excerpts from 'Critical essays on Marxism' in J.L. Stanley (ed) *From Georges Sorel* New York 1976. Parvus: discussion and reference in B Lewis, 'World War I: SPD left's dirty secret' *Weekly Worker* June 26 2014 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1016/world-war-i-spd-lefts-dirty-secret).
5. On Szabó, see G Litván and JM Bak (eds) *Socialism and social science: selected writings of Ervin Szabó (1877-1918)* Abingdon 2011.
6. Discussion in A Arato and P Breines *The young Lukács and the origins of western Marxism* London 1979, chapters 2-4.
7. 'Soviet' is in scare-quotes because there was only a limited organic development of workers' councils - still less of soldiers' or peasant councils - but merely a left turn of the Hungarian Socialists in response to an Entente ultimatum and Russian Red Army successes, to bring the Communists into government, involving renaming existing institutions as 'soviets': see RL Tökés *Bela Kun and the Hungarian soviet republic* London 1967, chapters 6-7.
8. VI Lenin *CW* vol 31, p165.
9. M McColgan (trans), R Livingstone (ed), London 1972, pp53-116.
10. See A Arato and P Breines *op cit* p176.
11. Though this text is substantially extended from the version in *Tactics and ethics*, which Lukács there dated "before the dictatorship of the proletariat": ie, before March 21.
12. On the 'March action', see B Lewis, 'Before, during and after March' *Weekly Worker* supplement May 6 2021 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1346/supplement-before-during-and-after-march). On the 'failed October' there is a good deal of detail, from a Trotskyist perspective, in johndiddell.com/2021/12/01/the-german-october-of-1923-a-failed-bid-for-workers-power; see also M Jones, 'Germany 1923': www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol5/no2/jones.html; marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol8/no3/jones.html; A Thalheimer, *whatsnextjournal.org.uk/Histories/History/1923.html*.
13. See A Arato and P Breines *op cit* chapter 10; on Rees, see E Leslie (trans), 'Introduction' *A defence of "History and class consciousness": tailism and the dialectic* London 2000, pp17-25; and comrade Parker's articles.
14. See note 13 above.
15. www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch03a.htm.
16. *Tactics and ethics* pp227-23. It should be noted that this is extracts, rather than a full text.
17. See A Arato and P Breines *op cit* pp203-05.
18. 'Autobiographisches Vorwort: mein Weg zur Marx' in *Marxismus und Stalinismus: politische Aufsätze, ausgewählte Schriften IV*, Hamburg 2018; and 'Postscriptum 1957 zu mein Weg zu Marx' in *idem*.
19. Patrick Camiller (trans), London 1979.
20. R Livingstone (trans) *History and class consciousness* London 1971, ppxxviii-xxix.
21. M Zurovski (trans), 'Introduction to M Sommer' *Anti-Postone*: cosmonautmag.com/2022/02/anti-postone-introduction.

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TECHNOLOGY

On its last legs

Mark Zuckerberg bet the farm on virtual worlds - and lost. Paul Demarty pours one out for the metaverse

“When the tide goes out,” said famous fund manager Warren Buffett, “you see who’s been swimming naked.” He was talking about the ‘dotcom bust’, and how the corresponding shocks exposed the immodestly leveraged likes of Enron and Worldcom.

Since then, we have watched a tightening of the US mortgage market in 2006-07 leading to the collapse of several investment banks, thanks to the near-fraudulent securitisation of junk debt over many years; along with the CDOs (collateralised debt obligation) and so on, more than one outright Ponzi scheme was brought to light - most notoriously that of Bernie Madoff.

Well, the tide has gone out once again on the great and the good of the technology industry; and it seems rather like *everyone* has been swimming naked - almost as if the San Francisco Bay Area had wholly transformed itself into a nudist colony. Since Joe Biden’s federal reserve imposed an end to the cheap money era, a merciless spotlight has fallen on the big dreams, bigger promises and bigger-yet disappointments of the tech scene. Uber can no longer dismiss its financial insanity with a languorous shrug in the direction of autonomous vehicles. Twitter’s long-term investors at least managed to find a greater fool - the greatest fool of them all - to sell up to. Google flounders from one big idea to the next.

Meta mess

And then there is Meta: a rebrand of the Facebook group, it owns, along with its formerly eponymous social network, Instagram, the Oculus virtual reality brand and various advertising (or ‘adtech’) services. In the two years since the Meta rebrand, however, the company’s main focus has been on one thing: the ‘metaverse’ - an attempt to stake out a monopoly in the anticipated future of pervasive virtual reality. Indeed, this was already a discreet priority years before the official public launch; the acquisition of Oculus - until then wholly focused on gaming and led by games industry legend John Carmack - only makes sense if Facebook/Meta were going to try something like this (or else just get into games in a big way).

The metaverse then allows you to put on your virtual reality headset, and emerge into a new world, where you are a smiling cartoonish avatar of yourself. The ‘default’ VR world is managed by Facebook, and is squeaky-clean to an almost Disney level. But you can visit other worlds too, which are - as per the background norms of the internet - flooded with pornography. The virtual worlds have places to visit - bars, comedy clubs, whatever else - but, of course, it is a strange, threadbare imitation of life: bars without beer, comedy without swearing ... Notoriously, the avatars do not have legs.

Zuckerberg has found all this rather difficult to sell to the general public. And now it appears he may be discreetly conceding defeat. Like every other major tech company, Meta has been through rounds of brutal layoffs. In March, he quietly announced to investors that the “number one priority” for the company would be building generative artificial intelligence



Next big thing that wasn't

“into everything we do” - necessarily implying that the metaverse was taking a backseat. If it was no longer a top priority *chez Zuck*, then the various other companies that rushed to start up metaverse projects could hardly be expected to pick up the slack (indeed, some blue-check partners, including Microsoft and Disney, had already shelved their metaverse investments). The thing is widely believed to be effectively dead.

Outside of that most credulous of all crowds - Silicon Valley investors - it was always a laughing stock. Meta’s own metaverse world never got more than 200,000 monthly active users (Facebook itself has around two billion). The businesses most happy to invest in the platform were largely cryptocurrency-focused, since they were already familiar with the art of selling nothingness in exchange for money; but the very first people to be discovered ‘swimming naked’ when the fed tightened the screws were the crypto bros.

Buzzwords

And - for heaven’s sake - where are the *legs*? It is a more serious matter than it first appears (I promise). Listening to the official responses to leg-focused ridicule, you would think that nobody had ever successfully animated the lower half of a human body in the history of video games (for that, in the end, is what the metaverse is - an ecosystem of games). This is quite absurd. People had legs in *Second Life* - a game-cum-social network that got a cult following 20 years ago and is the most obvious prior art. Millions upon millions of people play *Fortnite*, *World of Warcraft*, *Call of Duty* and many more ‘traditional’ multiplayer games with each other every day. All have somehow managed to cope with the challenge of bipedal character models. One can cope with the failure of the real thing to live up to the promise of lifelike facial expressions and so forth from the official launch; but there is simply no reason for this thing - which, after all, has had \$100 billion of Meta investors’ money ploughed into it - to look so cheap and half-finished, three years since the launch.

One thinks of Maxim Gorky’s damning verdict on the Lumiere films:

Last night I was in the Kingdom

of Shadows. If you only knew how strange it is to be there. It is a world without sound, without colour. Every thing there - the earth, the trees, the people, the water and the air - is dipped in monotonous grey. Grey rays of the sun across the grey sky, grey eyes in grey faces, and the leaves of the trees are ashen grey. It is not life, but its shadow. It is not motion, but its soundless spectre.¹

Cinema ultimately escaped his critique, of course - from hand-colourisation of frames in the 1910s to sound and colour stock in the 1920s and 30s, and other technical innovations that improved verisimilitude since the war. Along the way, it acquired a distinct sense of purpose: the technical demonstrations of the Lumiere and Edison films gave rise to the cinema as a kind of sideshow attraction, shown between vaudeville acts - and then to the narrative feature film, with its dedicated infrastructure of studios and movie theatres.

The rosier view one could put on the metaverse is that it is still in the first, ‘tech demo’ phase. Yet its first phase was *so* ill-conceived that it is genuinely difficult to see any path to universal adoption. At least the first films were cool attractions (Gorky’s misgivings notwithstanding). Facebook hitched its wagon to a niche technology - the VR headset - still going through its technical teething problems (in particular the notorious issue of severe motion sickness).

It conceived of the metaverse in line with 2021-era buzzwords about ‘decentralisation’ that flew under the catch-all banner of ‘web3’, along with cryptocurrency-derived novelties like the notorious non-fungible tokens (NFTs). Wider economic circumstances euthanised all this crap, fortunately, but not before the web3 sector demonstrated that its ‘decentralisation’ was a total fiction: it could only bring money into the Ponzi scheme because there were centralised marketplaces, storage and authentication services, and so on. It may be that a real use is found for technologies like blockchain, eventually; but the central claim that it would get rid of the need for trusted intermediaries in various human activities is proven laughably false - by the web3 debacle and also by the severe pressure on the crypto-trading

space, resulting from the collapse of a few exchanges. Crypto merely replaced trusted intermediaries with less trustworthy ones.

Likewise, only one of the largest tech companies in the world could even make a working possibility out of the metaverse. Yet it could only be worth trying for the one and only reason tech giants ever try *anything*: to manufacture a monopoly from which to extract rent. The fact that Zuckerberg’s vision of the next great enclosure turned out to be a dud is besides the point: the whole initiative was another nail in the coffin of the ‘new frontier’ idea of the internet - the idea that net users could be something like a class of yeoman farmers on their inviolable patch of cyberspace.

Grifters

The idea will persist, among grifters and true believers; just as one can find ‘frontiersmen’ preparing for social breakdown in the hills of Montana, or the occasional cult compound. For the left, we must prepare a rational plan for an internet that takes advantage of economies of scale, but not in the haphazard and anarchic way that the present arrangement of tech giants do - and certainly not guided by the perverse and tyrannical incentives that the mere fact of monopoly imposes on them.

It is the need for limitless growth that produces an idea as stupid as the metaverse, at least in part; but it was the same thing that produced the relentlessly manipulative, psychologically and spiritually enervating hellscapes of the *successful* social media platforms, from Facebook itself to the suddenly popular video-based Skinner box that is TikTok. *Democratic* planning would trivially allow abundance at the level of hardware and infrastructure, equivalent to the very best offerings from the giant cloud companies; with that in place, a great flowering of software and digital culture should be expected - not to improve some meaningless and largely fictional revenue number, but to meet a genuine human need, or indeed just for the sheer hell of it.

Before we depart from this topic, we might spare a thought for (what *should* be) another casualty of the metaverse mess - the fiction that Zuckerberg and his like are visionary geniuses. The squalid origins of

Facebook are well-documented, as is the tale - possibly apocryphal - of Peter Thiel’s decision to invest. The Facebookers’ pitch deck was full of guff about wanting to connect people to make the world a better place; but Thiel - already a viciously reactionary cynic - remembered his classes with René Girard, and guessed that the app would resolve to a bloodthirsty atavism recognisable to readers of *Violence and the sacred*. Whatever the merits of Thiel’s reasoning, he guessed right - the more angry and anxious users of all the major social platforms are, the more ‘engaged’ they become (and the more vulnerable to advertising). The point here is merely that Zuck did not even understand his one success.

An interesting article in the *New York Magazine* blog by John Herrman argues that the problem with the metaverse is that ultimately it only appealed to tech company executives, which would account for how such an obviously floundering product could get such impressive blue-chip buy-in. The point was not the silly ‘social’ features, but the possibility of employee surveillance after the shift to home-working during the pandemic: “Empty offices and newly empowered employees drove some tech executives *out of their minds*,” he writes, “and the metaverse promised a solution, or at least functioned as a response”.² But ultimately senior managers of this cast of mind came up with a better idea: just forcing people back into offices (among these executives, of course, was Mark Zuckerberg).

I think there is a more general point here, however. There is a specific kind of groupthink *among tech industry powerbrokers*, which amounts to an inability to abandon the apologetic structure that justifies their privileges. The industry *has* to be astonishingly inventive: otherwise why not work in a bank? Why not just start a hedge fund? Thus such people are easily embarrassed by the course of events: witness the increasingly bizarre flailing about of Elon Musk at Twitter, and his coterie of enablers like David Sacks and Jason Calacanis - but also, for that matter, the adulation directed at the fraudster, Elizabeth Holmes, before her blood-testing company, Theranos, was revealed to be a Potemkin village; or the glowing profiles of the narcissistic moron, Adam Neumann of WeWork, which aimed to “elevate the world’s consciousness” by, er, subletting commercial office space.

The CEOs and investors are not, in theory, stupid. They have degrees; they are literate. Their unlimited gullibility is an ideological artefact. They cannot face the facts: that the entrepreneurial genius is an illusion; that almost all of their ‘innovations’ are stolen, consciously or otherwise; that their industry is entirely parasitic on the state, be it through research subsidy or mere favourable monetary policy. That is the magic of capitalism: even the protagonists are non-player characters.

Without legs ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. picturegoing.com/?p=230.
2. nymag.com/intelligencer/2023/05/the-metaverse-was-a-ridiculous-idea-where-did-it-come-from.html.

AGGREGATE

Labourism on Mogadon

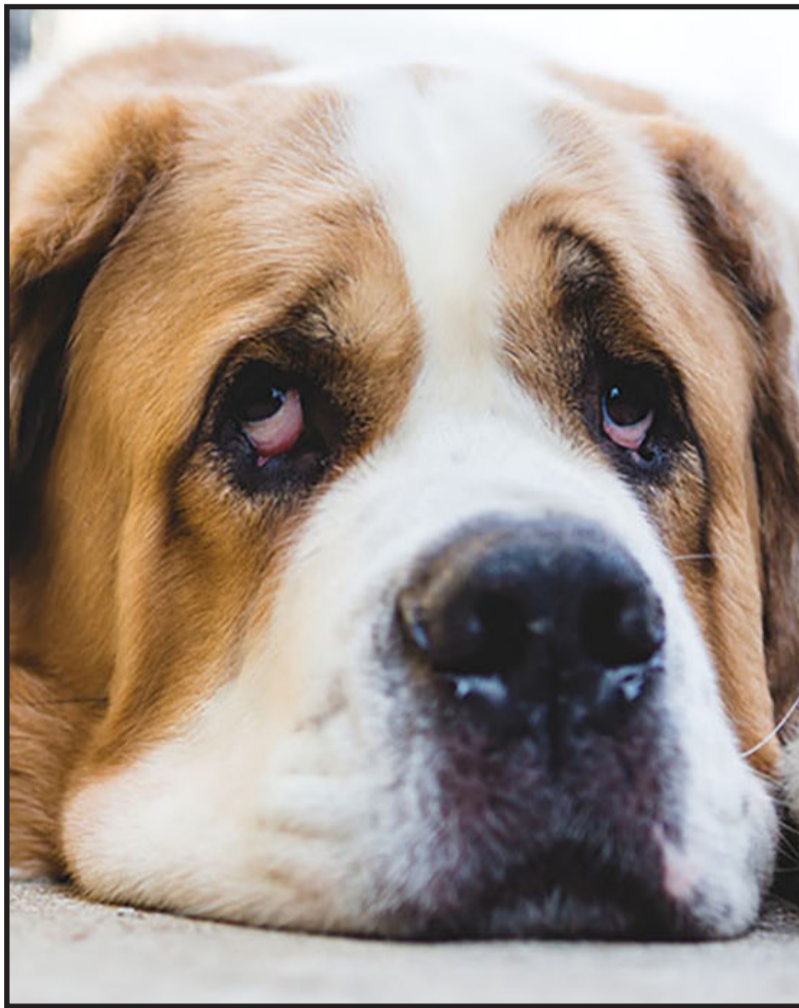
Though a Labour government is by no means certain, it would represent a major political turning point. Vernon Price reports on the aggregate of CPGB members and supporters

Held online on May 13, the meeting focused on the Labour Party. Provisional Central Committee member Kevin Bean gave the introduction. He noted Labour's gains in the local elections and the likelihood of a Starmer-led government after the next general election. Overall, the Labour vote had not gone up - the party's good results, like those of the Liberal Democrats and the Greens, were partly due to a significant drop in Conservative votes.

The Tories lost a swathe of seats and councils, but this was hardly unexpected, and it is unlikely that we will see immediate moves to replace leader Rishi Sunak. The attempt to rehabilitate Boris Johnson and emphasise 'traditional' Conservative values, such as family, patriotism and religion, are about both pressuring Sunak in the here and now and preparing for a post-Sunak comeback.

Comrade Bean's assessment of Sir Keir Starmer was of somebody who appeals to the ruling class - with a background in the state core, a foreign policy commitment to US interests and a business-friendly approach at home. The left, in the name of sensible, managerial politics, will remain marginalised and subject to constant attack. In the run-up to the general election Sir Keir will continue to present himself as a safe pair of hands. Advised by former prime ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, plagiarising Blue Labour and guided by endless focus groups, he will continue to target the largely mythical 'centre ground'. The resulting politics are utterly vacuous, even when compared to New Labour. Unless there is a dramatic economic upturn - unlikely - there will be little inclination to give substantial concessions to the unions or to go on a spending splurge for the benefit of the working class.

Stepping back to view the wider context, Kevin reminded us that we are in a period of global instability, where events do not always pan out as expected. The Corbyn movement itself took everyone by surprise, even those, like the CPGB, who expected a revival of the left in the Labour Party. Jeremy Corbyn's victory as Labour leader was a historical accident brought about by the 'morons' in the Parliamentary Labour Party who 'lent him' their votes in the first round. But more recently we have seen the false dawns of Enough is Enough and the Peace and Justice Project, which both burst into life full of expectations, but have failed to deliver anything tangible. Meanwhile, the recent wave of strikes was heralded by some groups on the left as a prelude to the outbreak of a revolution, when in reality the strikes, however



Sir Keir wants to reassure, calm fear and bore

welcome, have been very limited in terms of time and objectives.

Looking at the internal situation of the Labour Party under Starmer, comrade Bean described a regime of extraordinary tight control, evidenced in particular by the parliamentary and local government selection of candidates. Membership and activity has declined massively. Many have left through disillusionment or been expelled, but that still leaves a large membership with a significant number who consider themselves socialists of some kind. But the official Labour left is extremely weak and increasingly ineffective.

Fingernails

The Socialist Campaign Group of MPs illustrates this well - nominally it has around 35 members, but several of them are, or have been, junior ministers in Starmer's shadow cabinet. Not a few took part in the recent coronation celebrations. Their perspective now is holding on by their fingernails, keeping their heads down and avoiding a fate like Diane Abbott's or Jeremy Corbyn's. A faint glimmer of hope is that the next election may deliver a hung parliament, where their parliamentary votes can be used to extract concessions.

Left pressure groups such as Momentum and the Campaign for

are no moves to change that - indeed many union leaders are still hoping to obtain gains from Starmer when he becomes prime minister. The lack of success of the RMT union in backing the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition against Labour means that left trade union bureaucrats will, unless pushed, be unlikely to ditch Labour in favour of a tiny group with no influence in parliament. Also the Labour Party still maintains its working class electoral base. So, on balance, Lenin's designation still applies.

Addressing the much-heralded initiatives for a new workers' party, Kevin was of the opinion that any such development is unlikely until after the general election. The overwhelming desire is to kick out the Tories. Jeremy Corbyn may well stand against Labour and could win in Islington North, but his politics are those of the Labour Party, so he would see himself as an external faction of Labour rather than the spark for a new party. Starmer is emulating Blair in pledging little, meaning there is no likelihood of a crisis of expectations.

But there is still the possibility of the scattered fragments coming together in a new party project. The indications are that this will follow the politics of earlier attempts, based on a broad left amalgam of both reformist and would-be revolutionary elements - in other words, a Labour Party mark two - doomed to repeat the failures of the past. Any such development would provide an opportunity for us not only to intervene, but to argue for the idea of a Communist Party with a revolutionary programme. This would be consistent with our earlier interventions during the Corbyn period within the Labour Left Alliance - and before that within the Socialist Alliance, Left Unity, etc.

Comrade Bean ended his opening by posing some pertinent questions. Given the thoroughly bourgeois nature of Starmer's Labour Party, should we continue to advise people to vote Labour? Should we only support Labour candidates who are on the left? Should we call for votes for leftwing candidates standing against Labour? And should we stand our own candidates?

Debate

Carla Roberts was first into the discussion. She was critical of the praise currently being heaped on the trade unions by some on the left because of the current strike wave. There is no coordination, no attempt to defy the law, no attempt to organise solidarity actions. More than that, the trade unions remain trapped in the capitalist politics of the working class.

Mike Macnair spoke next. He expected that Starmer's remote Pablotite antecedence will lead to a Tory press offensive against him in the few months before the general election. On the question of the de-Labourisation of Labour, he agreed with Kevin that the trade unions are unlikely to sever their links. However, he thought it possible that the party might move to break its institutional links with the unions as part of a 'Blair on steroids' radical public-sector reform plan that involved wholesale privatisation.

On the failure of left-of-Labour parties to make any electoral impact,

Mike pointed to the bourgeois media that block any sympathetic coverage - once again highlighting the need for the working class to have its own media. Another show-stopper is the unwillingness of left groups to work together. Unity is a political choice that was seen to work in the Socialist Alliance, where the most important groups agreed to cooperate in what was a partyist project.

Farzad Kamangar raised doubts about the likelihood of a Labour win in the next general election. She drew attention to the results in 1992, when the opinion polls all predicted a win for Labour led by Neil Kinnock, but instead John Major secured an overall majority of 21 seats.

Jack Conrad then spoke. He noted Keir Starmer's 'Clause four on steroids' speech which promised changes to the DNA of the Labour Party, but without providing any details. We could see a situation where Starmer forces through a weakening of the trade union link as part of his efforts to bolster his pro-capitalist credentials. From the other angle, comrade Conrad also thought it possible that, if a Labour government attacked the trade unions, then this could lead to a rank-and-file backlash, resulting in disaffiliations from Labour. On the other hand, we should not discount the possibility that Sir Keir will talk 'conservative' to get Labour elected but act 'reformist' when in government. Unlikely, but with real movement from below, not impossible.

As regards the Labour left, it has been roundly defeated and is moving to the right. Its aims are becoming ever more modest and disassociated from calls for radical change. Jack agreed with Mike Macnair that Sir Keir was vulnerable when it comes to his *Socialist Alternatives* past. Surely Tory HQ and the rightwing media are just waiting to pounce.

Regarding Corbyn, it is not impossible for him to be recruited as the figurehead for a broad front project. Jeremy Corbyn, Ken Loach, Mick Lynch, Alan Gibbons, Left Unity, Counterfire, Socialist Labour Network, Liverpool Community Independents have all been involved in talks. Adding to comrade Macnair's comments about the media, Jack pointed out that the world has moved on from when the only content was printed, and from when TV was only available on four channels. We now have social media and celebrities with millions of followers. Jack emphasised the need for us to have a collective voice - coordinating our content, translating it into a political line of action and acting as a sponsor of theoretical study.

Responding to the discussion, Kevin Bean considered where various fragments of the Corbyn movement are now. Some have actually stood in the recent local elections as candidates for the Green Party, and others as independents - this clearly represents a shift to a lower level of politics. People who were previously Marxists are now just claiming to be 'representatives of their community'. If Starmer is 'Blair on steroids', he said that any broad front party coming from this direction would be "Labourism on Mogadon" ●

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USA

A tale of two liars

Despite the court judgment over defamation and sexual assault, he has come roaring back with a triumphant CNN 'town hall' performance. But, argues **Daniel Lazare**, the liberal bourgeois media is no more reliable than Trump's fact-free claims

The threat of civil war may have waned a bit during the first months of Joe Biden's presidency. But now it is back on boil, thanks to Donald Trump's triumphant appearance at a CNN 'town hall' meeting last week.

Trump put on a bravura performance for more than an hour, as he talked over host Kaitlan Collins, made fun of journalist E Jean Carroll for winning a \$5 million judgment against him for defamation and sexual assault, and in general carried on in his trademark, fact-free manner. But he also unveiled a rightwing programme that, in its own twisted way, was little less than revolutionary. For instance:

■ He called on Republicans to force Biden to default on America's \$31.4 trillion federal debt - an action that would throw global finances into turmoil (and US politics as well). "Well, you might as well do it now, because you'll do it later," he advised. "... We have to save this country."

■ He promised to pardon "a large portion" of the thousand or more people arrested for their role in the January 2021 Capitol Hill insurrection - an act that would essentially put a presidential seal of approval on an attempted *coup d'état*.

■ He said he would abide by the results in 2024 only "if I think it's an honest election" - which, given the evidence-free zone he lives in, means he will only recognise it as honest if he wins.

■ He refused to support the Ukraine-Russia war, balked at calling Vladimir Putin a war criminal, and promised instead to resolve the conflict in 24 hours: "I'll meet with Putin, I'll meet with Zelensky - they both have weaknesses and they both have strengths. And within 24 hours that war will be settled." But, since any such settlement would require major territorial concessions on the part of Ukraine, the effect would be to tilt the balance of power to Moscow - a prospect that fills the ruling class with horror from the United States to the European Union.

The results would thus be brutal across the board. Foreign affairs, economic policy, the western alliance - all would be in disarray if Trump wins another term. Since a second Trump presidency would pick up where the first left off, the coup that began on January 6 2021 would finally be complete. What little is left of democracy in America's sclerotic 234-year-old republic would be shattered.

As if that was not enough, Trump also promised his CNN audience to enforce the right to bear arms to the hilt - music to the ears of a burgeoning fascist movement that uses the second amendment as its war cry. Although he refused to say if he would ban abortion outright, he praised last summer's overthrow of Roe v Wade as "an incredible thing" and accused abortion advocates of wanting to "rip the baby out of the womb at the end of the ninth month". He went on and on about Jean Carroll, the former *Elle* magazine advice columnist, who emerged victorious last week after a New York jury found by a preponderance of evidence that Trump was guilty of sexual assault, battery and defamation.

"I swear on my children, which



Truth is an alien concept ... and not only for Trump

I never do, I have no idea who this woman is," Trump declared to laughter and applause from a hand-picked rightwing audience. "This is a fake story, a made-up story ... she's a whack job."¹

He also ranted about immigration in his usual apocalyptic way:

Look at New York City. Look what's happening. They're living in Central Park in New York City. The city is being swamped. Los Angeles is being swamped. Iowa is being swamped. Our whole country is being destroyed. Millions of people are coming into our country. And you know what the number is going to be, in my opinion, by the end of the year? Not the four million that you hear and the three million. I think it's going to be 15 million people.

But the millions of people filling the streets in those places are not immigrants for the most part, but ordinary citizens made homeless by economic policies that are driving housing costs far beyond what most workers can afford - economic policies that Trump supported down the line.

Polls

Not that any of this would matter if Trump's poll standing was weak. But it is not - rather, it is Joe Biden who is in trouble. Americans are so dissatisfied, according to a recent ABC News-Washington Post poll, that 44% say they would probably or definitely vote for Trump in 2024 versus only 38% who say they would vote for Biden and 12% who are as yet undecided. For black Americans, the number who would probably or definitely vote for Trump now stands at 27% - more than double the 12% who voted for him in 2020. For Hispanics, it stands at 43% - a significant increase over the 32% who were pro-Trump the last time around. On the all-important age question, 68% of respondents say that the 80-year-old Biden is too old for another term, versus only 44% who say the same about Trump (a comparatively youthful 76!).²

Other winds are blowing in Trump's direction. If more than 200,000 people are crossing over

America's southern border per month, it is because the number of displaced people around the world now stands at 100 million - more than double the level of 2012.³ That translates as one person in 80 who is on the run due to war, climate change or economic collapse. As a result, pressure along America's 1,591-mile southern border can only build, which in turn means that the audience for Trump's brand of xenophobia can only go up as well.

Add to that a sinking economy - real wages have fallen 0.5% since April 2022⁴ - and a war that weighs more and more heavily on Democrats as it festers and grows, and it is no wonder that Biden's poll numbers are in the soup. If voters do not like how he is doing, their only option in the oldest two-party system in the world is to go for Trump, even though he will put the last nail in the coffin of US democracy. The Biden administration is thus handing Trump power on a silver platter. But that is the historic function of a liberal establishment that is rotten to the core: to pave the way for rightwing authoritarianism by virtue of its own incompetence and corruption.

The corporate media reacted to Trump's performance with the usual horror and dismay. *The Washington Post* accused him of a strategy of tension, in which the goal is "to attack and undermine the entire system, because, by breaking it down, he gains more power". *The New York Times* declared with its usual pomposity that Trump is striking at "core American values that have been at the bedrock of the nation for decades: its creditworthiness, its credibility with international allies, and its adherence to the rule of law at home."⁵

What neither will own up to, of course, is their own contribution to the breakdown. If Trump thinks that reality is something he can make up as he goes along, it is because the bourgeois press regards the truth in a way that is equally cavalier.

This is most apparent with regard to 'national security'. The best way to think about Trump is as an upside-down Jeremy Corbyn. A week after the latter was elected Labour Party leader in September 2015, *The Sunday Times* quoted a "senior serving general" to the effect that

the armed forces would take "direct action" to stop him from forming a government. "There would be mass resignations at all levels," the unnamed general said, "and you would face the very real prospect of an event which would effectively be a mutiny."⁶

Since Corbyn was intolerable in the eyes of the defence establishment, he would have to go. But an equal and opposite reaction started taking shape on the other side of the Atlantic, once Trump declared for the presidency around the same time. The effort began slowly, as long as it was still possible to dismiss his candidacy as a joke. But it turned deadly serious, once he clinched the Republican nomination - and then grew into a moral crusade, once he won the election.

By April 2016, *Politico* was thus referring to him as "the Kremlin's candidate", while *The New York Review of Books* denounced him as a Russian "patsy". "Donald Trump and Russia: a web that grows more tangled all the time," a *Guardian* headline declared in July, while the government-funded Public Broadcasting System said that US allies were "left slack-jawed" by Russia comments that were less than completely hostile.⁷ Hillary Clinton called Trump a Russian "puppet" in a presidential debate in October, while in January 2017 the FBI signalled to the press that it was OK to publish the Christopher Steele dossier with its irresistible tale of "golden showers" at the Moscow Ritz-Carlton. So what if the story was obvious nonsense? Who cared, as long as it put pressure on him to resign? By the time Trump took office on January 20, the capitalist press wanted to know one thing and one thing only: how had a Svengali-like Putin gotten him in his grip?

But, as with the Labour Party's phony 'anti-Semitism' scare, it was all untrue. Indeed, NBC News reporter Richard Engel went on TV to declare that the "intelligence community" had decided to "drop" the Steele dossier "like a bomb" on Trump, because they were "angry" and wanted to "put him on notice" that they needed answers to the Russia-related questions swirling around him.⁸ The CIA was planting a phony story in order to force him

to come clean. But the press did not care, because a willing instrument of the CIA was precisely what it wanted to be.

"We don't have enough time to fact-check every lie he told," CNN host Jake Tapper said about Trump after the town hall appearance. But neither do viewers have enough time to fact-check every lie that Tapper and other CNN talking heads told about Trump at the height of Russiagate.

Parallel

The difference between Trump and Corbyn, of course, is that, while one is gone, the other has come roaring back. The press pronounced itself aghast at the untruths he spewed out during his CNN appearance, yet could not help spewing out untruths of its own. *The Times* quoted Trump as saying he wants to settle the Russo-Ukrainian war, "so we stop killing all these people", but then added archly: "He did not mention that the killing was initiated by Russia."⁹ But this was a lie, since the killing obviously did not begin with Russia in February 2022, but rather with the neo-Nazi-influenced regime that the Obama administration helped install in Kyiv in February 2014. Among the regime's first acts was to declare war on the breakaway provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk - a war that, by early 2022, had claimed more than 14,000 lives.¹⁰ Yet *The Times* has supported the regime every step of the way.

One lie begets another - a vicious cycle that in the case of Ukraine has led directly to war. If Trump inhabits a parallel universe all his own, so does the capitalist press. As an ex-*Times* investigative reporter named Jeff Gerth observed a few months ago in the *Columbia Journalism Review*,

Today, the US media has the lowest credibility - 26% - among 46 nations, according to a 2022 study by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. In 2021, 83% of Americans saw 'fake news' as a 'problem,' and 56% - mostly Republicans and independents - agreed that the media were 'truly the enemy of the American people,' according to Rasmussen Reports.

Two liars - Trump and the corporate media - thus excoriate one another, as they sink deeper and deeper into a morass of imperialism, war and dictatorship ●

Notes

1. See [rumble.com/v2n6dyg-trump-town-hall-on-cnn-full.html](https://www.rumble.com/v2n6dyg-trump-town-hall-on-cnn-full.html) (exchange starts at 19.20).
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3. UN Refugee Agency, 'Global trends: forced displacement in 2021', p5: www.unhcr.org/media/40152.
4. www.bls.gov/news.release/realer.nr0.htm.
5. www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/05/11/trump-town-hall-republicans/; www.nytimes.com/2023/05/11/us/politics/trump-2024-cnn-town-hall.html.
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TURKEY

Triumph of rabid nationalism

Erdoğan looks set to win the second round and a third term as president. Esen Uslu probes the May 14 results and the expected outcome of May 28

As expected, the first round of Turkey's presidential election has ended inconclusively and the eventual winner will be decided in the second round, to be held on May 28. However, that is not the case for the parliamentary elections, which were held simultaneously on May 14. There is a clear winner in the shape of rabid nationalism, although it was split into three components.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) of current president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has long proved unable to win an outright majority in any general election. However, it is still getting the largest share of votes - this time picking up 35%. It has consistently relied on the support of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), founded originally by the infamous Grey Wolves, in order to retain its majority in the national assembly.

However, as we approached the general elections, the MHP was in a sorry state. Cooperating with Erdoğan and his policies, without blinking an eye, caused internal tremors. A large group eventually split to form the Good Party (İYİ), which positioned itself as the main nationalist opposition and eventually aligned with the Republican Peoples Party (CHP) as the backbone of the Nation Alliance.

The state of the MHP was such a concern for Erdoğan and the AKP that they hastened, in April 2022, to reduce the electoral threshold to 7% from the 10% (designed to keep the Kurds out of parliament), in order to try and ensure sufficient MHP representation. But unexpectedly it received 10% of the vote - a loss of just one percent compared to the 2018 elections - and as a result of the reduced threshold won one more seat, taking it to 50. The result is that the AKP-MHP coalition has a working majority in the shape of 317 out of 600 seats.

Meanwhile, MHP's offshoot, the İYİ, also got 10% (and 7% of the seats - one better than in 2018). The need for the opposition alliance to pick up Kurdish votes in order to win both the presidential race and a majority in parliament put the İYİ in a difficult position. Its policies have been based on an existentialist enmity to the Kurdish freedom movement (and especially the HDP Peoples' Democratic Party).

Furthermore, the CHP was insistent that Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who is from the Alevi Turkish minority, should be the presidential candidate of the Nation coalition, but İYİ president Meral Akşener was adamant that Kılıçdaroğlu was unelectable. Her proposal was that either the mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu, or the mayor of Ankara, Mansur Yavaş, with their impeccable nationalist credentials, should be selected.

When eventually Kılıçdaroğlu was agreed as the candidate by the six leaders of the coalition in March, Akşener withdrew from the Nation coalition. It took two days of intense negotiations to bring her back into the fold. There was a compromise whereby İmamoğlu and Mansur would serve as assistants to a Kılıçdaroğlu presidency.

As the Turkish saying goes, however, 'Shredded pants cannot be held together with tacking'. From then on the İYİ was going through the motions of campaigning for the coalition but with no great enthusiasm. For example, on every possible occasion it emphasised its



Parliament stays right, presidency will too

opposition to 'terrorism' - code for the Kurdish freedom movement.

Akşener's slogan, "One vote for Kemal and one vote for Meral", is indicative. Most probably the İYİ was unable, or unwilling, to carry the votes of its popular base for Kılıçdaroğlu, since the third candidate for presidency, Sinan Oğan, is also from the nationalist wing.

Oğan was elected as a MP from Iğdır province on the Armenian border in the 2011 elections on a MHP ticket, but in 2015 he was expelled from the MHP. He mounted a legal appeal and was taken back into the party as a result. But he was expelled again in 2017, along with the group that went on to form the İYİ, however, he did not join the new party.

Azerbaijan

His family is of Azerbaijani origin, his academic career was on the economy and politics of Azerbaijan and, after gaining his PhD in Moscow, he lectured at the Azerbaijan State Economics University. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Oğan was close to Abulfaz Elchibey, the second president of newly independent Azerbaijan. He worked in the presidential office until a coup toppled Elchibey. Oğan also worked as the Azerbaijan representative of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency - designed to infiltrate the politics of Turkic populations in neighbouring countries - under the cloak of cultural cooperation.

He formed the Russia-Ukraine research desk of the Centre for Eurasian Strategic Studies (ASAM) - the main weapon in Turkish denial of the Armenian genocide during World War I. Oğan also formed the Centre for International Relations and Strategic Analyses - one of the most influential nationalist think-tanks operating nowadays. It presents itself as the "thought factory of Turkey".

In order to be a presidential candidate, Oğan needed 100,000 signatures. The president of the Zafer (Victory) Party, Ümit Özdağ, supported him. Özdağ is also an important figure in nationalist circles. He is the son of one of the officers of the junta that toppled the government in 1960 and a close associate of Alparslan Türkeş, the founding president of the MHP and another member of the 1960-61 military junta.

When Türkeş and his 14 fellow conspirators attempted to take over the junta, they were defeated and in effect exiled. They were posted

as diplomats to faraway countries. Özdağ's father was sent to Japan and he was born there. Educated in Germany he specialised, as an academic, in the political relations between the military and civilians. Özdağ also took part in the formation of ASAM and its Armenian Studies Institute.

He became a prominent member of the MHP and attempted to stand as a candidate against party leader Devlet Bahçeli at its 2006 congress - but found himself booted out two days before the congress was convened. He returned to academic work and became the president of 21st Century Turkey Institute - yet another think-tank of nationalists and ex-generals.

Özdağ rejoined the MHP in 2010 and was then elected to the national committee, becoming an MP in 2015. At the 2016 congress he declared himself as a candidate for the party presidency and, like Oğan, was expelled! He subsequently took part in the formation of the İYİ party and was elected as an MP in 2018.

He was also expelled from the İYİ in 2020, but once again this was overturned by the courts. So he returned to the party in 2021 - but then resigned to form the Zafer Party (ZP). In the 2023 presidential elections he floated the idea of Mansur Yavaş's candidacy, but then switched to supporting Sinan Oğan. For the parliamentary elections ZP formed the ATA coalition with smaller rightwing parties and won only two percent of all votes - with no seats in parliament as a result, of course.

However, Sinan Oğan got over five percent, so the support he gathered may be quite significant in deciding the outcome of the second round.

Left results

First, there is the Green Left Party (YSP) - the form in which the Kurdish freedom movement was forced to participate in the parliamentary elections when the HDP was threatened with collapse if its electoral support did not improve. YSP votes were down to nine percent, but that was still enough for 61 seats.

In the 2018 elections the HDP had 67 seats after it won over 10% of the vote. We must bear in mind that in that election the threshold was 10% exactly, and many on the left supported the campaign to get it over that hurdle. This time the Turkish Workers Party (TİP) joined the Labour and Freedom Alliance along with the YSP, but fielded its own candidate. The TİP got less than

two percent and won four seats. Had the YSP and TİP fielded a single list, they would have won more seats between them.

The TİP's campaigning drew much criticism from the left, as its anti-Kurdish bias became very apparent despite its lip service to the Labour and Freedom Alliance. The other communist and left parties that took part in the elections, running independently, got dismal results as expected.

Now we have a parliament with a clear majority for the AKP-MHP coalition - although the AKP fielded on its own lists candidates from parties with apparent religious tones. As a result, the Huda Par - the Hezbollah-associated party in Kurdistan - now has three seats in parliament. And the New Welfare Party (YRP) got three percent of the vote and five seats - the YRP had made use of the AKP-led alliance to jump over the electoral threshold.

The CHP lists included members of the Nation coalition except those of the İYİ. The unanimous decision of Nation had been not to put up party leaders as candidates. Their expectation was that when Kılıçdaroğlu won the elections, they would be appointed as ministers, so they are no longer MPs and their last hope to remain relevant in politics is if Kılıçdaroğlu wins the second round.

Given the buoyant nationalist right, however, such a win seems unlikely. Their hope is to persuade the five percent who supported Sinan Oğan in the first round to switch to Kılıçdaroğlu, and to mobilise those who did not vote. Meanwhile, keeping up the level of support from Kurdish voters will be a major hurdle. The Kurdish freedom movement did an excellent job in supporting Kılıçdaroğlu - in some Kurdish provinces he won 70% of the vote. But asking them to do the same once again despite the dismal support in central and western Turkey of 'white Turks' could be quite a task.

In addition, the left-leaning urban petty bourgeoisie will be very difficult to mobilise once more, because their disappointment and apathy is tangible. Considering the immense logistics of transporting those who must be returned to the earthquake zone to vote, doing that once more on May 28, which is the start of the holiday season, could be very difficult indeed.

But, unless such efforts are made, the result of that election looks to be a foregone conclusion, with Erdoğan winning his third term as president ●

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

weekly Worker

Hijab is about more than how women dress

Disenchanted with the west

Yassamine Mather gives her impressions of Turkey after 20 years of AKP rule and the evident failure of secularism from above

In the last 20 years Turkey has changed dramatically under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The country is far more Islamic, while the party in power is often described as national conservative, socially conservative and, according to some, 'neo-Ottomanist'.

As with other social-conservative forces in the region, the party and the current president are pro-liberal market economy, and Erdoğan has accumulated considerable personal wealth while in power. There is clearly dissatisfaction with the AKP's authoritarianism and censorship, not to mention corruption, especially amongst the urban youth, yet it managed to maintain a majority in the parliamentary elections of May 14.

I had not previously gone to Istanbul during the 20 years of AKP rule, but during a short visit last week I was shocked by the changes in social attitude and the rise of political Islam. In the 1980s and 1990s, in most major cities, very few women wore a headscarf. Nowadays, the reverse is true. The overwhelming majority of women, young and old, adhere to a very strict wearing of the hijab. This is not like Iran's compulsory headscarf: in Turkey its 'voluntary' wearing is taken very seriously. Those wearing a head cover usually make sure not a single strand of hair or fringe is shown. They also wear more or less what can be described as modest (if not fully Islamic) clothes.

I use quotation marks around the word 'voluntary', because, of course, as the western press and the 'international community' keep telling us, in 'democratic' Islamic Turkey, unlike dictatorial Islamic Iran, the wearing of the hijab is thus considered. However, if that is the case, we have to question the limits of this concept. Without a comprehensive analysis of why young women, students, office staff, service-sector employees, etc, are so keen to adhere to wearing the hijab, it would be difficult to assess the situation theoretically. However, the question remains: how much freedom in terms of work, study and social engagement would these women have, should they decide to remove their hijab? What is the level of peer pressure, parental pressure? In other words, just *how* voluntary is voluntary? How does the choice of wearing the headscarf relate to freedom of movement, work, etc? Do some girls and young women find it easier to work, live and socialise if they cover their hair? And is this a compromise that suits everyone?

I am sure that a Shia fundamentalist travelling from Iran to Turkey would envy the fact that in major cities, women are far more covered than in the Islamic Republic. Yet the hijab is compulsory in Iran and 'voluntary' in Turkey. Amazingly, Turkish nationalism and even Atatürkism seem to coexist to a certain extent with the religious movement, while in the Islamic Republic factions of



Kurdish women 'voluntarily' wearing the hijab

the Islamic Republican Party are at war with each other regarding precisely the issue of the compulsory hijab.

Since Erdoğan first became prime minister in 2002, the AKP has abolished regulations that banned veiled women from working, studying in state institutions and organisations. The AKP claims it respects secular lifestyles and there is no compulsion for women to wear a headscarf. However, in the last few years removing it, especially amongst young women, has been seen not only as a sign of 'secularism', but of political opposition to the governing party.

Different

Only three to four decades ago, Turkish women faced a completely different situation. The state, mainly led by elite secular 'republicans', discouraged the wearing of headscarves even in traditional religious cities - as was depicted so eloquently by Orhan Pamuk, in the book *Snow*, which deals in part with the dilemma of young girls choosing between their headscarf (bringing honour) and the country. As S Prasannarajan describes in *Open* magazine, in *Snow* "there's a staging of the play, *My fatherland or my headscarf*, in which a woman removes her headscarf and burns it",¹ startling both secular republicans and the local Islamists in the audience in what is described a religious town in

central Anatolia. Prasannarajan goes on to provide this quote from the book:

When the angry girl tore the scarf off her head, she was not just making a statement about people, nor about national dress: she was talking about our souls, because the scarf, the fez, the turban and the headdress were all symbols of the reactionary darkness in our souls, from which we should liberate ourselves and run to join the modern nations of the west. Although few could make out her words, everyone heard one taunt back very clearly: "So why not take off everything and run to Europe stark naked?"

In Pamuk's novel, young girls banned from various places for wearing the headscarf (remember, this is the pre-Erdoğan Islamic era) commit suicide *en masse*. As Margaret Atwood points out in reviewing the book,

Those not living in the shrunken remains of former empires may find it hard to imagine the mix of resentful entitlement (We ought to be powerful!), shame (What did we do wrong?), blame (Whose fault is it?) and anxiety about identity (Who are we really?) that takes up a great deal of headroom in such places, and thus in *Snow*.²

In neighbouring Iran this week, Mohammad Dehghan, vice-president for legal affairs, told reporters: "Without the hijab, the Islamic Republic would not have much of a meaning ... the hijab is the symbol of the Islamic Republic." Once more he was making it clear that this is a central issue, when it comes to the survival of the current order.

I have emphasised the issue of the hijab because in both Iran and Turkey its significance goes far beyond debates about women's attire or even women's rights. Wearing it up to 1930s, followed by its banning and the disdain for those who kept it in the Pahlavi and Kemalist era, and then a return to it under two different types of Islamic government - reflect above all else the failure of 'westernisation' and 'secularism from above', as espoused by the pro-west middle classes trying to impose their 'modernisation' ideals on the rest of the country. It shows the complexity and the difficulties of finding a revolutionary way to confront political Islam and the long struggle ahead in the fight for secular, democratic governments in the region.

Blind eye

Given Iran's opposition to most western positions and the fact that the current Turkish government has turned a blind eye to most US sanctions against Iran, you would have thought that Iran's Islamic leaders would favour an Erdoğan victory in Turkey's presidential elections. However, opinion in Tehran is divided and the majority of both conservative and 'reformist' politicians favour the victory of the opposition leader. Rivalry with Turkey in terms of who is more 'Islamic', Turkey's support for anti-Assad fighters in Syria in the last 10 years, as well as for separatists in Iranian Azerbaijan, and Iran's support for Armenia in its conflict with Azerbaijan Republic (not forgetting the promise of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Erdoğan's opponent in the May 28 second round, to build a regional economic alliance with Iran) - all have played their part. Last week in Iran the daily *Khorasan* published a photo of Kılıçdaroğlu holding up a map which showed his planned route for the connection of Turkey to China through Iran, thanks to the new highways and rail lines he is promising will be constructed under his presidency.

As for the Iranian opposition, however, Kılıçdaroğlu's anti-immigrant remarks and his promise to prohibit the sale of property to foreigners have angered those who are in forced exile or simply have chosen a better life in Turkey.

Meanwhile, there is no love lost between Syrian president Bashar el-Assad and Erdoğan, who were foes during the Syrian civil war. Assad accused Turkey of helping to finance his armed opponents. As a consequence of that civil war, Turkey now hosts a very large number of Syrian refugees. Of the 3.65 million refugees who currently live in Turkey, the vast majority are Syrian (Iraqis, Afghans and Iranians make up most of the others).

Although Erdoğan has secured huge sums from the European Union as part of a deal to secure the borders of 'fortress Europe', many Turks faced with spiralling inflation (currently standing at around 45%) and financial hardship blame refugees. So immigration issues have been a hot subject during the current elections and will remain key in the second round.

One local branch of Iran's Republican Party recently invited the media to watch, as Syrians from their district boarded buses bound for Turkey's southern border. Kılıçdaroğlu's deputy, Onursal Adıgüzel, is quoted as stating: "... we are not saying in a racist way that we're going to send people back. With the right policy and with healthy communication with Syria, we want to reconstruct the region again and send Syrians back step by step."³

All this has gone down well in Damascus, where the Assad regime cannot hide its pleasure, while, for his part, Erdoğan has responded to the opposition's election promises of returning Syrian refugees by trying to mend relations with Damascus, after a decade of conflict.

So in a very complicated situation, when it comes to a choice between Erdoğan and his opponent, Iran's Islamic Republic and Assad's Syria seem to be on the same side as western governments ●

Notes

1. [openthemagazine.com/cover-stories/what-the-headscarf-reveals](https://www.openthemagazine.com/cover-stories/what-the-headscarf-reveals).
2. www.nytimes.com/2004/08/15/books/headscarves-to-die-for.html.
3. www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/12/syrians-turkey-elections-uncertain-future-whether-erdogan-stays-or-goes.

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