

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



Assassination attempt will boost Donald Trump's chances of success in November. What then?

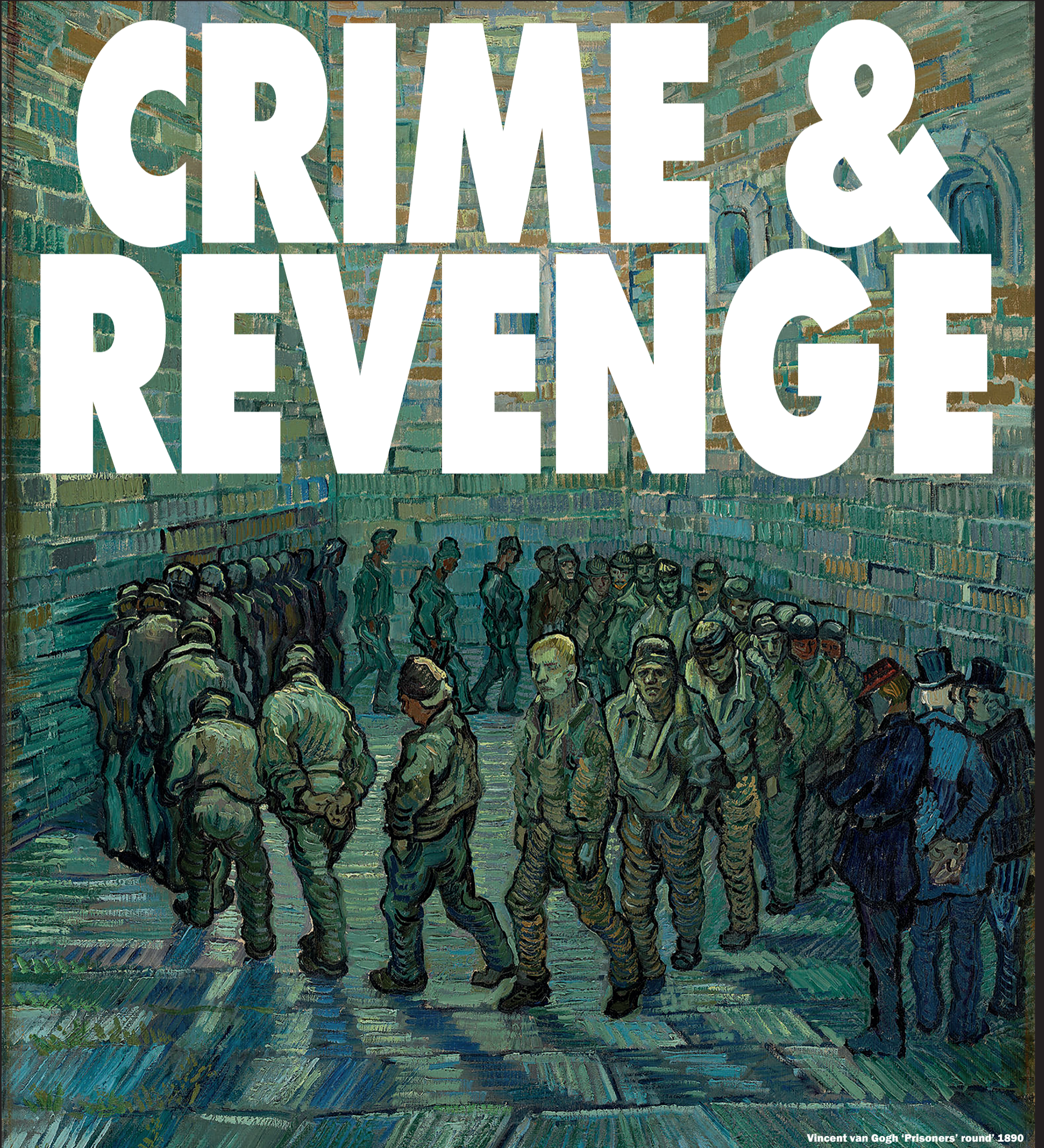
- Letters and debate
- Football's left and right
- New Popular Front
- Australia's RCO

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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CRIME & REVENGE



Vincent van Gogh 'Prisoners' round' 1890

LETTERS



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

NUM and Labour

It should have been a classic: the 40th anniversary of the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85; the election of a Labour government, the virtual political extinction of the Tory Party and England on the cusp of a Euro 2024 football victory!

It was the kind of political mix which, during the long history of our industry and its embattled communities, has seen euphoric scenes, as virtually the whole population has used the Durham Miners Gala as an opportunity for a mass, collective, loud-music, pride-filled party. As it turned out, despite the presence of some of the essential ingredients, others were noticeably missing. The most enduring was the sun: despite it being mid-July, not an appearance, even in a cameo role. Instead the rain poured down in unremitting torrents all day.

There was no-one from the victorious Labour government - no Starmer, Rayner or Miliband. By tradition the leader of the Labour Party is always automatically invited - in the past there have been popular rising stars seeking the endorsement of the miners and a chance to set out their political stall (something of an 'If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere' opportunity). But this died a death ever since Neil Kinnock was given the cold shoulder after the Great Strike for his failure to stand foursquare with us.

The customary playing of a favourite piece before the County Hotel, where the big wigs such as the current Labour leader take the salute, turned sour, as the bands marched right on by. The throngs of a hundred thousand miners, with their families and other members of their community - trade unionists of the still largely industrial smokestack industries - quickly melted away. In the past, when Jeremy Corbyn, for example, took centre stage, things were different, but apart from that, Labour leaders have recently been far away from the politics and concerns of the mining and now ex-mining communities.

Another famous face missing from the throng was former National Union of Mineworkers president Arthur Scargill. There was a good deal of bad blood between the two stars of the Durham miners, Dave Guy and Dave Hopper - that bad blood remains, even though the 'two Daves' have sadly gone. While the leader of the Labour Party always gets an invite, the leader of the NUM during its most testing time never does. Some of us tried to get the hatchet buried at least for this year, but to no avail.

On the face of it Labour seemed to have been bearing gifts. Firstly, there has been the long-awaited public enquiry into the policing of Orgreave during the Great Strike, which I will deal with below, but potentially more individually rewarding was the promise to "put right the injustice" of mineworkers' pensions. What exactly this means we can speculate about, but there is no doubt whatsoever that this promise persuaded thousands of former miners to vote Labour. As a mate of mine commented, "Look, Dave, I'd vote for the Taliban if I thought they'd give us back our money."

Since 1992 the National Coal Board/British Coal Corporation - with the blessing of all governments, Labour and Tory - creamed off 50% of the income from pension investments, despite not having paid one penny into them, and this amounts to some £8 billion in stolen, ill-gotten gains, worthy of the worse, most extortionist money-lender you could imagine.

As with the rest of Labour's manifesto, we have no details of what 'putting it right' actually means, but that did not stop lots of ex-miners excitedly speculating on their fortunes, now that Labour is in office. I think myself that we will now receive our 'reserve fund' and from now on all 'surpluses' (meaning the 50-50 arrangement, which we never agreed to) will end. As for the other investment profits, which have long gone into the government's coffers, I think we can kiss them goodbye.

What has been kept quiet is the announcement that Labour has reversed the previous government's support for a new coal mine in West Cumbria. This is as good a reason as any why Miliband did not appear at the gala - his manic hatred of all things carbon-composed, and especially coal, rivals that of Margaret Thatcher. We have been fighting the combined forces of the well funded 'green' movement for seven years, and cleared every hurdle they have thrown in the way. The simple fact is that Woodhouse Colliery, owned by the West Cumbria Mining company, would be a metallurgical mine for coal that produces blast-furnace steel, not power station fuel. We need new steel, which in turn requires blast furnaces to produce coke from coal.

It is proudly announced how many new wind turbines we shall have, like it or not. But every single wind turbine in the world uses blast-furnace coke from coal in their construction. Now that the last blast furnaces in the UK have closed, mainly because of the crippling carbon tax, we have to buy steel and steel products from abroad. In the case of giant wind turbines, it is China. Other primary steel is imported from the EU. They, by the same, equally stupid logic, allow steel production, but do not mine their own coking coal, which means they have to depend upon the international market to produce steel.

Woodhouse mine would be well placed to provide what was needed using the new mineral export terminal at Teesport - a regular supply on the doorstep. That supply would be consistent and lower-priced, but, more importantly in this environmentally critical world, it would be positively 'green', compared to the mountaintop-removal coal mining taking place in the Appalachians in the USA, for instance.

Woodhouse has had to undergo many environmental tasks proposed by the local council and government environment officials. It is going to be union-organised and that means, of course, the NUM - in contrast to the *laissez-faire* non-union outfits who are destroying the Appalachians. It is likely to be 8% less polluting and carbon-emitting, because the mine is itself more carbon-neutral in its operations than any rivals we know of (we are aware that coal itself is not carbon-neutral).

All of this brings me to Labour's pledge to organise an enquiry into the Battle of Orgreave, where 'militarised police' launched a vicious attack against striking miners during the Great Strike. Dozens of workers were badly injured and then false charges of riot and unlawful assembly were brought against 95 pickets. The court case against them collapsed following accusations of falsified evidence against the police.

Yes, of course, a full and detailed investigation - but into what exactly? So much of the left and union movement wants to 'forget about the ball' and 'get on with the game'. For example, the closures in British Steel cannot be taken on without dealing with the question of steel production: you cannot shout 'Defend steel' and in the same breath call for decarbonisation. You cannot defend the jobs of oil and

gas workers and at the same time talk about stopping oil and gas production.

What were the miners doing in Orgreave in the first place? We were trying to prevent the wholesale massacre of the entire British coal industry - 200,000 mining jobs and up to two million related or ancillary jobs. But these were not jobs in the abstract: they were in very specific and historic parts of the country. These were skills and roles linked to ethnicity, regional identity, national identity and linked to firm values passed down for multiple generations of class, justice, a sense of worth and value in your communal contribution. Any enquiry will miss the essence of what this fight was about.

While it is possible to isolate police actions on that day, nothing can ever justify the sheer savagery and pent-up hatred let loose upon us. The cynical use of our enthusiastic stepping into a well-planned trap. But that is not enough, is it? What about the actions carried out at Hatfield Main, Armthorpe, Fitzwilliam and a dozen other places? What about their cavalry charge at Ravenscraig, or the unrestrained attack on the miners' demonstration in London? Orgreave was simply a more sustained and public operation. An enquiry into policing the miners' strike might be educational, but is even that exhaustive enough?

What is required to bring the 'Justice and Truth' that the Orgreave campaign has sought is nothing short of a full enquiry into the 10-year pit closure programme carried through by Thatcher and John Major, with the baton faithfully taken on by Ed Miliband. What was the logic of closing down the most efficient, cost-effective and safe coal mining industry in the world? What about the clean-coal technology developed since the late 70s - burning coal efficiency and with greatly reduced emissions? The Green Power plant developed at Hatfield Colliery, which generated electricity with no CO₂?

Let's have an enquiry into the reasons why the cops had the orders they got in that bloody field - why Thatcher turned heaven and hell to rid Britain, to deindustrialise and deproletarianise the whole UK. Without it you'll never get to the rationale for Orgreave or pit closures, steel closures and the forthcoming purge of oil and gas.

David John Douglass
South Shields

Pre-revolutionary

I would like to reply to John Smithee on the question of the legalisation of drugs (Letters, July 11), and then comment on matters concerning the Labour Party.

The first question is whether communists should support the legalisation of drug taking. I have decided to change my position from immediately opposing the legalisation of drugs to one of temporary neutrality. Before communists can adopt a correct position about whether to support or oppose drug taking, what is necessary is to hear the arguments for and against, especially from the medical experts. A communist position on drug taking cannot simply be based on uninformed views, nor on the fact that people have taken mind-altering drugs for thousands of years.

Also, I don't think that communists should support legalisation so as to simply take the drug trade away from the criminal drug cartels. It is not only the drug cartels who are criminals. Official capitalism itself can be viewed as a criminal organisation - even more dangerous than the drug cartels. The greatest threat to human survival today doesn't come from the criminal drug cartels, but from official monopoly capitalism - the worst criminals on the planet.

One final point on the drug issue is that I am not opposed to scientific research on the nature and influence of drugs on the human mind. I once read a story about how placebo drugs were given to people in a scientific experiment. The test subjects thought they were taking the real thing and they experienced going on a trip, unaware that they had taken a placebo. This raises important questions about the nature of human consciousness and the power of subconscious beliefs, which mainstream science has hardly begun to explore.

As Smithee correctly pointed out in his letter, people have been taking mind-altering drugs for thousands of years. This was done for various reasons. Obviously the abilities of the human mind in an altered state of consciousness, whether produced by drugs or hypnosis, needs to be scientifically researched. One of these powers is the apparent ability to foretell the future. For instance, the biblical prophets were obviously in an altered state of awareness when they prophesied about future events, which later came to pass often in remarkable detail. While not confusing prophecy with religion, as the ancient peoples did and as religious people do today, we need to be aware of what these seers saw and warned us about, rather than simply ignoring these prophecies, because they were presented in a religious context.

So I am certainly not opposed to the scientific use of drugs by researchers who are exploring the nature and abilities of the mind in an altered state of consciousness, whether induced by a drug or hypnosis. Obviously, rushing to support the legalisation of drugs outside of scientific research, without hearing the arguments for and against, would be foolish.

On the question of the Labour Party I think that the Revolutionary Communist Group is the most vocal leader of sectarianism in Britain. They dismiss the Labour Party completely. This is to confuse rank-and-file Labour members with the rightwing, pro-capitalist group which leads the party. If the RCG is right, then Jeremy Corbyn should never have won the leadership in the first place.

What we need to remember is that Corbyn won the leadership of the party in a completely non-revolutionary situation. This is the most important lesson of the Corbyn episode. The RCG, the *de facto* leaders of sectarianism on the British left in relation to Labour, are not prepared for what will happen to that party, when capitalism begins to collapse - which I expect to start before 2030. Labour's recent landslide election victory may be a sign that we are entering a pre-revolutionary situation.

We can agree with Lenin that the working class is spontaneously socialist. In Britain, this spontaneous socialism is mostly expressed as a vote for the Labour Party, which presently benefits the right wing. The RCG needs to understand that the ruling class will seek to take over any mass party of the working class, including a communist party.

This is why I oppose the formal banning of factions in the communist party, which serves the interest of capitalist roaders in the party more than anything else. Rather than preaching sectarianism and dogma, like the RCG, communists need to take a flexible attitude towards the Labour Party.

Tony Clark

For Democratic Socialism

American bills

Paul Demarty's 'Denialism in the circles of hell' was a great article (July 4). It's good to know I'm not the only politics/history nerd who closely follows the interminably flawed

machinations displayed by the US seats of power.

I'll add one thing though; the other way laws are able to be passed is via the dreaded 'Bipartisan Bill', such as regarding the recent billions appropriated for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. In a display of shameless hypocrisy, the new House speaker, Mike Johnson, did a 180-degree turn and whipped support for funding Biden's foreign wars, despite spending his career in Washington prior to this opposing this kind of warmongering and the money spent on it.

It's a truism in Washington that, whenever the label 'bipartisan' precedes the name of any bill, it is guaranteed to be bad news for the 'normal' civilian people of America ... and also often the world.

Jason Patrick Quinn
email

Trump assassin

No doubt many thoughts will have been tumbling around the attempted assassination of Trump - that narrow escape of his. Not only questions or commentary in an empty-souled, flippant, utterly facile and anyway purely *distractive* social-media manner, but maybe the following from within our Leninism-modal ultra-seriousness.

1. Thank fuck the shooter wasn't a disoriented Palestinian-American believing he was doing the right thing for Gazans. Equally so, neither a Muslim of any stripe nor an 'undocumented' Latinx; nor some Chinese-American loner upset at American attacks upon his 'heritage', etc.

2. Thank fuck that, seemingly, Thomas Matthew Crooks wasn't a fall-guy stooge, acting as an unknowing 'proxy' for one element or another within the US deep state or Israel's Mossad - where the bulk of blowback would exclusively suit the latter, and yet again only suit the dark forces of global capitalism.

3. It's not only bizarre, but also almost surreally coincidental that the shooter was out to stop Trump becoming president, when it's Trump's 'haywire' politics, not those of Biden, that may well lead to an 'easing up' on Russia over Ukraine if again he's elected president. A bizarre coincidence is that the two assassinated Kennedy brothers were similarly less rabid about Cuba than other main state players of the time.

4. Thank fuck we communists don't opt for conspiracy theories in the absence of *realistic* doubts or evidence: giving 'conspiracy' a disproportionate status avoids either recognition or any understanding of far greater forces in play. Forces such as immeasurably more significant, *class-based* explanations within our overall Marxian truth.

In much that same vein, maybe it's worth noting that the World Socialist Web Site considered our recent UK general election as a "war" election, whereas the *Weekly Worker* questioned whether it was over "Gaza". At least to my mind, the former analysis/posture is far more useful - arguably one driven predominantly by objective 'expansiveness' rather than the *Weekly Worker's*, based upon *subjectivism* within hugely inadequate 'parochialism'?

Maybe also all this comes as part of strangely outdated stances - when and where things have moved in multiple 'oblique' ways and in often 'obscured' dimensions? So yet again it's all about that 'internally directed' dialecticism thing so absent anywhere on our hard left, goddamnit!

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

PRISON

Crime and revenge

Eddie Ford welcomes the early release of prisoners, but the emphasis should be on rehabilitation, not crisis management

With Britain's hellish prison system at breaking point, the new Labour government announced on July 12 emergency measures to release some prisoners early, as the situation had become a "ticking timebomb". According to the new justice secretary, Shabana Mahmood, this should free up spaces "in the low thousands", and the policy is on top an early-release scheme started in October by the former Tory government, which has seen more than 10,000 prisoners freed up to 70 days early.

This is something that we communists cautiously welcome as an outbreak of sanity - though, of course, we would go a lot further, as far too many people are sent unnecessarily to prison, which should only be considered as a last resort in an extremely small minority of cases. That is, rather than the default option with the prison system effectively acting as an auxiliary arm of social services as part of a truly criminal and totally irrational punitive 'justice' regime - one to boot that is hugely expensive. Before the general election, the prison population was projected to hit 106,300 by March 2027, with the average cost of a place behind bars getting near to £50,000 a year. 'Law and order' in the UK comes with a heavy price tag for everyone.

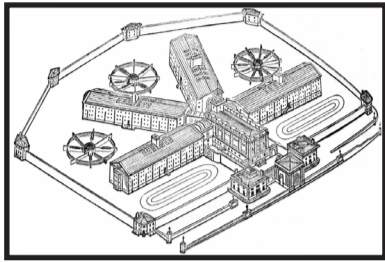
Prisons have been operating at 99% capacity since the start of 2023. Mahmood, whilst visiting HMP Bedford and HMP Five Wells in Northamptonshire, declared that from September the government will be cutting the automatic release point for most standard sentences from 50% to 40% in England and Wales, though serious violent offenders - as well as those jailed for sex offences, terrorism and crimes associated with domestic abuse - will be excluded from the scheme. As of July 8, according to the latest available government figures, only 708 places remained in the adult male estate - that is, 83,755 out of a "usable operational capacity" of 84,463. For the prison system to run "smoothly and effectively", we are told, it needs to keep a 'buffer' of 1,425 cell spaces free in men's prisons to be able to cope with any sudden influx.

Safeguard

Showing the desperate state of affairs, officials fear that capacity will be overwhelmed by the end of August, if not earlier, but the change cannot come into force until September, because it requires secondary legislation to be voted on by parliament. Additionally, up to 200 police cells to hold inmates have been made temporarily available under Operation Safeguard - a scheme first implemented under a Labour government in 2006, when the prison population had only 125 spaces left.

The justice secretary has also vowed to strengthen probation by recruiting at least 1,000 trainee officers by the end of next March, while "tackling reoffending". She said the new government would "speed up" prison-building and publish a 10-year "capacity strategy" this autumn. But these sticking-plaster measures are dwarfed by the scale of the problem. The likelihood of prisons running out of space before September still remains very high and, while early release as a measure might well buy some breathing space, this dire situation will keep recurring, because successive governments have introduced waves of laws to increase both sentences and the number of people sent to prison.

Shabana Mahmood said the policy would be reviewed after 18 months, although the measures were necessary



Overcrowded: Pentonville

- otherwise the police would be unable to arrest "dangerous criminals", as there would literally be nowhere to put them. No mention, of course, of the horrendous plight of prisoners with almost half of them living in double cells designed for one man, with a significant minority in single cells with no internal sanitation - sometimes locked up for 23 hours in appalling conditions with many having exposed electric wires, glass missing from their windows, widespread infestations of vermin, and so on.

Inhuman

This inhuman treatment puts those with already fragile mental health at even greater risk, with the same going for the high proportion who suffer from an alcohol or drug problem. In fact, around half of prisoners are addicted to drugs, while crack and heroin addicts account for two-thirds of shoplifting offences and half of burglaries. And if you did not have a drug problem before you entered prison, you might develop one whilst banged up inside as a means of just surviving the nightmarish day, as the walls start to close in around you. Recreational drugs are plentiful within the system, of course.

But "prison works" - as infamously declared in 1993 by then home secretary Michael Howard, to rapturous applause at the Conservative Party conference in a perverse inversion of the truth. He announced that the government would "no longer judge the success of our system of justice by a fall in our prison population" and vindictively took away TVs from the inmates, making their miserable lives even more miserable - an approach that has been the cornerstone of Tory policy on 'law and order' for decades. Prisons are not a 'holiday camp', but somewhere where you are meant to suffer.

Now, the immediate crisis regarding capacity can be laid at the feet of the Tories. Leaked documents reveal that Rishi Sunak was warned by senior civil servants a week before he called the general election that he was at risk of breaching his "legal responsibilities" if he failed to take action over the prison overcrowding crisis, and the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, actually chaired emergency Cobra meetings himself on how to respond.¹ Thus Alex Chalk, the previous justice secretary, also prepared plans to release some prisoners after 40% of their sentence, and to send fewer people to jail in the first place - going 'woke', as the right would call it - but these were blocked by Sunak's key aides amid concerns in No10 they would not get the necessary secondary legislation through parliament, as the likes of Suella Braverman were likely to oppose it. The leaked letters also seem to show that, just two days before the election was called, Sunak finally agreed to meet the demands to release thousands of inmates early - cynically knowing the election would make it impossible to deliver and hence hand on the problem to the next government.

In that sense, Shabana Mahmood was right to accuse Sunak and former

ministers of being "the guilty men", who are responsible for "the most disgraceful dereliction of duty". They did nothing as a result of the most venal political self-interest - happy to let the prison numbers stack up and for the suffering to continue. But, even if they manage to avert the current crisis confronting them over prison space, we can only expect the Labour administration to uphold the ethos of punishment and revenge.

'Red 'un'

As the CPGB *Draft programme* (section 3.17: 'Crime and prison') points out, in class society crime is a product of "alienation, want or resistance".² Meaning that under capitalism the criminal justice system is "anti-working class, irrational and inhuman", as property is considered primary, with "the person merely a form of property".

It is well worth looking through this section. Our model is the early USSR, which even abolished the concept of 'guilt', replacing it with the notion of public danger - or not - with the emphasis being on rehabilitation.

Given what we have already described, prison officers are a group of workers who have to put up with an incredibly gruelling and sometimes dangerous working environment, often with next to no support from those above (and often hated by those below). Unlike what some on the left might stupidly say, the Prison Officers Association is not irredeemably reactionary - far from it. Indeed, its history reveals a perhaps unprecedented struggle to obtain recognition as a trade union.³ In short, the roots of the POA can be traced back to the launch in 1910 of the underground *Prison Officers' Magazine* - otherwise known as the 'red 'un' after the colour of its cover (not its politics).

In the meantime, we had the police strikes of 1918-19 by the Police and Prison Officers' Union, which led to the subsequent ban on any affiliation to Labour and the Trade Union Congress - followed by the subsequent lengthy struggle to get the right to re-affiliate and defy section 127 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, which made it unlawful for prison officers to take industrial action

Oehlerites

Therefore it is, yes, stupid for anyone on the left to call for the POA to be expelled from the TUC - a demand we hear from Oehlerites such as the Spartacist League. Why would anyone on the left actively want prison officers, or any other group of workers, to be disorganised and thus vulnerable to reactionary politics? After 1984-85 and the defeat of the Great Strike, many former miners got jobs in the prison service. If you were unlucky enough to end up inside, who would you rather be greeted by - an ex-police/army or BNP type, or a politically aware ex-miner who is unionised? It is double stupid when you remember that the POA was once affiliated to the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, and in July 2015 it endorsed Jeremy Corbyn's campaign in the Labour Party leadership election. What reactionary cads! ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/16/revealed-sunak-was-warned-he-risked-breaching-legal-responsibilities-over-prisons-crisis-leaked-papers-show.
2. communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme/3-immediate-demands.
3. poauk.org.uk/our-union/history.

ACTION

Sheffield Transformed

Friday July 19 to Sunday July 21: Festival of leftwing politics, Sadacca, 48 Wicker, Sheffield S3. Talks, debates, workshops and culture. Tickets £15 (£8). Organised by Sheffield Transformed: www.facebook.com/sheftransformed.

Tolpuddle Martyrs festival

Friday July 19 to Sunday July 21: Annual commemoration festival, Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum, Dorchester Road, Tolpuddle DT2. Tickets £60. Organised by Tolpuddle Martyrs: www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk/festival.

Day of action for Palestine

Saturday July 20: Local actions for Palestine. Israel's genocidal assault on Palestinians has killed more than 39,000 in Gaza, including more than 15,000 children, and displaced the vast majority of the population. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Palestine, political crisis and resistance

Sunday July 21, 12 noon to 5.30pm: Post-election conference, SOAS, University of London, 10 Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Mainstream politics conceals popular anger at austerity, the cost of living and government support for Israel's genocide in Gaza. Where next for the left after the election? Speakers include Lindsey German and John Rees. Tickets £15 (£5). Organised by Counterfire: www.facebook.com/events/999365414976743.

What should the unions do under Labour?

Monday July 22, 5.30pm: Online public meeting. Now that we have a Labour government, what should the unions do? Speaker: Ian Hodson (BFAWU). Organised by Labour Left Alliance: www.facebook.com/events/8923246061024018.

Palestine and anti-war movements - what next?

Tuesday July 23, 6.30pm: Public meeting, SET Woolwich, Riverside House, Beresford Street, Woolwich, London SE18. Building the movements for Palestinian freedom and peace in Ukraine, now that Starmer is PM. Speakers include Andrew Murray. Organised by Greenwich Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Say no horror show

Wednesday July 24, 9am: Protest against the Farnborough Airshow. Assemble opposite Kwikfit, 30 Farnborough Road, GU14. Stop the trade in weapons causing death and destruction in Palestine, Yemen and around the world. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: caat.org.uk/events/protest-farnborough-airshow.

Communist Culture Club

Thursday July 25, 7pm: Weekly online meeting. Paul Cooper on 'Mark Fisher and acid communism', and Agnes Kory on 'Why socialists shouldn't be inverted snobs about opera'. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

Learn how to beat your landlord

Saturday July 27, 11am: Community training, St Paul's Church, 35 Celia Street, Kirkdale, Liverpool L20. Learn the skills you need to beat your landlord. Tenants are sick of rising rents, battling damp and mould, and getting evicted through no fault of their own. Family-friendly event with childcare provision. Registration free. Organised by Acorn the Union: acorntheunion.org.uk/liverpool_learn_how_to_beat_your_landlord.

Stop fascist Tommy Robinson in London

Saturday July 27, 12 noon: Counterdemonstration. Assemble Russell Square, London WC1. March to Trafalgar Square. Oppose actions of far-right groups led by Tommy Robinson. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: standuptoracism.org.uk.

Regional big rides for Palestine

Full-day rides supporting charities in Palestine. Registration £15 (£10). Saturday August 3. Book by Saturday July 27. Birmingham city centre, 8.30am, ends at Balsall Heath. Manchester city centre, 8.45am, urban route through parks. Newport city centre, 9am, cross the Severn Bridge to end in Bristol. Saturday August 10. Book by Saturday August 3. Three routes across London, starting from Kings Cross, Paddington and Croydon at 8.45am and converging on Mile End. Organised by The Big Ride for Palestine: www.thebigride4palestine.com/big-ride-2024.

Divest for Palestine conference

Saturday August 10, 10.15am to 4.30pm: Conference, Central Hall Westminster, Storey's Gate, London SW1. Discussing the need to escalate struggles for Palestinian freedom, by breaking links between British institutions and Israel's machine of murder and oppression. Tickets £12 (£6). Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/divest-for-palestine-conference.

Potteries Chartist festival

Sunday August 18, 11am to 4pm: Family-friendly festival, Market Place, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent ST6. Remembering the 1842 attack on the Chartists, which saw Josiah Heapy killed and many injured, with 142 arrested and 54 transported to Australia. Includes stalls, music, poetry, speeches and food. Organised by People's History Association of North Staffordshire: www.tuc.org.uk/events/potteries-chartist-festival.

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.

GALA

A grand get-together

Durham Miners Gala has always been a celebration of the labour and trade union movement. But this year, reports **Ian Spencer**, it had a special poignancy

If you are on the left, the Durham Miners Gala should be on your bucket list of things to go to before you die. It is a joyous celebration of the working class traditions - not only of the Durham coalfield, but of the entire labour and trade union movement.

In the past, it was almost always addressed by the leader of the Labour Party, who would also, symbolically, take the salute from the balcony of the County Hotel, where the dozens of brass bands stop to do their party piece. Needless to say, Tony Blair avoided it like the plague, despite his Sedgefield constituency being just 13 miles away from Durham.

By contrast, Jeremy Corbyn has always received a warm welcome. After all, this is the home of Labourism, the thing Corbyn could not and will not ever break from, with all its social chauvinism as well as solidarity, with all its support for British imperialism, as well as its limited and *faux* internationalism. Corbyn was here this year, but not speaking. He had to make do with waving from the hotel balcony and listening to the increasingly ironic rendition of 'Oh Jeremy Corbyn' as he sat on the stage.

Bands

For anyone not familiar with it, the bands, unions and other groups, such as the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, process from the centre of the city to 'Durham racecourse' (now university cricket pitches) - with bars, candyfloss, fairground rides and stalls with communist literature all within easy reach. After the speeches, some of the colliery bands actually go back to the cathedral for an Anglican service - the 'Blessing of the Banners' - and to remember all the lives lost in mining disasters.

Most people duck out of that and just enjoy themselves. For those living, as I do, in a former pit village a few miles outside Durham, the day starts early. Like a scene from *The Full Monty*, the bands survive, even if the collieries have gone. Typically, the bands do a dress rehearsal outside their local miners hall or on the village green before setting off to 'the Big Meeting'. If close enough, bands used to march into town, behind their banners. More typically now, a coach drops them off.

The banners themselves are a pleasure to see. My personal favourite is that of Chopwell Lodge, featuring Marx, Lenin and Keir Hardie. (One can only imagine what Marx and Lenin would have made of being on the same banner as the former Liberal and later Labour Party parliamentary leader.) I confess to an emotional reaction when I saw the banner of Dawdon Lodge, the pit where my grandfather worked. That is the thing about the Big Meeting: the appeal is at a traditional and emotional level and it is in that spirit that many still support the Labour Party, but increasingly without the expectation that it will represent the working class - never mind deliver a gradual Fabian transition to something called socialism.

Fabians there were aplenty. The Workers Party of Britain had a big expensive tent, with a large picture of the Dear Leader, George Galloway. Ironically, the Labour



No Labour tops this year: good

Party presence was rather muted. There was not even the big tea-tent Labour used to run. We had to fall back on the private sector and queue in the rain for a long time to get a decent cuppa. No-one I spoke to dissented from my suggestion that this will be symbolic of Sir Keir Starmer's government.

Stay away

There was, however, the tent of the re-elected Labour MP for the City of Durham constituency, Mary Foy, who, to my knowledge, has assiduously stayed away from each and every Palestine solidarity demonstration, despite having been selected on a pro-Corbyn ticket. Instead, she confined herself to the safe territory of a reading in the cathedral. As I have pointed out, there was not a single senior Labour Party figure on the balcony or among the speakers. Mind you, Luke Akehurst - Zionist witch-finder-general and newly elected MP for North Durham - was expressly asked not to attend.¹

It was not only the rain that seemed to keep people away in droves. There was little enthusiasm for the speakers, which included union leaders Christina McAnea (Unison), Ian Lavery (NUM), Matt Wrack (FBU) and Mick Whelan (Aslef). There were some cheers for Lavery's call to end the two-child benefit cap, but probably the warmest reception was for Heather Wood of Women Against Pit Closures - a reminder, perhaps, of the power of movements that extend

beyond the well-paid trade union leaders into the lives of real people in struggle.

In the marketplace of 'left' groups there were plenty of Stalinists too, with the Communist Party of Britain, Young Communist League and *Morning Star* all having a separate pitch. However, in the Stalinist tent beauty contest, the award for 'most expensive looking' must go to the CPGB (ML), which had a large picture of Marx on the side, but an even bigger one of Stalin inside. This was situated sufficiently far away from the WPB tent to avoid an unseemly tussle - but close enough to remind us that "misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows".²

Still, a cheerful representative of the CPGB (ML), camera in hand, called by our stall in the big marquee, to film us for a future production on Proletarian TV, their slick YouTube channel. Other lefties that called by ranged from the comradely (Socialist Party of Great Britain) to the condescending (Socialist Workers Party), to the utterly deranged (Economic and Philosophic Science Review, whose paper looks as if it has been carefully crafted from a deluxe edition of a John Bull printing set).

There were, of course, non-Stalinist groups. The Revolutionary Communist Party looked suitably relieved now the university exams are over and must be looking forward to a new wave of members in freshers week. Unfortunately, none seemed to want to chat about

how the election results in the UK and France presaged 'revolution in five to ten years' time'.

Our stall provided not just a life-affirming day out for the comrades present, but a good deal of interest from those attending - many of whom were familiar with the *Weekly Worker* either online or in print. We met with comrades from the past and hopefully the future. I neglected to count how many copies of *Weekly Worker* I took away from our London HQ, but they were quickly snapped up by the curious, the interested and some with stories to tell. One was a former member of the CPGB (ML), whose break with Stalinism followed his trip to China, courtesy of 'the party'. A few signed up for the establishment of a Northeast Marxist Forum, in conjunction with the People's Bookshop in Durham, which stocks the *Weekly Worker* and is a centre for the left in Durham and beyond.

Symbolic

Since its founding in 1871, the gala has been symbolic of the large, inchoate British workers' movement that strives to achieve reforms within capitalism, while clinging to the traditions of the past. On the edge of that there is a weak and fragmented left. Marx famously observed in relation to the French Workers Party that "what is certain is that [if they are Marxists, then] I myself am not a Marxist". One can only wonder what he would have made of the plethora of sects on offer.

To some the gala might have seemed like an anachronism, a

theme park of socialism, to match the nearby 'olden days' Beamish open-air museum. Given the 40th anniversary of the miners' Great Strike, the theme of this year's Big Meeting was 'solidarity forever'. When you are there, the sense of the importance of solidarity and struggle is as real as on any picket line. Our history should be and is a constant reminder to us all that the working class has been defeated many times in the struggle for a better world, in which humanity can realise its true potential. If revolution is a 'festival of the oppressed', the Miners Gala is a reminder that the proletariat has not gone away.

As Friedrich Engels observed in a letter to Georgi Plekhanov in 1894,

One is indeed driven to despair by these English workers with their sense of imaginary national superiority, with their essentially bourgeois ideas and viewpoints, with their 'practical' narrow mindedness, with the parliamentary corruption which has seriously infected the leaders ... The only thing is that the 'practical' English will be the last to arrive, but when they do arrive their contribution will weigh quite heavy in the scale.

I for one will be back for the 139th Big Meeting. Come and join us! ●

Notes

1. skwawkbox.org/2024/07/14/akehurst-told-not-to-attend-durham-miners-gala.
2. *The tempest* act 2, scene 2.

Paul Simpson

FOOTBALL

From kick-off to finish

Carl Collins examines the current state of the beautiful game that is now worth billions, its origins in violent country ways and the influence of the far right

England lost 2-1 and Gareth Southgate has gone. Sir Keir Starmer can't bask in football glory, as Harold Wilson did way back in 1966.

However, for many fans and pundits alike failure to win in two successive Euro finals counts as some sort of national disgrace. There is without doubt a deep sense of entitlement when it comes to football.

The famous 'Three Lions' anthem and the "It's coming home, it's coming home, it's coming home, it's coming home" chorus more than sums up the national psyche when it comes to the game. Written by comedians, Frank Skinner and David Baddiel, it was recorded by the Lightning Seeds specially for Euro'96 and almost instantly reached number one in the charts. We have heard the song again and again ever since. Whenever England plays in tournaments, fans chant "It's coming home". It is as if the international silverware somehow belongs in England.

Of course, Harry Kane's team is one of the best in the world. Amongst the top ten perhaps. But throughout Euro'24, Spain were clearly better. They were the deserving winners, playing an attractive, brilliantly coordinated, modern style of football.

Today football counts as the most popular participation and spectator sport globally by far. Billions watch and millions play every week. It is also big business. The international football market is expected to go from being worth \$4.04 billion in 2023 to an estimated \$5.65 billion in 2031. Top players transfer for eye-watering sums easily exceeding \$100 million.

So, there can be no doubt that football has come a long way. But from where?

Start

Let's start with diplomat and scholar Thomas Elyot, on 16th century 'fote ball' or 'fute ball':¹ "Nothing but beastly fury and extreme violence; wherefore proceedeth hurt and consequently rancour and malice do remain with those that are wounded; whereof it ought to be put into perpetual silence."

A definitive origin of the sport we now call football is much disputed. The Aztecs played a team game called 'tlachtli', 3rd-century China played something called 'cuju', and 'marn grook' was a game known to have been played by Aboriginal Australians long before white settlers arrived.²

But the game in its modern form - which had a considerable amount of the country engrossed in last weekend's final - has its origins in 12th century England. A team game, usually involving neighbouring villages, with the purpose of the transporting an inflated pig's bladder to a marker in the opponent's village. And, as the description from Elyot suggests, it was certainly considerably more violent than the modern-day game. There are examples of punching, biting and kicking, resulting in broken bones and even fatalities. There were no clearly defined regulations; no referee; no limit to the number of participants in any single match; no defined size for the playing area (sometimes the play area covered several acres); and there was no time-limit. Sometimes it lasted just a few hours, sometimes days.³



Watched by billions and, for many, held closer than religion

One can imagine the anticipation in the lead-up to one of these matches; the excitement, nervousness, trepidation. And it is surely to be expected that a feeling of comradeship would develop, not only between the participants from a particular town or village, but eventually inter-community respect and camaraderie. Attempts to ban the activity by those in positions of power would have intensified such feelings and reflected class antagonisms. Those looking to ban these games would have included the landowners, whose fields were being used (a man once drowned when a game was organised as cover for damaging dykes being used to drain the Fens).

And, of course, others who made up what constituted 'authority' would also have been aware of the danger in allowing the masses to come together in this way. Capitalism, even in its earliest days, is always interested in what workers are doing in their own time. Not only because those workers make up a large segment of 'the market' as consumers, but also in case those out-of-work activities begin to develop into a collectivity that poses a threat to the wealth and power of the ruling class.

Despite some examples of success in stopping football being played, attempts at banning it have been, to say the least, unsuccessful. And so the game began to develop, mirroring the development of capitalism. The game was exported around the world (as we have seen, there were games that resembled football already existing, but the more codified version was imposed) as part of the colonialist project.

Neoliberalism impacted on the game through the introduction of 'markets' and privatisation (of clubs and leagues). And then big-business ownership of clubs, which led to them being used as assets (possibly to be stripped), as a means of prestige for owners of questionable

repute - or even by states as a means of 'sportswashing' their image as dictators and human rights abusers in their own countries and regions.

A counter-movement inevitably took place from below. A connection can clearly be seen between class struggle and football ever since its inception: from the defiance of private land ownership from around the 15th century to more contemporary conflicts - such as fans opposing football authorities' proposals to create a 'Super League', consisting of Europe's elite clubs. Ordinary (mostly working class) people demonstrated against the plans of the authorities who were looking to take 'the working man's' game away from them in order to maximise revenue (above all from TV deals). What is that if not a form of class struggle?

And was the 'hooliganism' of the 1970s and 80s in Britain, which saw the expression of a distinctive culture, of symbols and rituals, not at least a part of a counter-movement to the deindustrialisation, the unemployment, the attacks on working class institutions carried out by the likes of Margaret Thatcher, which decimated working class communities, leaving them with little else other than 'their' football club through which to express their anger and frustration?

Right outfits

In addition to the super-rich taking over the top end of the sport, rightwing political organisations have certainly identified with and exploited, 'football culture'. The Football Lads Alliance and later the Democratic Football Lads Alliance are two recent outfits to do this. Imbedding themselves within the fan base, they are then able to institute their ideology and steer a layer of fans. The English Defence League (in the 70s and 80s the National Front and British National Party) have found fertile ground for agitation and recruitment.

Benito Mussolini exploited the popularity of football in Italy in the 1920s and 30s in order to reshape public consciousness. Through propagandist, he was able to ferment nationalist sentiment by associating it with sporting success (Italy won the 1934 and 1938 World Cups and the 1936 Olympics soccer). Historians and fans a lot older than myself may argue that Italy was deserving of the success on merit, but Mussolini took no chances. It is widely claimed that he heavily influenced the organising body and even the referees to guarantee success.

In the 1934 World Cup Mussolini himself selected the referee for the semi-final and final. In the 1938 final, it is widely believed that he demanded the team - now wearing a black kit to resemble the colour of fascism and displaying Roman salutes before games - should "win or die". Italy's opponents' goalkeeper, Hungarian Antal Szabó, is reported to have said afterwards: "I may have let in four goals, but at least I saved their lives".⁴

Similarly, Adolf Hitler used the 1936 Berlin Olympics to promote fascism and his regime's image on the world stage. Sporting success was portrayed as resulting from 'discipline', which could then be filtered through to other aspects of people's lives and create a justification for the acceptance of such ideas. The idea of 'discipline' and 'power' explains why elite public schools, such as Eton, pushed for football to be played by students before the game split into two separate codes (rugby and soccer) as a result of public-schoolboy cheating and picking the ball up! (I am aware that this is a bit of a myth, but it will annoy just the right people and make football fans laugh).

Francisco Franco too exploited the passion of fans in Spain, cultivating and increasing divisions in society and the civil war by adopting certain teams as the

emblems of his regime.

There are, of course, other examples which football fans amongst the *Weekly Worker* readership will probably have in mind. Even today's political figures, such as Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, look for endorsement from celebrity players as much as from business leaders. Not a goal is scored nowadays by the England team without the inevitable, heavily staged photo being posted on social and contemporary media, showing politicians of all stripes in their ill-fitting football shirts celebrating, along with the masses.

Left illusions

There are some on the left who think that leisure pursuits such as football were specifically designed, or at least permitted, by the ruling class as a form of repressing protest; and that by participating in any way in this sport the working class becomes distracted from the need for revolution. History would show us that, on the contrary, there is the potential for 'football culture' to be an integral part of the revolutionary movement.

It is watched by billions across the world. It creates a passion and devotion that is held closer than many a religion; it is passed down and continued through generations. And that goes right to the heart of working class communities.

When I see fans campaigning against ticket prices, I see ordinary people demanding higher wages and resisting the profiteering of capitalists. When I see fans campaigning against a takeover of their club, I see ordinary people fighting for more democratic control. Fan takeover of clubs represents to me a community form of working class control and management. When fans are complaining about migrant labour dying in their thousands while building sports stadiums for dodgy states to hold events in an attempt to 'sportswash' their crimes, I see the fight for workers' rights and trade unions. There are, if it is properly considered, very few concerns faced by football fans, either directly or indirectly, which could not be addressed by the minimum demands of any communist organisation worth its salt.

There are fan groups, such as those of Rayo Vallecano in Spain, St Pauli in Germany, Celtic in Scotland and Dulwich Hamlet in England, to name but a few, with leftwing or progressive ideologies informally (or even formally in some cases through constitutions), who are dominant within the clubs' supporters. Some fight fascist organisations directly in the streets and terraces, and they have managed to combine communities and football clubs on that basis. Organisations such as the Football Lads and Lasses Against Fascism and Trade Union Football and Alcohol Committee have worked hard to counter rightwing agendas. There is potential to organise within the football fan base, linking their issues to communist solutions •

Notes

1. www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00012232.
2. www.footballhistory.org.
3. www.danceshistoricalmiscellany.com/murdering-play-violent-origins-english-football.
4. sites.duke.edu/wcwp/research-projects/football-and-politics-in-europe-1930s-1950s/mussolinis-football.

FRANCE

Fragile unpopular front

Unity with the neoliberal Macronites made the Nouveau Front Populaire the largest bloc in the lower house. But, **Mike Macnair** warns, the signs of fragmentation are already all too apparent, and there is a real danger that Marine Le Pen will have a successful presidential run in 2027

Elections to the National Assembly produced (in English terms) a 'hung parliament'. The Nouveau Front Populaire coalition came first ... and consists of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's proprietary brand, La France Insoumise (LFI - France Unbowed), the Parti Socialiste (PS), Europe Écologie - Les Verts, the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), and various smaller groups. Second placed comes president Emmanuel Macron's Ensemble coalition.¹ Third placed is the far-right Rassemblement Nationale (RN). There are also a number of smaller groups represented that are not part to the three major blocs.²

The substance of this vote is 'anti-fascist'. The strong showing of the RN in the Euro elections produced Macron's decision to call a snap election. And it also produced the decision of the Parti Socialiste to return to unity with LFI in the NFP - a rebranded version of the 2022 Nouvelle Union Populaire Écologique et Sociale (New Social and Ecological Union of the People - Nupes). The PS had split from Nupes in October 2023 over the LFI leadership's refusal to call Hamas 'terrorist': that is, over the question of loyalty to the USA. This, in turn, led to the first-round result with RN in the lead, followed by NFP, and then the Macronites. In the second round there was substantial step-down between the NFP and the Macronites in order to defeat the RN.

Failures

The rebranding of Nupes as the NFP is part of the same 'anti-fascist' framing as the original Front Populaire of May 1936, against the threat of the fascists of Action Française and other groups, which had driven out the previous Radical-led government by riots on February 6 1934, forcing the Radicals to submit to a right-led government. The original FP united the PS (then called the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière - SFIO), the PCF, the left-origin but largely rural-based Parti Républicain, Radical et Radical-Socialiste (usually referred to in English as the Radical Party).³

The idea had been most famously promoted by the report of Georgi Dimitrov to the 7th Congress of Comintern in August 1935.⁴ It had been in the air since 1934, when it became clear that Hitler was not returning to the Rapallo policy, in which the German nationalist right allied with the Soviet regime (as the Soviet government at first hoped).⁵ Dimitrov did not only codify the Popular Front idea; he also promoted a new idea of the *workers' united front* - one that, unlike the older Comintern doctrine, required downplaying disagreements for the sake of unity:

'The communists attack us,' say others. But listen, we have repeatedly declared: We shall not attack anyone, whether persons, organisations or parties, standing for the united front of the working class against the class enemy. But at the same time it is our duty, in the interests of the proletariat and its cause, to criticise those persons, organisations and parties that hinder unity of action by the workers.⁶

The French Popular Front was not the first. The Spanish Frente



Jean-Luc Mélenchon: LFI proprietor

Popular (FP), including (among others) the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party - PSOE), the Izquierda Republicana (Republican Left), the Unión Republicana, (Republican Union) and the Partido Comunista de España (PCE), won elections in February 1936. It aimed to defeat the far-right Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas ('Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rights' - CEDA), which imitated aspects of fascist and Nazi ideas, but aimed to win power through elections, and the monarchist Renovación Española ('Spanish Renovation'), which openly sought a coup to overthrow the republic that had been created in 1931. The FP victory led initially to an Izquierda Republicana government with external support from the PSOE.

In July 1936 Francisco Franco and his fellow rightwingers in the Spanish army launched a coup against the government, leading to a three-year civil war. The PSOE and the PCE joined the government in September 1936, while leaders of the anarchist CNT trade union confederation did so in November. In May 1937 the government suppressed local militias in Barcelona of the CNT and the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista ('Workers Party of

Marxist Unification'), formed in 1935 by fusion of the Trotskyists and Bukharinists to create a 'broad-front', non-Stalinist party).

The Frente Popular government was determined to fight a *regular* war, and a *constitutionalist* war, not a revolutionary war, in the (delusive) hope of attaining British and French support: the Francoists were militarily backed by fascist Italy and Nazi Germany; the British and French, under the name of 'non-intervention', imposed an embargo on arms supplies to the Republic, which they actually enforced. In particular, the Republic did not attempt to undermine the base of the Francoists in the colonies by offering independence. It is quite *possible* that a policy of revolutionary war would have failed⁷; but the policy of the Frente Popular government certainly ended in a regular military defeat. In April 1939 the Republicans finally surrendered Madrid.

The French Front Populaire initially seemed much more successful. The PCF agreed to external support of the SFIO-Radical government led by Léon Blum. The publication of the election results triggered a mass strike wave with factory occupations in May-June 1936; the result was massive economic concessions in order to

preserve the constitutional order, codified in the June 1936 Matignon agreements between the government, the main employers' organisation and the Confédération Générale du Travail trade union federation.⁸ Workers obtained, as well as substantial wage rises, the legal right to organise, to collective bargaining and to strike, two weeks' per year paid holiday, and the 40-hour week.

Capital flight

However, 1936-37 saw a flight of capital, forcing a devaluation and inflation. And without the pressure of the strike wave after the Matignon agreements, the Senate - which was indirectly elected and overrepresented rural areas, and hence was controlled by the right-blocked Popular Front initiatives. In June 1937 the Senate brought down the Blum government by refusing emergency-powers legislation to deal with the foreign exchange crisis. The powers it *did* give Blum's successor excluded foreign exchange controls; and in March 1938 a brief return of Blum as prime minister was defeated by the same means.⁹ During 1937-38 the SFIO was forced out of the cabinet, leaving a Radical government with external support.

Meanwhile, the Blum government from the outset maintained French

colonial policy, offering only French citizenship for some Algerians (which it was unable to deliver anyhow). The British from July 1936 insisted that France join the arms embargo against the Spanish republic as a condition for British (limited) diplomatic support for France against Germany.

The end of the Popular Front came when the PCF voted against the Munich Agreement in September 1938, leading the Radical government to denounce the PCF as warmongers: the formal agreement was abandoned. In November 1938 centre-right politician Paul Reynaud became finance minister (under the premiership of the Radical Edouard Daladier) on a policy of deregulation, austerity and "shock therapy". There were massive sackings.

This regime was, of course, overtaken by the outbreak of World War II in August-September 1939. The PCF was banned for failing to condemn the Hitler-Stalin Pact. In spring 1940 France fell. The French right had for some time taken the view that the USSR was the main enemy and senior generals shared this view - they were as much concerned to get rid of the French constitutional regime as to conduct military operations against the Germans. The result was German occupation of France in the north and west, the Vichy Catholic-authoritarian regime in the south-east.

Spanish and French

Thus both the Spanish and the French popular fronts ended with the victory of fascism, albeit in different forms. If we ask *why* this is the case, the answer is that the outcome was implicit in the nature of the project from the start. What was involved was an electoral bloc of leftists with centre-left constitutional-loyalist parties on the basis of *defence of 'democracy'*, meaning by 'democracy' the parliamentary-constitutional form of bourgeois rule.

In Spain, the determination to preserve fig leaves of 'constitutional credibility' reduced potential military effectiveness, without achieving its goal of British and French support. In France, once the Matignon agreements had brought the strike wave to an end, the government gradually met the usual fate of leftwing governments: flight of capital, blocking operations by the second chamber, inflation and demoralisation; the military and political victory of fascism in 1940 only capped this, showing that the possessing classes have a real appetite for revenge if they have once had a serious scare.

Secondly, the essence of the popular front of the 1930s (and of 'popular front' rhetoric in France today) is the creation of a bloc of the workers' parties, with at least some element of the liberals, against the 'external' threat of fascism or some other authoritarianism to the liberal constitution. Trotsky commented in 1937, of Spain, that the liberals were merely the shadow of the bourgeoisie, since big capital in fact backed Franco.¹⁰ The French Radicals similarly represented the anti-clerical wing of the petty-bourgeoisie and peasantry, not big capital. The role of the left-liberals was not the direct control of big capital through these parties: it was a *signal* to the state

core that the government would abide by constitutional norms for the protection of private property. It thus would be perfectly possible to have a 'popular front' with *no* capitalist party, as long as it gave such a clear signal of constitutional loyalism.

But the political bloc for 'defence of the constitution' contains a *misconception* of the constitution. Fascist bands are not merely an external threat: they are a paramilitary *auxiliary* to the state core, and are able to gain real effectiveness due to *protection by the police and the judiciary* - as is evident in both Italy and Germany in the 1920s. The liberal constitution *contains within itself* the principle of 'nation, work, family' authoritarianism (which is not an inheritance from the feudal past, but has a material ground in the necessary authoritarian side of capitalism, the regime of the workplace). It is expressed within liberalism in the nation-state form, and in the constitutional principles of autonomy of the executive and of the judiciary, in the regime of the regular army and the professional police force, as well as in the reserve 'emergency powers'; and in the imperialist countries, in the overseas colonial possessions. The constitutionalist 'defence of the constitution' is the defence of these elements, as well as of its liberal elements.

Trotsky famously wrote in 1931, in his article 'For a workers' united front against fascism', that

When one of my enemies sets before me small daily portions of poison and the second, on the other hand, is about to shoot straight at me, then I will first knock the revolver out of the hand of my second enemy, for this gives me an opportunity to get rid of my first enemy. But that does not at all mean that the poison is a 'lesser evil' in comparison with the revolver.¹¹

In the same article, he referred to the Bolsheviks' common efforts with the Kerenskyites to defeat the Kornilov coup in late August 1917.

The image of poisoner and shooter is striking, but in fact misleading. The reason is that the circumstance that gives rise to a real threat of the victory of the far right is the *breakdown of the political ascendancy of liberalism* due to economic failure. In this situation, after one nationalist-authoritarian operation fails, another will come along shortly. Kornilov was seen off, but the October revolution only at the last minute pre-empted Kerensky's plan to use troops to prevent the meeting of the Congress of Soviets (also reflected in the attack of Krasnov's Cossacks on Petrograd alongside a rising of the officer cadets; both failed). Next came Alexeev's and Kaledin's 'Volunteer Army', created in November... One way or another, civil war was inevitable. Kerensky was not merely a poisoner, but *planned* to shoot the soviets, but at the time of the Kornilov coup bottled it when he saw the level of opposition.

Thus the electoral victory of the

Frente Popular in Spain saw off the CEDA and the monarchists, but by July 1936 Franco and co were ready with their coup. Restricting the horizons to the defence of the republic was, in practice, to set up a weak regular army against a stronger one. The victory of the Front Populaire in France saw off the rag-bag groups of the far right who had rioted in 1934; but the demoralisation that resulted from the failure of the government to control the stagflation (thanks to the Senate's ability to block exchange controls) prepared the way for the peculiar form of fascist coup through military defeatism of spring 1940.

Popular fronts win

This is not, however, the end of the story. The fall of France and Norway in Spring 1940 broke the back of the British empire's geostrategic line, which was (and had been ever since the 18th century) to hold Europe divided in order to free British imperial hands in the larger world. The British became desperate for US support, and agreed for the sake of 'lend-lease' supplies to hand over world leadership to the USA after the war.¹² The USA, for its part, now faced a potential fascist-United Europe as a world rival for the role of Britain's replacement.

In consequence, when Germany invaded the USSR in June 1941, and more clearly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the result was a *global* popular front against fascism of the USSR and the 'democratic' imperialist countries. Under its banner, popular-front resistance movements were armed by the Allies. Also the US and UK provided real material support to the USSR, but held off until June 1944 from 'opening the second front' in Europe - with the result that Soviet victory on the eastern front took Soviet armies to the Elbe, and so on. In Yugoslavia and Albania communist-led popular-front partisan movements (militarily supported by the Allies) drove out the German-backed regimes.

Across much of Europe popular front governments were the immediate outcome of the defeat of Germany. In western Europe, these commonly functioned to restabilise capitalism and then gave way to centre-right governments.

In eastern Europe, it is fairly clear that Stalin's *intended* policy was to create capitalist states in a friendly-neutral relation to the USSR, which was the outcome in Finland, Austria and Afghanistan. In 1947-48, however, the USA began to push for naval access to the Danube, and proposed the Marshall Plan to apply to eastern as well as western Europe. This would revive capitalism on the basis of US control, and thereby recreate the inter-war 'cordon sanitaire' against the USSR. The Soviet government responded by setting free the CPs in the Soviet Army-occupied eastern European countries and northern Korea to pursue a policy of 'Sovietisation'. The cold war commenced, and the Chinese CP also pushed forward, taking power in early 1949 - again in the name of a popular front government. The 'socialist camp'

was further extended under the name of such governments in North Vietnam (and later the whole country), in Cuba and in South Yemen.

These apparent successes made the idea of the popular front as the strategic road to socialism the common opinion of the very large majority of the left worldwide. They overshadowed the equally numerous cases in which the popular front, or anti-imperialist front with nationalists, led to defeat, and in some cases to the destruction of mass communist parties.

Why did popular front governments bring in socialism (or rather, *appear* to do so)? I set on one side the 'state capitalist' and 'bureaucratic collectivist' theories that this was all just 'Soviet imperialism'. Both theories were disproved - as much as 'official' communists' celebration of the 'socialist camp' was - by the ignominious collapse of 1989-91, leaving little standing. Neither theory could predict such a collapse. Trotskyism *could* predict such a collapse, but outside the *Critique* group round Hillel Ticktin, and the Spartacists, few Trotskyists did.¹³

USSR question

I am personally of the opinion that the USSR after the effective implementation of the ban on factions in the double police coup against the party in 1927-29 cannot be characterised as a dictatorship of the proletariat, or, therefore, as socialist (unless we were to revive and stretch the *Communist manifesto* tag, 'reactionary socialism',¹⁴ for it). The same applies to the imitators of the Soviet regime.

But let us suppose, purely for the sake of argument, that the Soviet regime and its imitators *could* be characterised as 'socialist'. If we ask why popular front governments succeeded in creating 'socialism' in this sense in the countries that joined the 'socialist camp' between 1948 and 1970, where others failed and were merely antechambers to rightist governments or military coups, the answer has two fundamental elements.

The first is that the armed forces of the old regime were *first* smashed and those controlled by the USSR or by the local CP created, before the creation of the popular front government. In Austria and Finland the USSR agreed to the *recreation* of capitalist state cores. Elsewhere, not so.

The second is the relationship to the USSR. We have seen endless cases in which the flight of capital and 'capitalists' strikes' destroy very mild reformist projects, like those of the government of François Hollande in 2012-17 - leave aside more extreme cases like the original French Front Populaire government. The ability of the Spanish Republic to survive as long as it did was due to Soviet arms supplies. It is *normal* for capital to strangle dissent by economic sabotage; the British 'non-intervention policy' in Spain was in reality what would now be called a 'sanctions regime' against the republic, and Britain maintained technical and financial sanctions against the Soviet regime from 1917 to 1941. 1941-45 ended by making the USSR strong enough that it *could* support allied regimes.

But this must not be overstated. At the end of the day, the USSR was out-produced by the USA and its global empire, and in 1989-91 the Soviet leadership agreed to *abandon* its allies and to demolish its own regime, both to cut costs, and in the illusory hope of getting in exchange favourable access to international financial markets. The result was collapse. There is no case since the

collapse in which a popular-front government has produced more than a period of initial hopes, followed by demoralisation, like the 1930s French Front Populaire.

Non-governmental

Small communist parties could not construct popular front government coalitions. But they could imitate the popular front policy on a small scale, by creating fronts that similarly signalled constitutional loyalism - not by the involvement of mass petty bourgeois parties, but by that of celebrities and of single-issue campaign groups. (It is worth noting that single-issue campaign groups go back to the 18th century in Britain, well before the emergence of a political labour movement with Chartism.)

Thus the old CPGB constructed 'popular front' campaigns involving characters like Hewlett Johnson, the 'Red Dean of Canterbury'. The CPUSA in the same period began using the idea of the 'trilogy' of class (represented by the Rooseveltian Democrat trade union officials), gender (represented by various bourgeois feminists) and race (represented by black nationalist figures) as a form of popular front.

They were unpopular fronts, because - with the exception of the US civil rights movement in the 1950s-60s - these forms of attempt to make the popular front work have largely got nowhere. But it is this 'unpopular frontism' that has since the 1980s been extensively adopted by the far left. The Socialist Workers Party's Anti-Nazi League was a very clear 'unpopular front' of the 1930s CPGB type, signalling constitutional-loyalism through the 'Nazi' trope (which appealed to the British self-image of 'our finest hour') and the role of various celebs. Its successors have followed the same pattern.

It should by now be transparent that this antifa unpopular-frontism has completely failed to stop the rise of the far right, which is spearheaded by forms of right-populist nationalism that cannot be easily pigeonholed as 'fascism' or 'Nazism'. Indeed, just as Chilean Popular Unity promoted the 'constitutional' general Pinochet before his 1973 coup, antifa popular-frontist no-platforming has provided political support for *state* no-platforming of anti-Zionists...

Unpopular-frontism does not have effects on the scale of popular front governments. What it does is to generalise on the left the idea that unity is only possible on terms of the suppression of disagreement (Dimitrov's 'united front' argument) and that it is only possible with the *presence* of 'celebs', whether from the 'official' left or from the milieu of charities and single-issue campaigns. The effect of this idea is in fact, on the one hand, to produce division of the left, as different groups seek to engage different celebs; on the other, to actively promote the politics of social democracy, which was *already* grounded on politically signalling constitutional loyalism to the state.

It now seems unlikely that there will be a Nouveau Front Populaire government in France. The PS, the PCF and the Greens have proposed as prime minister the non-deputy economist, Laurence Tubiana, who served as French ambassador to the 2015 Paris climate negotiations. The LFI has refused to accept this option. *Le Monde* and *L'Humanité* are piling on the pressure on the LFI to submit; but the break-up of the NFP and the formation of a 'grand coalition' government excluding the LFI on the left, as well as the RN and its allies on the right, remains a real possibility. The effect of such an outcome would be to prepare the ground for RN victory in the next presidential election in 2027.

In light of this development, it

seems probably better to regard the NFP not as an actual popular front, but as something closer to the unpopular frontism of British and American politics. It seems to have been merely a rebranding operation, and one that appeals to a false nostalgia, like talk of a 'green new deal' that carefully forgets the failure of the real 1930s 'New Deal' to deliver sustained economic recovery - until the war actually did the job.

We will not successfully defend democratic rights by committing ourselves to a common bloc for defence of the liberal constitution as such. We need our own clear programme of radical democracy, on the basis of which we can enter *partial* agreements for common action, and for common defence, where needed, against far-right gangs and against state repression. But we also need to recognise that the working class actually taking power will need to be on a European scale, in order to organise the resources to defeat flight of capital, sanctions regimes, and so on. A political project of nostalgia for the run-up to World War II can never be more than a short-lived rebranding operation ●

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Notes

1. I am usually hostile to the media cult-of-personality method of identifying political trends with individual leaders, but in these cases Mélenchon's outright ownership of the LFI brand is well-known, and 'Renaissance', the core of 'Ensemble', was created round a cult of personality of Macron as a Bonapartist saviour of France from right and left.
2. *Le Monde*'s 'make your own coalition' game (www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2024/07/09/construisez-votre-majorite-absolue-a-l-assemblee-nationale-avec-notre-simulateur-de-coalition_6248225_4355770.html) gives a full list of the parties. More political geography and names can be found at www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2024/07/08/la-carte-des-resultats-des-legislatives-2024-au-second-tour-la-composition-de-l-assemblee-et-le-depute-elu-dans-votre-circoscription_6247510_4355771.html.
3. www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2024/06/20/claude-andrieu-historienne-l-etiquette-nouveau-front-populaire-fait-appel-a-l-imaginaire-plutot-qu-a-l-histoire_6241782_3232.html.
4. Dimitrov's introduction and reply to the discussion are at www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/7th-congress/index.htm.
5. J McIlroy, 'Stalin, the Comintern and the popular front in Britain, France and Spain, 1935-1939: some historiographical and political reflections' *Critique* Vol 51 (2023), pp305-61.
6. www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm.
7. There is an interesting discussion on land reform attempts in S Basco, J Domènech and L Maravall, 'Land reform and rural conflict: evidence from 1930s Spain' *Explorations in Economic History* Vol 89 (July 2023): www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0014498323000244. This points to the conclusion that land-holding patterns in Spain were sufficiently different to the Russian 'Black Earth' region that promoting peasant land seizures more vigorously, a policy Trotsky argued for, would not have worked. But this does not preclude the possibility of a policy of revolutionary war more generally succeeding.
8. The CGT had recently reunified (1934) after the 1920 split, when the pro-SFIO union leadership expelled the communists and anarchists after the split in the SFIO between the communist majority and the loyalist minority, which had reconstituted as SFIO.
9. O Kirchheimer, 'Decree powers and constitutional law in France under the Third Republic' *American Political Science Review* Vol 34, pp1104-23 (1940). This is a very valuable article on the slide from parliamentary forms of government to the delegation of broad powers to the executive.
10. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/xx/spain01.htm.
11. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1931/311208.htm.
12. N Moss *Nineteen weeks* New York 2003.
13. I have written about this issue in 'Historical blind alleys: Arian kingdoms, signorie, Stalinism' *Critique* Vol 39, (2011).
14. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch03.htm. It would be stretching the sense, since the *Manifesto* refers to ideological trends, while the point of using this tag for the Soviet regime and its imitators would be that this regime *actually* enserfed the industrial workers and re-enslaved the peasantry, so that in a sense it 'froze' the transition between feudalism and capitalism.

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USA

No driver at the wheel

The incumbent is not all there; the challenger nearly dies in an assassination attempt. All the more reason to ditch the entire US presidential system, argues **Paul Demarty**



Following American politics from afar this past month has been strange.

On July 13, a young man was shot dead after apparently attempting to assassinate Donald Trump at a rally in Pennsylvania. He got close, grazing the former president's right ear. As I write, little enough is known about his motives. They may not be terribly interesting: the last man to make an attempt on an American president's life did it to impress Jodie Foster, apparently without success.

This event, as well it might, has thrown the American media into a state of hysteria. It is, perhaps, a sticky wicket, at least for many of them. So much energy has been invested in presenting Trump as a uniquely aberrant political force, a cancer in American governance. Now somebody has tried to kill him. What else did you expect, allege the Trumpists? If you constantly accuse someone of being a new Hitler, when going back in time and killing Hitler is such a cliché of science fiction that you could hardly get away with it today, why should someone not take it seriously?

Indeed, there has recently been a flare-up in what they call the 'fascism debate' in American contemporary historical studies (basically: is he or isn't he?). Some sceptics have argued that, if

the 'Trump is fascist' contingent really believed that, they would not be wasting time writing learned articles on the subject. They would be stockpiling weapons. Perhaps this young man, armed with his dad's AR-15 semi-automatic, Thomas Matthew Crooks, took the rebuke seriously?

That would be the most reasonable projection onto the attempted assassination. Conspiracy theories swirl around all such events. American politics seems unusually given to such conceptions of political violence - from the assassination of Jack Kennedy to the attack on the Twin Towers and beyond. (Justin Rocznik, a leftwing podcaster, recently noted - when internet paranoiacs started claiming that the collapse of the Francis Scott Key bridge in Baltimore was an "inside job" - that, for some people, it is quite impossible for any piece of infrastructure to be destroyed without the state being somehow behind it.)

We expect the conspiracy theories birthed in the last few days to have a good long life. There are more similarities, after all, between Donald Trump and JFK than some people like to think. Both men are accurately described as Machiavellian, bullying, sexually incontinent, with the morals - as Joe Biden would say - of an

**81st birthday cake:
things can only get worse
for Joe Biden with his 82nd,
83rd ... you have to feel
sorry for the guy on a
human level**

**Meanwhile Donald Trump
looks like the winner. So
what will the Democrats,
the army top brass and the
secret state do about that?**

alley cat. Yet both are perfect screens for mass projection. The ferocious anti-communism of JFK is reinterpreted as a pacifism sure to be snuffed out by the military-industrial complex; and the crude 'might makes right' attitude of Trump is weirdly interpreted as a subversive 'isolationism'. Of course 'they' wanted to get rid of him.

Senility

This botched killing succeeded, unlike any previous stimulus, in taking Joe Biden's senility out of the headlines. That is the strangest story of all, for we have seen everything change, and yet nothing; and the change has been occasioned by the revelation of precisely no new information at all.

Joe Biden was, after all, obviously in the throes of cognitive decline four years ago, when the Democrats' immune system put him up as the antibody to Bernie Sanders's second tilt at the Democratic nomination. His candidacy had not been encouraged by his friends. "You don't have to do this," Barack Obama is supposed to have told him. He did not listen. Listening no longer appears to be his strong suit. Unfortunately, neither is speaking. The cheerfully lowbrow wit of his younger days, still flickering from time to time during his presidency,

is gone from more and more of his public appearances. There is only a strange, mumbling, shambling ghost in Scranton Joe's place; an unblinking, confused stare; a possibly fictional golf handicap.

For all his crimes, it is difficult not to pity him at this hour. Very many readers of this paper will have watched friends and loved ones lapse into senility, Alzheimer's or other irreversible conditions of cognitive degeneration. No small part of it, in many cases, is the stubbornness with which the victims of these conditions hold onto the possibility that nothing is wrong: that the gentle attempts of the family to manage the problem are some kind of hostile conspiracy. But these are, after all, typically private tragedies. Biden occupies the least private position in the whole world. To put it bluntly, our dementia-stricken relatives do not, usually, have the exclusive and inalienable political authority to end human civilisation in thermonuclear fire.

Therefore it is wrong to see the Biden situation as essentially a private matter, into which a salacious media is intruding, although - if the torrent of leaks in the bourgeois press are to be believed - it is his wife, Jill, and notoriously erratic son, Hunter, who have formed a *laager* around him and encouraged him to press

on. The fact that the president is senile, and was senile at the time of his election - the fact, indeed, that this has more or less happened before, in the case of Ronald Reagan's second term - is a social dysfunction. How do such men get the nuclear codes?

Biden's progress

In Biden's case, the story starts a while ago. From humble, Irish-American roots in Scranton, Pennsylvania, he made good and proceeded to a career in law and ultimately politics, becoming a senator for Delaware in 1972. (One of the many sobering factoids people bring up about his age is that he served as a senator under Richard Nixon.)

He has made a great deal, over the years, of this no-malarkey 'Scranton Joe' persona. It has worked for him, on the whole, even if it is somewhat mythical. Joe's father was not a factory hand, but a successful businessman who was ultimately ruined: that is what makes his background humble. Delaware itself is an internal tax haven, and a fiefdom of the chemical engineering empire of DuPont, and little else, which he made no effort to change in the near half-century in which he represented it. The stupendously corrupt health insurance industry has always had Delaware senators in its pocket. Yet his straight-talking and scrappy manner has served him well, and made him one of those senior politicians you could imagine having a beer with.

It seems also to have bred a certain chippiness - that, for all he is part of the Democratic political furniture, he is still an outsider. Franklin Foer, in his recent and rather glowing book on the first two years of his presidency, suggests that Biden saw his victory as a kind of revenge against the party establishment, who somehow never thought him up to snuff. He was convinced not to stand in 2016 - it was, after all, Hillary Clinton's "turn" - and seems to have bitterly regretted it. He thinks he could have

won. He is probably right.

The surprise package in the Democratic nomination struggle in 2016 was, of course, Bernie Sanders, the long-standing semi-independent senator from Vermont, whose pro-labour social democracy and condemnations of the wealthy proved surprisingly durable over the course of the campaign. The Democratic elites were always going to see him off; but they actually had to lift a finger or two to do it. Clinton, already widely disliked, was further discredited by Sanders' attacks, and his refusal to drop out until late in the campaign, for which the Hillaryite faithful have never forgiven him. (It was *her* turn.) The victory of Donald Trump over her initiated a political crisis that is still ongoing.

Biden was not to be denied in 2020. Yet it became clear, as the primary debates dragged on, that he was not quite the sharp-witted, fighting Irishman he had once been. Sanders stood again, and in the early stages of the contest, made the running. More mainstream, left-leaning figures like Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar were rapidly sidelined. Panic set in. Obama is largely credited with orchestrating a mass pulling-out of centrist candidates in favour of Biden.

He still had to beat Trump, of course, and ultimately did - with narrow, but definite, victories in the blue-collar swing states, where his appeal was always likely to be an asset. On the way there, however, he offered limp debate performances, where his confusion and irritability was - I would say unignorable, but the mainstream media largely *did* ignore it, and pandemic conditions largely allowed him to conduct the campaign from his *Führerbunker*. By November 2020, the pattern of selective blindness was already in play.

Democratic-leaning media have, ever since, involved themselves in a conspiracy of silence, for all they now howl that they have been deceived by all the president's men

(and his wife). We have watched Biden confuse his living and dead sons, grow increasingly prone to embarrassing falls, and even heard unlikely rumours that he had soiled himself during an audience with the pope. All the way along, Trump has made it part of his routine. Polling consistently suggests that Americans think Biden is too old for the job. He was let off from prosecution for mishandling documents, in part because juries would be unlikely to convict an "elderly man with a poor memory" of a crime which "requires a mental state of wilfulness".

Yet all this was quietly ignored. There has been no crack in the 'Blue code of silence'. The press gallery has mutely looked on, while the Democratic machine methodically rigged this year's primary. After all, it is simply not the done thing to replace the incumbent.

Until a few weeks ago, the line of attack was nothing less than the claim that videos clearly showing Biden wandering off, making gaffes and so on were instances of misinformation. The term, 'cheapfake', was coined to describe videos that had allegedly been deceptively edited. The 'deception', however, turned out to be only showing the worrying bit of footage out of a whole video. Thinking about this for more than three seconds gives the lie to it. Suppose the rumour that Biden shat himself in the Vatican was true: the equivalent claim would be to say that failing to talk about any of the time Biden was *not* actively defecating constituted "misinformation". On balance, every political correspondent in the liberal press corps should be fired, and go into a trade where gullibility is an asset.

Disaster

All that changed on June 27, when Biden and Trump faced off for the first time in a head-to-head debate. This disaster - whose lowlights we will not rehearse - made Biden's decline unignorable. Crucially, it broke the dam in the media.

In the following days, *The New York Times* published multiple op-eds and an editorial urging the president to stand down as candidate. All but the most desperate major media followed suit. In due course, many members of congress have done the same. (Pathetically, that does not include the famous 'Squad', who have rallied around him.) As I write, there are rumours that donors are threatening to withhold further contributions, although Biden-Harris 2024 already has a decent war-chest in hand.

The leak-spigot is now fully open. We have heard that he has often been no more than a ghostly presence at important fundraising events; that he deputised the noted blues-rock guitarist, Anthony Blinken, to speak to the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, because he was already in bed at 8pm. He is only fully *compos mentis*, apparently, between the hours of 10am and 4pm.

Despite all this, he has insisted that he is still standing (in both senses of that word!). He has claimed that it is all a plot of "the elites", which is not even the stupidest conspiracy theory circulating among his supporters. (The idea has spread that this is all the work of the media, who are trying to make him look bad, so the one reliable source of ratings - Trump - gets back in. Readers may make their own judgment.) He insists he can get back on track, and announced a striking populist platform for his next term at a rally on July 13, which seems to be a concession to Sanders and the Squad (we wonder what the donors think of that).

But how? Nearly every time he speaks, he makes some gaffe

(which has been true for a while, but now there is extra scrutiny). Whenever he hides away from public engagements, that is interpreted as a sign of unfitness too. There was a bit of both in last Thursday's address to a Nato conference, in which he introduced Volodymyr Zelensky as "President Putin", tried to laugh it off, and then delayed the subsequent press conference by close to an hour - presumably while hysterical handlers attempted to prepare him for the inevitable barrage of hostile questions about his condition. He could always make great play of the evil on the other side, but, now there has been an attempt on Trump's life, it seems the Democrats are prepared to keep the powder dry for a time.

Dementia and Parkinson's disease are not conditions that tend to get better with time. Already trailing Trump going into this eventful few weeks, and now trailing further behind, it seems he is doomed to lose. Having sprung against him, can the media really be believed if they go back to supporting him? Can that genie go back in the bottle?

If he insists on taking it all the way, there are bizarrely few remedies at hand. For all the defects of the British constitution, at least parliament can get rid of a prime minister through a vote of no confidence. The Democratic nomination process has remedies in theory, and the Chicago convention has not even yet taken place and nominated him. But that would require anointing a successor and generally far more decisive action among Democratic elites than has been evident so far. His cabinet could declare him incapacitated under the 25th amendment, but they are people who entirely owe their positions to him individually. He could be impeached and convicted, but of what? In any case, it has never happened, despite several attempts dating back centuries. Why would Trump-addled house Republicans even do it, when keeping Sleepy Joe around means a near guarantee of victory in November?

The available replacements are a mixed bag. There is Kamala Harris, the vice-president - that would be the easiest switch. The Democratic ticket would get to keep all the money it has already raised without any further hassle. She is at least a good speaker on abortion - the one issue where the Democrats enjoy a clear advantage over the Republicans, thanks to the Dobbs decision and the ugliness of its implementation in several red states. Nonetheless, she is not popular as an individual. Only now, with Biden's post-debate approval ratings at an historically awful level, is she favoured over him. She has kept a low profile during their administration. She may become more popular if forced meaningfully onto the campaign trail - or less.

If not her, we are likely in the territory of plucking a successful Democratic governor from the state level. Gavin Newsom of California is talked about, though he has not really had to learn to fight, having proceeded from one blue rotten borough to the next - the days of the Republican 'governator', Arnold Schwarzenegger, seem strangely long ago. There is JB Pritzker of Illinois - like Trump a scion of a real-estate empire and, also like him, someone with something resembling the common touch. Or there is Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan, who has boxed clever in an important swing state, passed meaningful legislation with wafer-thin majorities in the state legislature, and is generally well-regarded by the political cognoscenti.

The trouble with all these people is, firstly, that getting them onto the ticket would be difficult, and probably require arranging

a contested convention - all but impossible without Biden's say-so. They also have little name recognition outside their home states. They might flourish, or they might bomb, as Florida governors Ron DeSantis and Jeb Bush did on the Republican ticket.

Elected monarchy

All these options have a common weakness, which is that they involve yet further backroom machinations among a political elite staggering under successive blows to its reputation. The liberal media seethes - self-servingly - because it considers itself betrayed by Democratic insiders' deceptions on the point of Biden's cognitive health. As far as the right is concerned, it is already canon that these shadowy forces are behind the attempt on the life of Trump, whether by endlessly denouncing him as a new Hitler, or by directly arranging to have him 'taken care of'. No senior Democrat can escape these two distrusters - they all covered for Biden, indeed continue to do so in public (while often apparently attempting to sort things out in private); and they all traffic in the kind of anti-Trump rhetoric that, in the light of Crooks's actions, sounds to the right like an admission of guilt.

One could not ask for a better illustration of the shortcomings of presidential 'democracy' - better described as 'elected monarchy'. A president could hardly qualify for the title if his removal were *easy*; but this merely produces a culture of impunity, whether in the form of Biden's stubborn refusal to face reality or Trump's serial threats on the liberty of his enemies. It is better not to have such a monstrous office at all. Caucus leaders in the house and the senate are frequently offloaded, especially in these days of fire-breathing far-right factions. *Good.*

American presidentialism, when it functions, allows the state core to have a stronger hand in politics than it might otherwise. The president, for practical purposes, has control over matters of war and peace, of geostrategy, and so forth. For the formulation and execution of these policies, he needs the aid of the permanent civil, intelligence and military bureaucracy, who enjoy considerable influence between administrations. "Whoever wins," as the anarchists say, "the government gets in." Indeed, now that Biden's infirmity is obvious, the question arises: who is actually running the country? It is, after all, still running, if not enormously successfully. Executive functions are, roughly, being carried out.

For all the froth, US policy - agonising disengagement from the near east, dismemberment of Russia and escalating conflict with China - has been consistent, from Obama to Trump to Biden (and, we suppose, to Trump again next year). It is difficult to argue that any part of it is being carried out successfully, or even that Trump's narcissism and Biden's senescence have made much difference. (Niall Ferguson, the Tory historian and American transplant, recently courted scandal by suggesting that, in the "new cold war" with China, "we - and not the Chinese - might be the Soviets". There is certainly the whiff of late-Brezhnev about all this.)

One thinks of the spoken-word vocal by Godspeed You! Black Emperor: 'Dead flag blues': "The car is on fire, and there's no driver at the wheel... We're trapped in the belly of this horrible machine, and the machine is bleeding to death."

Escape means escape from the chains of American constitutionalism - a third American revolution, that will finally deliver on the democratic and republican promise of the country's best moments ●

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THE LEFT



Primary task set

Theory and programme are treated seriously, but there are leftist and anarchistic carryovers. **Martin Greenfield** reports on the Revolutionary Communist Organisation conference in Australia and the next steps that are needed in what will doubtless be a long journey

What a breath of fresh air: an organisation on the Australian left has emerged that has set its primary task as re-establishing a Communist Party!

Meeting at just its second conference in Brisbane on the weekend of July 6-7, the Revolutionary Communist Organisation passed a motion that states:

There is no possible road to a socialist society without the organisation of a mass communist workers' party and the elevation of the working class to power led by this party. In the absence of such a party, the primary task of all communists is to create one.

If the comrades had passed no other motion, that would put them head and shoulders above the existing small confessional sects that litter the left.

Unlike those organisations, Trotskyite or Stalinite, which

either pretend that other left groups do not exist or see the path to socialism through a handful of cadre going 'directly to the class', the RCO seeks to unify Marxist currents through a process of fusion to build strong links with the working class and its organisations over time.

Unlike most of the Marxist left in Australia, the RCO also takes theory and programme seriously. It seeks to adopt the approach of classical and orthodox Marxism - a programme with a minimum-maximum structure, that prioritises politics and the demand for a democratic republic at its centre. It understands partyism, that unity is around a programme that members *accept* as the basis of activity, not *agreement* around theoretical shibboleths.

If you read through its (overlong and over-detailed) programme and other documents, you will realise that the CPGB *Draft programme* and its politics have been a major influence. However, there are concerning leftist flourishes,

St Petersburg branch of Union of Struggle for the Liberation of the Working Class, February 1897.

Shortly after picture was taken, the whole group was arrested by the Okhrana.

From left to right (standing): AL Malchenko, PK Zaporozhets, Anatoly Vaneyev; (sitting): Victor V Starkov, Gleb Krzhizhanovsky, Vladimir Lenin and Julius Martov

We too are in a pre-party situation. That means fighting opportunism, drawing lines of demarcation and laying the foundations of a party programme

such as wrong calls for a split in Australia's peak union body, the ACTU and incorrectly describing the Australian Labor Party as the "primary party of Australian capitalism".

But, unlike almost all other groups, the comrades, when queried on such matters, engage positively and are keen to develop their politics. A healthy culture.

The RCO is for the "strategy of patience", as outlined in its 'Theses on revolutionary strategy'. This for them means charting a course against left and right opportunism: "Right opportunists within the workers' movement promote a strategy of 'coalitionism'. This tendency seeks to forge alliances with bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties to form governments to advance workers interests."

Meanwhile, left opportunism is

... represented by the 'strikist' tendency of the workers' movement, [that] poses the general strike as the primary weapon in the arsenal

of the proletariat... [where] the spontaneous activity of the working class will give rise to explosions of class struggle during which revolutionaries may lead an insurrection.

These political ideas will be very familiar to readers of the *Weekly Worker*.

A further indication of the RCO's politics comes from a post on social media in November 2023: "Four books that had a major influence on our politics". It posts images of *Capital* by Karl Marx, *Revolutionary strategy* by Mike Macnair, *History and class consciousness* by Georg Lukács and *Imperialism in the 21st century* by John Smith.

The RCO emerged from a study group in Brisbane of comrades who had in part been through the failed Socialist Alliance experiment of the then Democratic Socialist Party. After an interregnum in direct-action, eco-anarchist groups, they identified the need for a partyist culture for communism.

The comrades encountered a group of high school students in Melbourne who had established the 'Collective of Leninist Youth'. These groups merged to form the RCO two years ago and have grown to around 70 members.

Conference

The conference saw open debate among delegates and non-delegate members of the RCO. It also granted speaking rights to non-member observers, including your correspondent and two from the 'post-Cliffite' Socialist Alternative (SAIt), which is the largest and noisiest far-left group in Australia.

An impromptu debate between myself and a comrade from SAIt took place on the question of elections. SAIt is the dominant group in a 'sub-reformist' electoral coalition called Victorian Socialists, whose platform is practically indistinguishable from the left-liberal Green Party.

When pressed on the need for a revolutionary group to have a revolutionary programme - and an election offering connected to this programme - the SAIt comrade celebrated the fact they have none and were guided by "where we can get most traction as an organisation". Their opportunism was thus laid bare for the RCO comrades to see.

However, it was a serious oversight of conference not to develop ideas around the forthcoming federal election, due by May. Victorian Socialists work is one thing, but comrades must focus on high politics to inform their activity. How to approach the ALP? What to say about the Greens? What demands do we put to ALP 'left' candidates?

A motion to change the name of the organisation to Communist Unity was set aside, with a group of comrades to work with the incoming central committee to recommend a new name and work towards a possible socialist unity conference in 2025.

It would make sense to change the name, not only to drop the tautology of 'revolutionary communist', but to adopt a name that promotes the central task of the group - unifying communists around a democratic programme fighting for a partyist culture on

the left. The RCO is in discussions with the 'third worldist' Red Ant collective, which is a tiny splinter from the Democratic Socialist Party. Unity with them on a principled basis could be a catalyst for a name change.

The comrades did vote to change the name of their journal from the anarchistic sounding *Direct Action* to *The Partisan*, reflecting its struggle for a partyist culture in the Australian socialist movement. It needs to turn this journal - online, in print and in social media - into its primary weapon for propaganda, debate and organisation.

The delegates debated a wide range of topics over the two-day conference: the nature of imperialism and of the Chinese state; organisational tasks; women's oppression; the climate movement; the national question in Australia; sexual freedom; electoral work - to name a few.

A motion on "actually existing socialism", moved by an impressive comrade with what I would call 'left Stalinist' politics, wanted to commit the group's perspectives to "defend the continuation, deepening and export of these socialist projects" (emphasis added); namely China, Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba. Do the comrades really want these dead-end projects exported?

The comrade happily accepted an amendment to only refer to Cuba, (an opportunist dodge to get the politics through, while avoiding debating North Korea) and accepted an addendum referring to Cuba having a "local dictatorship of the proletariat". Really? A rushed discussion did not allow for clarity on this matter and it seems the comrades are lumbered with this motion. Why it is in the perspectives document is beyond me. There are no plans for any activity based on it.

There is much to be admired in the group, but it also has serious shortfalls - some unavoidable, but many may be overcome through experience. One positive is the youth of the group - I doubt they have many members over the age of 30. But this also means a lack of serious experience and no real historical ties to the workers' movement or its culture. It includes members from a range

of political backgrounds - and none. This means it can attack the question of unity from a partyist perspective and has junked the sect methodology of agreement around theoretical questions that plagues the socialist left.

The comrades, however, suffer from a chronic over-formalism and a pandering to campaign ideas without any purchase whatsoever. An example: despite the age of the comrades, the conference has committed the RCO to organise a formal 'Young Communist Caucus' for all under the age of 26. Looking around the room, that would include at least half the membership.

On top of this, the comrades wish to form a youth organisation named "Red! Socialist Youth Front" - with whom, it is unclear. There are also plans for Red Workers Clubs, an Anti-Imperialist Solidarity Front, a Red-Green Front, a Communist Women's Front as part of a Women's Liberation Union, and an autonomous group, 'United 4 Ecosocialism'.

This all smacks of aching inexperience, substitutionism and putting the cart way before the horse. This playing at partyism, and debating contentless united front organisations that emerge not from the material reality of the struggle, but from the heads of the comrades themselves, does not do them any favours.

Anarchistic

Further, elements of the group seem not to have moved past anarchistic ideas of organisation. A small organisation of under 100 does not need an elaborate structure. Indeed, mass parties can be strangled by over formalism. While their subjective motivation is democratic, the result is a bureaucratic straitjacket. A hallmark of anarchism.

There was a motion for an RCO convention to meet every two months to effectively police the work of all other committees, including the central committee. The proposal was for this convention to be a delegate body from the cells. It is concerning enough that an organisation of this size has delegate structures for its conference - including from formal caucuses from "specifically oppressed groups" within its rules - but to introduce layers of oversight smacked of anarchistic distrust of the organisation's culture, and a very concerning inwardness and excessive formalism.

The amendment on rules and structure also included a proposal for conference to have delegates carrying mandated voting instructions from cells in a *signed code of conduct*. What is the point of meeting to debate if you have instructions on how to vote from your cell?

The proposal, from a comrade who has recently come from the direct-action ecological movement, was thankfully defeated. But there are lingering traces of anarchistic sympathies in organisational matters, with delegate systems and mandates, which are wrong in principle and completely unnecessary for a small organisation trying to build an open, partyist culture.

What is also of concern is the acceptance of a 'discipline and control commission'. Such commissions were the bureaucratic weapons of secret factions in 'official communist' parties and have been misused in Trotskyist groups too. While the comrades' desire for democracy is commendable, they have gone completely over the top with rules,

committees, delegate systems and empty proposals for mass organisations.

Further, a culture of 'two-minute democracy' where, although the mover of motions had seven minutes, rejoinders had just two minutes each - a for-and-against structure - and a policed debate, where heckles and 'facial expressions' such as eye-rolling are not allowed. Of course, a more rigorous, open press would allow for the real differences to be explored and provide the background for conference debates, rather than pinched two-minute soundbites (on subjects that are often peripheral at best).

Three trends

Basically, there were three political blocs: a majority called the Marxist Unity Circle, which broadly has what you could call 'Marxist Unity Group and CPGB-inspired' politics. Then there is a small third-worldist Stalinite group, which defends "existing socialist experiments", while another trend is more from the anarchist and direct-action ecological movement. A six-strong central committee was elected, containing all of them - four comrades reflecting the majority view, plus one comrade each from the 'Stalinite' and 'anarchistic' trends.

All this paints a very mixed picture. The comrades are earnest and serious - a welcome change. But they are clearly an isolated discussion and propaganda group, with little experience of engaging with the working class movement.

Conference agreed a programme that is more than 26,000 words long (twice the length of the *Draft programme*). Further, it passed a perspectives document (more than 5,000 words) that included many irrelevant matters. It also agreed a document called 'Charting the course', which was more like an 'action list' (nearly 6,000 words), and finally a 'Theses on revolutionary strategy' (nearly 5,000 words). On top of this, there are four other documents totalling more than 10,000 words - far too much even for a fully established party, let alone a small pre-party group.

This just creates confusion, ambiguity and 'revolution by conference motion'. While rejecting the programmeless opportunism of most of the left grouplets, the RCO has gone too far the other way. It has set itself far too many 'Potemkin village' projects and included too many empty campaign and organisational ideas that simply will not be completed.

However, central to its project is an emerging understanding of partyism that is healthy. Over the next year, the RCO needs to focus on just one or two things - and get them right. It needs to declutter its agenda, look outward and engage with the workers' movement through its press to give them something to cut their teeth on.

Its main priority should be professionalising *The Partisan* and developing communist journalism. The RCO should aim to transform it into a weapon that becomes compulsory reading on the Australian left, which has no serious journals to debate programme, strategy and tactics.

The most important thing, however, is that the comrades are *thinking* and are open to debate and a partyist culture. That alone sets them apart and gives them a chance of building something worthwhile ●

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Fighting fund

More than possible

We are hoping *Weekly Worker* readers and supporters will ensure that we reach our monthly £2,250 fighting fund target in July and right now things are looking reasonably good. Thanks to a total of £646 that came our way over the last seven days, we now have £1,471 in the kitty!

There was a brilliant £170 donation from comrade KB, while JS transferred exactly £100 to our account. Other bank transfers/standing orders were from MM (£75), PB (£70), TR (£40), OG (£24), GS (£20), SS (£15), SA (£12) and CC (£10). On top of that, we received regular PayPal transfers from comrades RL and PM (£50 each) and from MZ (£10).

All this means that we need another £739 in exactly two weeks. That is obviously more than possible, but I take nothing for granted. Please play your part if you haven't already done so this month. As well as using bank transfer and PayPal, you can, of course, send us a cheque.

For more details on how to do any of the above, please go to the link below.

It is vital that the support - both political and financial - of our readers continues. As comrade GH recently wrote when renewing his subscription, "The quality [of the *Weekly Worker*] is incredible. Where else on the left can you find not only such well-written articles, but a commitment to democracy and free debate? Expect a contribution from me in the very near future!"

I'm not sure whether by "contribution" he meant an article or a donation, but we look forward to receiving either one! If you agree with his sentiments, please chip in as much as you can! ●

Robbie Rix

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

weekly worker

Democratic
centralism, yes;
bureaucratic
centralism, no

Rats in a sack

Local assemblies are a recipe for chaos, confusion and ineffectiveness. Jeremy Corbyn continues to disappoint, writes Carla Roberts

Why did Jeremy Corbyn not last as leader of the Labour Party? Yes, there was certainly the determination of the pro-Zionist right in and outside the Labour Party to get rid of him, aided by the entire bourgeois media, which happily lapped up the many false and weaponised claims of 'anti-Semitism' in the party. Labour's inconsistent and weak stance on Brexit too played a role in the 2019 general election defeat (though, yes, it is true that during that 'terrible' and 'disastrous' election, more people voted Labour than this year).

But a dreary opinion piece in *The Guardian* penned by Corbyn is a stark reminder that his defeat also had a significant, self-made aspect to it.¹ The man is clearly no leader. As an aside, the article, published on July 12, cropped up numerous times talking to people at the Durham Miners Gala, which took place the next day - and not in a positive way.

Corbyn assures us that it was local "people-power that led to my re-election" in Islington North. It was his friend, Teme Teme Wanga, and thousands like him,

who gave up their time to support our campaign in a variety of ways: knocking on doors to speak to voters, offering posters to residents and shops, sending messages in family or street WhatsApp groups, stewarding rallies, creating art, or making cups of tea for those entering data late into the evening.

His re-election had apparently *nothing* at all to do with the fact that he has been the Labour MP in the constituency for over 40 years and is probably Islington's most famous resident. And he has been a very good MP, by all accounts, taking up the concerns of local residents, while making a point of supporting all sorts of local campaigning events, shop openings, street parties, etc. The official Labour candidate, Praful Nargrund, never had a chance - and not just because he is a keen advocate of privatisation in the National Health Service and is personally linked to a number of private healthcare and venture capital firms.² Reports about support for Corbyn and him running 'neck and neck' were always highly suspicious - and had probably been spread by both camps, each for their own reasons.

In any case, Corbyn is trying to tell us that his election is the "start of a new politics" - "a new way" of doing things, a "grassroots model" and an expression of "real community power". And "once this has been replicated elsewhere, this can be the genesis of a new movement" that "will eventually run in elections" and would be "capable of challenging the stale two-party system" (my emphasis).

Wait, what? First we have to "replicate everywhere" the work he has been able to do in over 40 years as a local MP? How long would that take,



King rat: the best Corbyn's assemblies could produce

especially without having the facilities and name recognition of Corbyn?

It gets worse. He consciously rejects building a new political party at this point in time: "To create a new, centralised party, based around the personality of one person, is to put the cart before the horse. Remember that only once strength is built from below can we challenge those at the top."

Programme first

So instead of building a political party that could coherently organise people on the basis of a shared socialist programme (leaving aside for now what this would look like), we have to build "local people's assemblies" first - which might or might not turn into a party. (Corbyn is very unclear on this issue in his article, though Collective, the proto-Corbyn outfit set up by his allies, says it *does* want to "eventually transform into a new political party").

In any case, we would argue that it is in fact Corbyn who has it exactly the wrong way around. Socialists and communists consciously put the programme first - the organisation flows from that. Unless you are clear about *what you are fighting for* and what concrete changes you want to see in society, you are bound to get lost in hyper-activity for the sake of hyper-activity.

But Corbyn assures us that the decent results for many independent candidates support his localist outlook: "Look at where other independents challenged the main parties most effectively. They built on community power to stand up for themselves and

against those who had ignored their demands for peace and humanity."

That is astonishingly dishonest. Clearly, it was the very *centrally* and *nationally* organised campaign, Muslim Vote, that successfully managed to mobilise the Muslim population to get four pro-Gaza MPs elected, with another dozen or so candidates ending up in a good second place. Muslim Vote is not a party, but it almost acted like one. And we would not be surprised if it turns into a political party before long, especially if Labour continues to fail so spectacularly to stand up to the genocidal campaign of Israel against the Palestinians.

Incidentally, Muslim Vote has called on Corbyn, the Green Party and other "independent groups" to emulate the New Popular Front in France in order to challenge the Labour government in future elections.⁴ George Galloway too has repeated the call for Corbyn to lead some sort of "popular front movement or party" (perhaps because, while some candidates of the Workers Party did quite well on July 4 - when they stood in areas with a large Muslim population - most of them did as badly as the rest of the left).

Should such a non-aggression pact come to pass - or, worse, a 'popular front' of some kind, perhaps as one of Corbyn's necessary steps towards a party - we can guess what its programme would be like: subordinated to the most rightwing of the forces involved, as is usually the case. This is, after all, not the first

time it has been tried. The disaster of the Respect Party springs to mind, where the Socialist Workers Party subordinated itself to the (perceived) demands of the Muslim organisations involved.

Real democracy?

But Corbyn pretends that what he is trying to do is all shiny and new: "Here in Islington, we are planting the seeds for a new way of doing politics." He wants to organise a monthly "people's forum", which is supposed to be

a shared, democratic space for local campaigns, trade unions, tenants' unions, debtors' unions and national movements to organise, together, for the kind of world we want to live in. Listening to the voices of those who elected me. Discussing the concerns and hopes of our community. Empowering each other to do something about it.

Crucially, he says: "That is what real democracy looks like." Getting together once a month to chat about local issues? Dear god. No, Jeremy, that is not "real democracy" - neither is being allowed to vote every five years. "Real democracy" would be the working class running every aspect of society, from top to bottom - what we would call socialism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the transition to communism. To achieve that, our class needs to be organised around a clear programme that fights to achieve such "democratic control over every sphere of life: the state and politics, work and economy, international relations", as the CPGB *Draft programme* outlines.⁵

And, yes, it needs to be organised in a "centralised party" to get there. Of course, we agree with Corbyn that this should *not* be "based around the personality of one person". Especially not a person with such a weak grasp of political ABCs. No doubt personalities matter: Corbyn still enjoys a certain 'messiah status', although it has to be said that he is more like the invented version of Jesus, as the pacifist who 'turns the other cheek', than the far more realistic description of Jesus as a revolutionary communist who took up the battle against the Roman occupiers.

Corbyn's entire time as leader of the Labour Party was characterised by his futile efforts to stop the right undermining him. Like a fool, he kept arguing for "unity". Instead of condemning the anti-Semitism smear campaign as the big lie that it was, Corbyn launched an official enquiry run by Shami Chakrabarti - thereby giving, of course, credence to the weaponised accusations. The campaign to conflate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism really exploded after that. Instead of clearing out the right in the way that Starmer cleared out the left, Corbyn bent over backwards, throwing *allies and supporters* to the wolves.

Nevertheless, should he officially

put his weight behind an organisation like Collective, it would quickly attract tens of thousands. But Corbyn remains hesitant. Perhaps he really believes that Keir Starmer will let him back into the Labour Party, as happened with Ken Livingstone? There is zero chance of that happening, but for somebody like Corbyn, a Labourite through and through, it is a difficult habit to break. But his allies will continue to pressurise him into launching a party. The question is, what kind of party?

Centralised party?

We suspect that Corbyn rejects the idea of a "centralised party", because he has the *bureaucratic centralism* and 'follow the leader' approach of much of the British left in mind. And we would agree with him about how useless such structures are. However, *democratic centralism*, as developed first in the German Social Democratic Party and then refined in the Bolshevik Party, is anything but the 'one party, one view' attitude of much of the left.

Real democratic centralism allows for vibrant and open debates, in full view of the working class, in order to convince the membership of the best possible way forward. Once you have had the transparent and democratic debate, you might vote on a particular line of action for a particular duration, and the membership is expected to follow that line - for example, when it comes to the material put out during a demonstration or the attitude taken towards a particular election or campaign. But political lines that are routinely imposed by the leadership without discussion, perhaps even against the wishes of many members, are likely to be ignored or, worse, undermined - and are therefore almost entirely useless.

Should local assemblies take off (which we seriously doubt), they would by definition develop independently of each other and with all sorts of weird and wonderful people, organisations and views involved. It would be virtually impossible to bring all those views together into a coherent party with a coherent programme - rats in a sack comes to mind.

Much more likely that Collective will do precisely what Corbyn says he wants to avoid: build a top-down organisation with minimal democracy and members' involvement, on the basis of a minimal, sub-reformist programme that subordinates the fight for real socialism to the perceived views of the right ●

Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jul/12/people-power-re-election-new-politics-jeremy-corbyn.
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