

weekly **worker**



Ismail Haniyeh assassinated: a deadly spiral towards a regional war that can only but cause untold human suffering

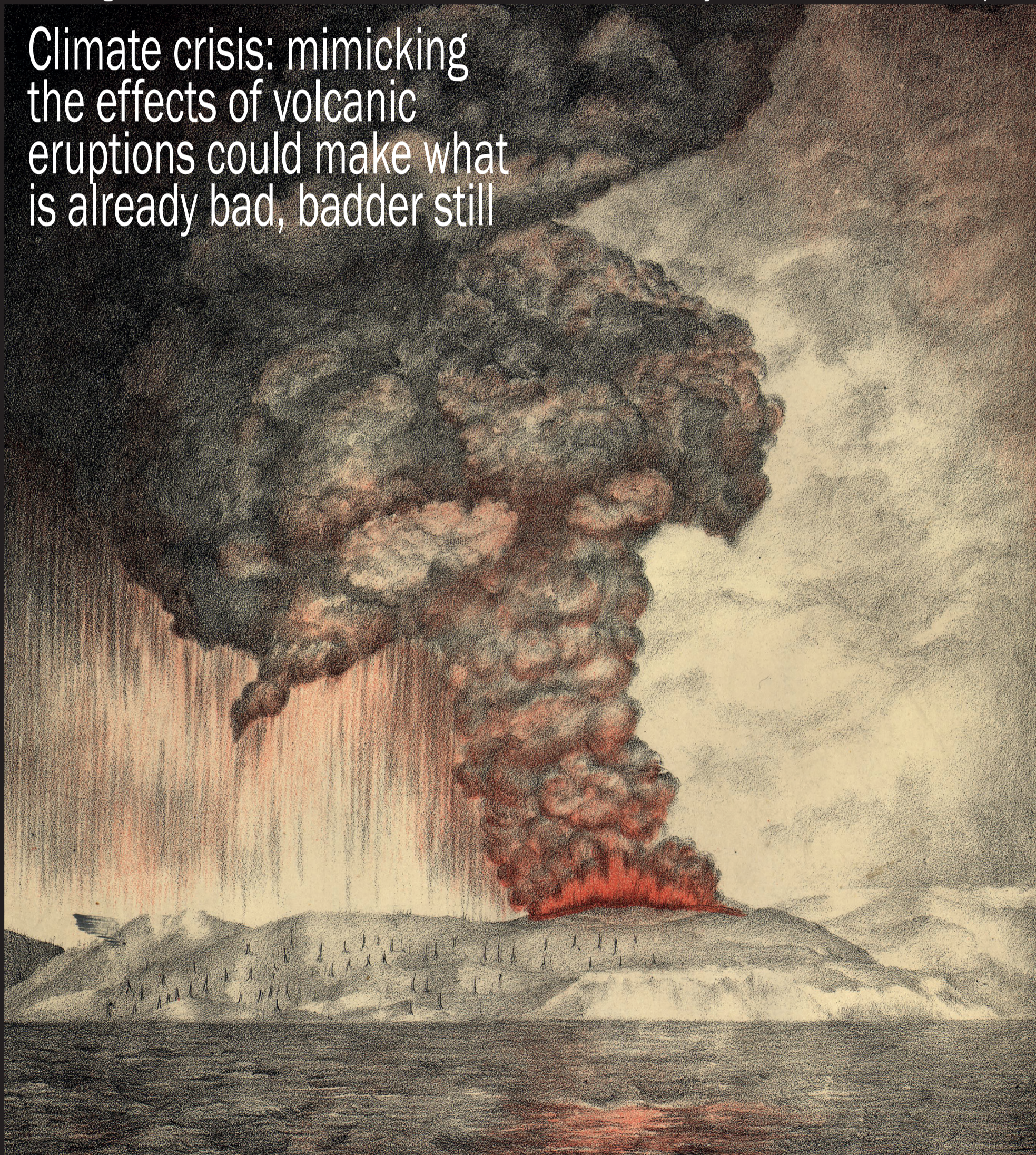
- Letters and debate
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No 1502 August 1 2024

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

Climate crisis: mimicking the effects of volcanic eruptions could make what is already bad, badder still



LETTERS



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

Shut down Elbit

On Palestine Action's fourth anniversary, activists have shut Elbit down in Shenstone. They have used two vehicles to block both entrances into Elbit's UAV Engines factory in Shenstone, Staffordshire. From on top of a van at one gate, activists have lobbed glass jars of red paint towards the building to symbolise the company's ongoing complicity in Palestinian bloodshed. With the ongoing blockade it's highly likely the activists will have succeeded in shutting down the Israeli weapons maker.

Nevertheless, UAV Engines Ltd is owned by Israel's largest weapons firm, Elbit Systems, the primary target of Palestine Action's four-year-long direct action campaign - 85% of Israel's military drone fleet and land-based equipment is supplied by Elbit. The company uses Gaza as a laboratory to develop weaponry which is later marketed as 'battle-tested'. Crucial components for such 'battle-tested' weapons are made in factories across England, with engines for drones being manufactured by Elbit's UAV Engines Ltd.

Two similar factories have been forced to permanently close down since Palestine Action was launched. Most recently, Elbit was left with no choice but to sell their factory in Tamworth after their profits were reduced by 75% due to constant disruption and sky-rocketing security costs. The Tamworth factory used to make cooling units for Israeli tanks, but now it only produces parts for public transport.

As part of the direct action strategy employed by Palestine Action, the campaign has also succeeded in driving several companies to cut ties with Elbit. As one activist said from inside the van blocking UAV Engines on July 31, "If you associate with Elbit, Palestine Action will associate with you."

Around 10% of Gaza's population is killed, injured or missing due to the ongoing genocide carried out by Israel since October 7. Despite rulings by the International Court of Justice, which confirmed Gaza is illegally occupied and Israel is committing a plausible genocide, Britain has continued to maintain military relationships with the Zionist regime.

According to a spokesperson of ours, "Whilst Palestine Action's campaign has been ongoing for four years, there has never been a more crucial time for ordinary people to take action against Israel's weapons trade. During the ongoing Gaza genocide, Israel's biggest weapons producer has been allowed to continue operations on our doorstep. It's now a legal and moral obligation for ordinary people to take direct action to shut Elbit down."

Palestine Action
Email

Trans freedom

Comrade Brunhilda O of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation in Australia raises the issue of trans liberation (Letters July 25 2024). She complains that the CPGB's *Draft programme* "fundamentally fails to touch on the issue" and that the RCO's *Road to power* is altogether superior.

I am not going to comment on the RCO's four demands around the issue (all of which are more than worthy of an extended discussion). Instead, I am going to defend the CPGB's *Draft programme*.

Section 3.16 on 'Sexual freedom' says this:

Gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people, etc have often

been scapegoated or persecuted. They are portrayed as threats to timeless religious values, sexual norms and the nuclear family - the basic economic unit of capitalist society.

Bigoted attitudes divide the working class and aid those advocating the authoritarian state. The working class needs to be mobilised in order to defend and advance sexual freedom.

Communists demand:

■ Decriminalisation of all consensual sexual practices. End police and state harassment.

■ Lesbian women and gay men should be accorded the same rights in society as heterosexuals: that is, state marriages, artificial insemination for lesbians, adoption and fostering. No discrimination in custody cases on the grounds of sexual orientation.

■ No discrimination in any area of employment.

■ Decriminalisation of prostitution so as to remove it from criminal control.

■ For the self-organisation of prostitutes to improve their conditions. Prostitutes to be provided with special healthcare and other services to reduce the dangers they confront. Measures must be put in place to give prostitutes wider social opportunities.

The purpose of the communist programme is to provide a broad strategic approach, to state basic principles ... and nothing more. Many, even important issues, will be left out and can be, should be, dealt with elsewhere. In articles, resolutions, by special commissions, etc. The programme itself should be as *short* as possible.

Hopefully, with that in mind, when comrade Brunhilda next reads our *Draft programme*, instead of finding what's not there, she will find what's really there: opposition to discrimination, championing of freedom.

Jack Conrad
London

Welcome here

My 89-year-old mum has just come out of hospital after having been admitted due to a fractured knee following a fall. She can no longer walk and needs a hoist to get her in and out of bed and off and onto a chair and wheelchair.

My mum has two carers, who come in four times a day - working 14 hours a day, five days a week. These carers come from a wide range of countries: Zimbabwe, India, Ghana and Nigeria. I'm not allowed to give them money, but I am able to give them boxes of chocolates from time to time! They are all very friendly, helpful and hardworking.

My experience of meeting these carers has affected me deeply and changed my view on immigration controls, which I now oppose. I therefore think it was wrong for Marxists to support George Galloway's red-brown Workers Party of Britain, which opposes migrants and wants the Royal Navy to sink the boats of migrants making their way across the Channel.

Just like Nigel Farage's Reform UK, the WPB must be fought, given the anti-migrant poison they have introduced into politics within the UK. My view now is that all migrants are welcome here.

John Smithee
Cambridgeshire

Communism?

I read Marcus Strom's review in last week's edition of David Lockwood's book, *The politics of the Malayan Communist Party from 1930 to 1948* ('Flip-flopping programmatically', July 25).

For me the Malayan Communist Party was merely an independence movement with overtures to communist ideals as a means of

garnering support from an always gullible and mostly politically clueless population. I've read Chin Peng's biography, *Alias Chin Peng: my side of history*, and found little attention to communist aspirations. Most of the active members of the MCP during the long campaign were solely mercenaries.

I can understand how a burgeoning 'communist' movement needs to rely on secrecy and what I think is called 'democratic centralism' - which is a euphemism for 'anything but'. But therein lies the danger of a movement reliant on non-democratic means of establishing power and then, once in power, 'struggling' to establish democracy. It's like expecting a group of alcoholics taking over a brewery to suddenly embrace teetotalism - good luck with that strategy.

I've also read *The private life of Chairman Mao* by Zhisui Li, who was Mao's private physician for most of his reign of power. The Chinese Communist Party may as well have called themselves the 'Chinese Monarchist Party', judging by the way Mao was monarchised (or deified) post-1949 until his death in 1976.

Private enterprise has always been "indispensable", in Mao's own words, to the Chinese economy. Today, maybe the top 500 Chinese companies are state-owned (a few hundred thousand state-owned enterprises in total and another few hundred thousand partly state-owned), but the vast bulk of the 40 million registered firms in China today are privately owned. There's communism for you! Communism seems to mean anything that anyone can attach to it.

The Provisional Irish Republican Army have dabbled in socialist rhetoric, varying according to time and place, throughout their existence. Talking to Irish republicans today, one daren't mention anything about reform of the financial system or tinkering with the economic foundations of society, as such ideas interfere with the short-term goal of Irish unity. It's all part of a 'process', you see. Firstly, 'independence' and then we can talk about 'socialism', as the British influence will be out of the way. Probably, Chin Peng thought the same thing.

But, when Malaya gained 'independence' in 1957, British influence (or should we say 'capital influence'?) remained. After what we may describe as 'Irish independence' (anything but) discussion of socialism will more likely be outlawed than initiated. Platitudes to socialism-cum-communism are 99% used to hoodwink people into supporting independence movements, or essentially just to support seizures of power by one grouping against other competing groupings vying to be the executives for the shadowy elite who run everything, control the money supply, own the vast majority of media outlets, control the foundations whose benefaction essentially controls the charitable and NGO sectors, who atop the secret societies and the vast power that that entails.

In fact, for me the nearest thing to communism comes from Michael Albert's Parecon and the Socialist Party of Great Britain. Both at least explain what a decent society could be like. Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and 'Goofy' didn't do this. Lenin's 'April theses' was more an opportunistic attempt to bandwagon popular sentiment rather than his deeply held beliefs, because, up until that time and after, Lenin's views and actions were anything but related to socialism/communism: "If socialism can only be realised when the intellectual development of all the people permits it, then we shall not see socialism for at least 500 years." Ah ... he was such an icon, was he not?

Ironically, although the Soviet Union didn't have the best of starts, due to having despots like Lenin leading the charge, it did develop into state capitalism of a type that I personally see as preferable to other state-capitalist experiments across the world at that time, or since. I would rather have lived in the Soviet Union during the 1960s and 70s rather than El Salvador - or even Scotland for that matter. A near guarantee of a home, a job, subsidised heating and all the other benefits for me is better than the precarious lifestyles of most people living in other state-capitalist adventures seen around the world at the same time in all the various countries.

Has anyone ever watched, *Just a boy's game* written by Peter McDougall, with the leading role played by Frankie Miller? Jesus Christ! Give me the Soviet Union any time rather than that hellhole. I know it's only 'fiction', but it's based on some type of reality, as is much fiction - even science fiction.

But don't confuse the Soviet Union with communism (as one shouldn't confuse the X-Factor with entertainment). A dog born in a barn doesn't make it a horse. Communism is always just over the horizon - 'Let's just experience a little more capitalism, comrades, and then we'll establish communism!' Anything but!

Louis Shawcross
County Down

Segregation

I know there is a lot of shooting, swimming, running, etc going on at the moment, but should one's brain wish to visit the higher pursuits for a short period of time, 'PBS' has some illuminating documentaries.

PBS stands for Public Broadcasting Service, and is the one and only national TV channel in the US that accepts no advertisements. What it does do is accept money from various trusts, and membership from ordinary people like me. Many of the glam programmes you see on television here are made with the help of PBS or (usually) GBH, the Boston flagship

('grievous bodily harm' does not exist as the name of a crime in the USA!).

A documentary about Mississippi - the state with the most violent history during the fight for desegregation of all of the southern states - is a case in point. *The harvest: integrating Mississippi's schools* charts the path of the fight for desegregation in the schools after the 'Brown vs the Board of Education' decision, at a time when the Supreme Court was a little more sensitive, following through with the murders of Martin Luther King and John F Kennedy. The schools became desegregated, and parents and students testify as to what it was like sharing a bathroom with people of a different colour for the first time in your life. It looks as though the racial divide is at last diminishing. Hope! There is hope!

And then the documentary moves through the years until now.

If one takes the pessimist view of a half glass of wine, then Mississippi is now an empty glass. Because of white flight and/or the emergence of private schools, the schools in Mississippi are now segregated again. Some of the state's living conditions have changed, of course. There is a black middle class. Black and white people do eat in the same restaurants at the same time. There is not the same amount of open brutality over black people voting - although voter nullification is having to be fought now. But the schools have gone back to the 'good old days', with black children in state schools and white children in private schools.

When people ask me about the reasons for the Molotov cocktail-like explosiveness of race relations in the US, it usually takes me a little time to go through the history of slavery and slave rebellions, the Civil War, Reconstruction, the early 1900s and lynching, the struggle for the parity of black service men and women and factory workers during World War II and the civil rights movement. From now on I'll save my breath and just tell people to watch the PBS documentary on Mississippi's schools.

Gaby Rubin
email

Fighting fund

What a month!

Last week I reported that we were just £138 short of our monthly £2,250 target for July, with a week still to go. Well, what a response there's been!

First of all, comrade AC took it upon himself to make sure we reached that target by making a PayPal transfer for exactly £138! He was followed by FK, BK and MF, who each made bank transfers of exactly £100! Other transfers/standing orders came from LM (£80), GT (£35), JT (£25), AB (£20), MD (£10), DD (£8) and DS (a more modest, but still very welcome £2).

And there were other PayPal donors apart from AC. One was from comrade PS, who contributed £50 and then emailed us to say he'd been reading the *Weekly Worker* over the last year and he found that its "content is invariably well-researched and well-written" and "provides a welcome antidote to the usual fare served up by mainstream media". He particularly appreciated "the editorial policy of inviting contributions from other groups and individuals on the left, thereby providing a space for debate".

Having made that payment, he went on to explain: "I wanted to

donate something, as I can imagine a lot of time and effort goes into writing, editing and publishing the material that I read." Quite right, comrade, but it's readers like yourself who make us aware how much our effort is appreciated!

Other PayPal donations were made from DB (another £50) and JS (£7), while comrade Hassan handed his usual banknote to one of our team, this time for £10.

I can't say how delighted I am that all that came to £735, taking the final total for July up to a tremendous £2,847 - almost exactly £600 over the target! Just what we needed after the various extra expenses recently incurred.

And what a way for the *Weekly Worker* to go out before our usual two-week summer break. Next week is the CPGB's Communist University, of course, and our next issue will appear in three weeks time on August 21.

See you at CU! ●

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

USA

Donald the Führer?

Liberal hysteria about Trump abolishing presidential elections - even being a new Hitler - sees the BBC acting as mere propagandists for the US Democrats, writes Eddie Ford

During this US presidential election campaign, any pretence at objective reporting by the mainstream media has gone out the window. Whilst no-one expects anything else from the likes of *The Guardian* newspaper, of course - which told us that the Labour Party is riddled with anti-Semites - the BBC is at least in theory committed to objective reporting as part of its charter.

After all, how many times have they played us the phone call between Kamala Harris and the Obamas - whereby, in the words of *The New York Times*, "cameras rolled" and "hokeyness ensued".¹ But that is nothing, compared to the media storm about Donald Trump's recent comments at West Palm Beach to a crowd of Christians from the Turning Point Action group. Their founder, Charlie Kirk, compared Joe Biden's vaccination efforts to an "apartheid-style open-air hostage situation." Pretty weird, but there you go. Trump himself said to the audience: "Christians, get out and vote, just this time. You won't have to do it any more. Four more years, you know what, it will be fixed, it will be fine, you won't have to vote any more, my beautiful Christians."²

Many US Democrats called Trump's remarks "terrifying" and "authoritarian", and naturally the Kamala Harris 2024 Campaign issued a statement saying that democracy was "under assault" by Donald Trump, who has "promised" to use "violence if he loses" and "the end of our elections if he wins" - "the termination of the constitution".

The story is being aggressively spun by the BBC (there is no other word for it) in conjunction with Trump's previous remark that "I will be a dictator for a day" if re-elected. But is this really meant to be *serious* reporting?

Did Trump really say that he was going to abolish presidential elections if given a second term in the White House? Firstly, his comments have been taken out of context - no doubt deliberately by some - and downright misreported by others.

Trump actually spoke for over an hour at the gathering and about halfway through he discussed voter turnout among Christians, claiming that they do not vote "proportionately" to their numbers. Nearing the end of his speech, he denounced the Democrats, who "don't want to approve voter ID", and implored Christians to turn out in droves to prevent Democrats from "cheating" - because "we want a landslide that's too big to rig" in order "to save America". Then Trump made the now famous comment about Christians not having to vote again in four more years, because it will be "fixed". All reactionary crap, of course, but hardly a sinister fascist agenda deserving of such hysteria. Like all bourgeois politicians, he was merely trying to maximise his vote by almost any means possible.

Secondly, a few days later the former president clarified his remarks to a certain extent in an interview with Fox News: "That statement is very simple", he said, "Christians are not known as a big voting group" but "I'm explaining that to them" that if they vote this time, "I'll straighten out the country" - then "I won't need your vote any more" and "you can go back to not voting". When the news host pointed out that many Democrats had interpreted his comments to mean there would never be another election



Threat is from Democrats too

again, Trump claimed that he had not heard that - rather stretching credibility - and continued to elaborate about how lots of Christians tend to not vote because "maybe they're disappointed in things that are happening".

Thirdly, perhaps more importantly - whether it was at the forefront of Donald Trump's mind or not - the 22nd amendment of the US constitution, enacted in 1951, prevents anyone from having more than two terms, hence Trump will not be able to serve as president beyond early 2029. Also, there is the not unimportant fact that Donald Trump is a mere mortal - even if some of his more devoted followers think otherwise - and will be rather old come 2028. So on those grounds alone, this is the last chance you will get to vote for Trump and then that is it - well and truly "fixed".

Over the years, several presidents have voiced their antipathy toward the 22nd amendment. Harry Truman described it as "stupid", Ronald Reagan said the amendment "infringed" on people's democratic rights, Bill Clinton suggested that it should be altered because of longer life expectancies.

As for Trump's "dictator for a day" throwaway, the paranoid liberal media rarely put that in context either. In fact, they completely mangle the quote, which arose during another interview with Fox News last December.³ He was asked twice whether he would ever abuse power by seeking retribution against anyone or is "going to be a dictator". Trump said no, "other than day one", when "we're closing the border and we're drilling, drilling, drilling" - "after that, I'm not a dictator". That is, he would use his presidential powers to close the southern border with Mexico and expand oil drilling.

Yes, again, it is horrible reactionary crap - promising to persecute people trying to flee poverty and further destroying the natural environment in the single-minded pursuit of profit. Dumb all over. But this is not much different from the policies pursued by the Biden administration, which last year approved a huge Alaska drilling project - even if it did later row back on some aspects of the expansion. In June, Joe Biden signed an executive order closing the border with Mexico, once the average number of daily encounters hits 2,500 (and illegal Mexican migrants would be subject to immediate removal from the US).⁴ Screaming about the dangers of a Donald Trump dictatorship seems rather perverse, given what is actually happening on the ground right now.

Trying to portray Trump as a potential Führer ignores the glaring democratic deficits in the US constitution as it exists today, and the general anti-democratic nature of American state apparatus itself - which is very real. But democracy in America is not like mom and apple pie, it has to be actively fought for like everywhere else. Nor does it detract from the fact that Trump tried to carry out a self-coup on January 6 2021 to prevent a joint session of Congress counting the electoral college votes to formalise the victory of president-elect Joe Biden - even if some on the left could not recognise what was happening right in front of their eyes.

Neither does it deny that there are real fascists and real fascist grouplets in the US, of course - the Three Percenters, the Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys, and perhaps some of those around the unhinged QAnon movement - that meet the classic Leon Trotsky take on fascism, in which "capitalism sets in motion the masses of the crazed petty bourgeoisie and the bands of declassed and demoralised lumpenproletariat - all the countless human beings whom finance capital itself has brought to desperation and frenzy".

Yes, they were all encouraged and flattered by Donald Trump in his bid to stay in office. But, as the CPGB has always insisted, there is a world of difference between using such fascist grouplets as pawns and lifting any of them into the saddle of power. As they do not have their backs to the wall, why on earth would the capitalist class dump the certainties that come with the 'rule of law' and US-style 'democracy' for the chaos of fascism? Much better to keep the pretence of a government run by and for the people than openly deprive them of all basic democratic rights.

It goes without saying that socialists do not believe a word of it when Trump says he is going to "fix" all of America's problems - any more than he 'fixed' them in his first four years. But it is clear that he has an authoritarian agenda, he wants to roll back all manner of gains and rights. The problem is that by calling this 'fascism' the left tails, does the bidding of the Democrats. And, if they really convince themselves that Trump is beyond the pale, is a 'fascist', who knows what they and their friends in the state machine will do?

Trump's January 6 2021 self-coup was never going to succeed. However, while at the moment Trump and Harris appear to be neck and neck in the polls, if that changes, if Trump regains his lead, crucially in the swing states, things could easily change. Instead of a coup attempt coming from Trump, maybe next time, it will be Joe Biden, the chiefs of staff, the FBI that will give the coup order.

An assassination (that works), ballot fixing (for real), disallowing the wrong members of the Electoral College... Who knows? But do not imagine that the threat to what passes for 'democracy' only comes from one direction ●

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Notes

1. youtube.com/watch?v=N42028alWYg.
2. youtube.com/watch?v=gE7xoHJkgvE&t=35s.
3. youtube.com/watch?v=dQkrWL7YuGk.
4. news.sky.com/story/joe-biden-set-to-close-border-with-mexico-after-signing-order-capping-asylum-seekers-crossing-into-the-us-13147915.

ACTION

Grangemouth refinery march for jobs

Saturday August 3, 11am: Assemble at Grangemouth Stadium, Kersiebank Avenue FK3, for a march past the refinery to a rally in Zetland Park. Stop the closure, with 500 jobs going next year. Demand a fair and just transition for workers with investment in low-carbon alternatives. Organised by Unite the Union Scotland: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=893984739425073.

Starmer - stop arming Israel, end the genocide!

Saturday August 3, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Park Lane, London W1. Israel is escalating its genocidal assault on Gaza. Meanwhile the new government continues UK complicity in Israel's violence. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/national-march-for-palestine-3.

London big ride for Palestine

Saturday August 10. Book by Saturday August 3. Full-day rides supporting charities in Palestine. Three routes across London, starting from Kings Cross, Paddington and Croydon at 8.45am, converging on Mile End at 5.30pm. Registration £15 (£10). Organised by The Big Ride for Palestine: www.thebigride4palestine.com/big-ride-2024.

Big ride for Palestine welcome rally

Saturday August 10, 7pm: Genesis Cinema, 93 Mile End Road, London E1. Short films and speakers including Ben Jamal (PSC). Tickets £6.75, food and drink available. Organised by Tower Hamlets Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=876086704554739.

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.

Young Communist League summer camp

Friday August 16 to Sunday August 18: Camping for anyone aged 14 to 30 at West Leeds Activity Centre, Lenhurst Avenue, Leeds LS12. Featuring outdoor recreation and social activities, plus political discussion and education sessions. All meals, classes and socials will be indoors. Bookings: £50 (£30) all-inclusive with full board. Organised by Young Communist League of Britain: ycl.org.uk/summer-camp-2024.

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.

Remember Burston strike school

Sunday September 1, 10.30am to 4pm: Rally, Diss Road, Burston, Norfolk IP22. Commemorate the longest strike in history. Free entry. Organised by Unite the Union and the TUC: burstonstrikeschool.wordpress.com/2024-rally.

Wigan Diggers festival

Saturday September 7, 11.30am to 9.30pm: Open-air free festival, The Wiend, Wigan WN1. Commemorating Gerrard Winstanley and the 17th century Diggers movement with music and political stalls. Organised by Wigan Diggers Festival: www.facebook.com/WiganDiggersFestival.

Stand up for choice

Saturday September 7, time tbc: Counter-protest. Assemble at the Millicent Fawcett statue, Parliament Square, London SW1. Oppose anti-abortion groups and stand up for the right to choose. Organised by Abortion Rights: www.facebook.com/Abortionrightsuk.

Join the fight for a workers' manifesto

Sunday September 8, 1pm: TUC rally, Old Ship Hotel, 32-38 Kings Road, Brighton BN1. Demand the new government enacts pro-worker policies. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/ShopStewardsNetwork.

Peace and Justice international conference

Saturday September 14, 10am: Conference, Blizard Building, Queen Mary University of London, 4 Newark Street, London E1. Politicians, union leaders, academics and activists discuss solutions to global injustice, inequality and conflict. Registration £23 (£11.50). Organised by Peace and Justice Project: www.facebook.com/TheCorbynProject/videos/1127055275024908.

Women chainmakers' festival

Sunday September 15, 11am to 5.30pm: Family festival, Mary McArthur Gardens, Cradley Heath B64. Celebrate the 1910 women chainmakers' victorious 10-week strike against starvation wages. Entrance free. Organised by TUC Midlands: www.womenchainmakers.org.uk/events.

The long depression and the tepid 20s

Wednesday September 18, 7pm: Online and onsite lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker Michael Roberts examines the IMF forecast that the major economies are stuck in stagnation. Registration £7 (£4). Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/473.

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.

CLIMATE

Delusions of techno-fix

Instead of dealing with the root causes of the climate crisis, there is a frantic search for technological solutions. However, argues **Jack Conrad**, there is a real danger of making what is already bad, badder still

Given the abject failure to deliver on government pledges made in Paris 2015 at Cop 21 - and the good chance that average global temperatures will exceed the 1.5°C limit for the “entire five-year 2024-2028 period”¹ - there has been a renewed turn to techno-solutions, when it comes to the climate crisis. Much is perfectly reasonable and, with this or that caveat, unobjectionable: solar panels, wind farms, heat pumps, home insulation and Ulez charges. Other techno-solutions are, though, unmistakably *pseudo*-solutions.

Top of the list here must be electric vehicles: capitalism’s poster child in the fight to counter global warming. All sorts of government incentives have been put in place to promote the EV industry and get people to buy, buy, buy. The sales pitch is that EVs are good for the environment. Owners can look you straight in the eye and say, ‘I’m helping to save the planet, I’ve brought an EV.’ Doubtless that helps explain why Tesla briefly racked up a stock exchange valuation of \$1 trillion, making it worth more than “the other top nine leading carmakers combined”² - that even though Tesla’s profits were not exactly impressive and EVs accounted for less than 8% of US sales in 2023.³

EVs have the great virtue of allowing urban sprawl, road building and the whole car economy going unquestioned, all the while promising to deliver ‘green transport’. And it is undoubtedly true that EVs directly emit no tailgate greenhouse gases - obviously not the case with conventional internal combustion and hybrid vehicles.

However, EVs do not grow on trees. By definition, electricity has to be generated and this results in an altogether less virtuous picture. If it is generated exclusively by hydro, wind, solar or nuclear power, EVs perform far more efficiently when it comes to greenhouse emissions than conventional vehicles, perhaps by a factor of three. If, on the other hand, it is fossil fuels - ie, coal, gas and oil - that constitute the primary energy source, performance is decidedly less impressive. With coal power there is hardly any difference between the emissions of an EV and the best hybrids (over the lifetime of use). Suffice to say, things are not straightforward. There is always an energy mix, when it comes to power generation. In terms of advanced capitalist countries, Norway and France are at the cleaner end, the UK around about the middle, and Germany, Netherlands and the US at the dirty end.⁴

Then there are the batteries. They rely, of course, on mining metals such as cobalt, lithium, graphite, etc. Most cobalt comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo, often dug in unregulated artisanal mines. Conditions are awful, child labour is common and pay rates can amount to as little as 30p per hour. Pollution levels are extraordinarily high and are linked to birth defects and all manner of illnesses.⁵ DRC cobalt principally goes to China and from there to the world in the form of EV batteries and industrial metals and chemicals.

Lithium mining is mainly concentrated in Australia, Chile and China. It too can hardly be considered eco-friendly either. Huge amounts of fresh water are required - approximately 500,000 litres to obtain just one ton of lithium. Processing and production are energy-intensive too: for every ton of lithium, an average of 15 tons of CO₂ are emitted.⁶



Government sponsored tree planting: typically ends in failure

Considering these and other such factors, it is estimated that it takes four years, in the UK, before an EV catches up with a conventional vehicle in terms of greenhouse emissions.⁷

There is also the fact that EV batteries are “tough to recycle”.⁸ Tesla, BMW and Nissan batteries are not standardised: they come in various sizes and contain differently-shaped battery cells, joined together by welds and other connections that must be broken down. “This complexity makes the process more expensive and dangerous.”⁹

Nor should we forget the vehicles themselves. The steel, plastics, glass, computer chips, tyres, etc - all involve an environmental cost. Surely, then, when everything is taken into account, the much vaunted transition to EVs is more a giant selling opportunity than any kind of a genuine solution to the climate crisis. And, predictably, not least due to relentless marketing, car numbers of all types continue to inexorably rise (1.475 billion of them in 2024, up from a billion in 2011¹⁰). And oh, what heaven it is to be behind the wheel. Average speed of traffic in London nowadays is 8 mph. Average speed of horse-drawn carriages in Victorian London was ... 8 mph.¹¹ So it goes.

Nuclear solution

After years of disenchantment there has been a renewed spurt of enthusiasm for the nuclear industry too. Naturally, this is excused using rhetoric about delivering clean, cheap and secure energy. Nuclear power therefore finds some unexpected advocates, such as George Monbiot, Jared Diamond, James Lovelock, Michael Moore and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (who wants to “leave the door open”¹²). Sir Keir’s Labour government is, of course, fully committed to nuclear power and pledges to build a “fleet” of mini-reactors (not be operational before 2030¹³). It promises to make Britain a “clean energy superpower”.¹⁴

However, the old problems remain. Constructing nuclear power stations produces a hell of a lot of greenhouse gas emissions (mainly due to the millions of tons of concrete and the hundreds of thousands of tons of steel). They also take a hell of a long time before being put into operation - it may be 20 years and more from start to finish. There is an exorbitant price tag too. Eg, first proposed in 2007, construction of Hinkley Point C in Somerset began back in 2016 and the estimated completion date is now 2031. All at a cost of between £35-46 billion.¹⁵

Even with the most advanced

nuclear reactors, the electricity generated remains hugely expensive - four or five times as much as wind and solar.¹⁶ On top of that there is the disposal of the waste and decommissioning - a hidden cost. In the case of plutonium-239 - half-life of 24,000 years - what makes it particularly hazardous is not its radioactivity, but its carcinogenic properties. If leaked into the water table and drunk, or blown into the air and breathed in as dust, it can slowly kill millions.

Spent uranium, though it has a relatively short half-life, kills quickly because it releases lots of radiation. For example, even 10 years after removal from a reactor, a typical fuel assembly “still exceeds 10,000 rem/hour - far greater than the fatal whole-body dose for humans of about 500 rem received all at once.”¹⁷ High-level waste is therefore deposited in deep, geologically stable, underground sites or left to cool in large storage pools (which in the US are meant to be impervious to natural disaster and terrorist attack). However, despite rigorous inspection regimes, tight operating systems and numerous fail-safe mechanisms, there have been plenty of accidents - most notably Kyshtym, Windscale/Sellafield, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima. Then there is Zaporizhzhia - a disaster just waiting to happen.

Nor are fusion reactors all they are cracked up to be. True, there have been many breakthrough announcements. But apocryphally the ‘promised land’ of cheap, safe, pollution-free energy is ‘20 years away’ and, as I have argued, probably always will be.¹⁸ Even if the tremendous technological problems can be solved, they remain massively expensive even by the usually massively expensive standards of the nuclear industry. Construction of the ITER complex in France began in 2013 and it is thought that it will cost between \$45 billion and \$65 billion by the time it is finally completed in 2025.¹⁹ Despite the hype there are many safety risks too. All in all, as Dr Daniel Jassby - for 25 years principal research physicist at the Princeton Plasma Physics Lab - concluded in a well-known 2017 article, fusion power “is something to be shunned”.²⁰

So why do various governments relentlessly pursue nuclear power? Maintaining nuclear weapon status, or having the option of going for nuclear weapons status, provides the most likely explanation - see the arguments of Phil Johnstone and Andy Stirling (both of Sussex University).²¹ Nuclear power requires a talent pool of physicists, engineers and technicians,

along with a chain of companies capable of supplying the necessary components. The nuclear weapons industry rests on that talent pool and supply chain. Peaceful nuclear power is, therefore, an oxymoron. Those radicals who have thrown in their lot with nuclear power have thrown in their lot with the military-industrial complex. So it goes.

Other solutions

There are plenty of other pseudo-solutions. Take the case of hydrogen. It has real potential as a source of clean, concentrated and easily stored energy, which can be used to avoid the intermittency problem associated with solar and wind (though batteries could do that). But hydrogen suffers from the same problem as EVs: production requires power, which can, of course, be clean or dirty.

So hydrogen comes in many colours. Green hydrogen is made by the electrolysis of water using power generated from renewable sources. However, big oil - eg, Shell, BP, Chevron and ExxonMobil - is proposing, for its own narrow reasons, other, intermediary hydrogens: blue, grey and brown, which rely on oil, natural gas or coal. In other words, burn fossil fuels to save the planet (read: save the fossil fuel industry).²²

Nor is biofuel the panacea it was once promised to be. Governments encourage transnationals to grow monocrops on a huge scale - not to feed people, but to generate power. The ever growing number of cars providing a ready market. Though generating costs are not as high as nuclear power, they are still high. Meanwhile, small-scale agriculturalists are dispossessed and precious land and water resources wasted.

Carbon trading was once considered a sure way to combine ecological sustainability with the dynamism of capitalism. The idea was to offset the carbon cost of manufacturing clothes, taking flights or keeping the office lights on, etc, with planting forests somewhere, anywhere. Since 1997 and the Kyoto protocol, an elaborate international market has come into existence, which allows investors and companies to trade carbon credits and carbon offsets. In 2023 the size of the market was estimated to be worth \$479 billion (and expected to grow by 39% by 2030).

Of course, it is really all about corporate greenwashing. Especially when it comes to ordinary consumers, that matters. People want to feel that they are ‘doing the right thing’ when they buy and companies also want to be seen ‘doing the right thing’.

Predictably it has, though, made not the slightest difference, when it comes to the continued growth of CO₂ emissions.

More than that - there is considerable evidence that many of the forest planting schemes touted by the carbon offset industry are bogus. A recent research study, led by Barbara Haya of Berkeley University, covering almost 300 offset projects, found a dismal record of systematic overclaiming on benefits (in plain language - fraud).²³ “‘Offsetting’ is a misnomer - you can’t ‘offset’ your emissions,” concludes Haya. “We need alternative ways of supporting climate mitigation, because the current offset market is deeply not working.”²⁴

Government reforestation and afforestation schemes designed to meet the Paris and other such targets are hardly any different. Either transnationals are subsidised to plant masses of trees by buying up vast tracts of land and establishing industrialised, single-species forestry. Native trees and plants are uprooted and animal species decimated. All in the name of reducing greenhouse emissions. That or there are hasty, ill-conceived and poorly managed non-commercial projects, which all too often fail to grow any forests at all. Instead of letting nature slowly take its own course, ‘wrong trees in the wrong place’ is an all too frequent diagnosis of what *typically* happens.

Another solution is carbon capture and storage. Not trees, but pipes, filters and machines, in other words CCS technology. Elon Musk has offered his much publicised \$100 million XPRIZE to spur on CCS development.²⁵ But the real heavy lifting has come from the fossil fuel industry.

The supposed idea is to reduce CO₂ levels by sucking it in from the atmosphere mechanically or capturing it before release from fossil fuel burning power stations, steel plants, cement kilns, etc - and storing it in geologically suitable underwater or land sites (which will not leak, of course). However, even on face value, there are definite downsides. The estimated cost of extracting carbon ranges from \$15 to \$120 per ton.²⁶ In addition there is the cost of transport and storage. Note, however, the IPPC reported in 2020 that to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5°C, between 100 billion and one trillion tons of CO₂ needs to be removed from the atmosphere.²⁷ In other words, if CCS was going to do that job, it could cost well over a \$120 trillion (global GDP in 2022 was put at some \$100 trillion²⁸).

Not only is CCS expensive: it has “a long history of failing”. That for all its claims to be a proven, ready and up-to-go technology. Yes, carbon can be removed from the atmosphere - that much is easy. However, even without the transport and storage, CCS is an “energy-intensive” technology.²⁹ Sadly CCS sucks carbon from the atmosphere only to pump it back out again. Doubtless, if perfected, carbon capture and *utilisation* has the potential to clean up vital industries, such as cement and steel (CO₂ can be captured and put to use). But as a general solution to global warming CCS is a complete non-starter - yet another excuse for prolonging the life of fossil fuel capitalism and delaying the measures necessary to reach net-zero carbon.

Surely, that is why oil majors have invested so heavily in painting themselves as leaders in developing

CCS technology. According to the marketing bunk, “carbon capture technologies are critical for lowering global CO₂ emissions”. However, in actual fact, the oil majors have not engaged in any serious drive to perfect CCS technology as a solution to global warming - a chimera. Instead, the emphasis has been on enhanced oil recovery (EOR). Sequestered CO₂ is injected into a production well to push out yet more oil - a process which results in 40% of the CO₂ being released into the atmosphere (and, of course, more CO₂ is released when the oil is finally burnt).

Since 2008, in the US, the oil companies have received a 45Q tax credit of \$10 for every metric ton of CO₂, if it is used for EOR. A figure, now, thanks to Joe Biden’s ‘Build Back Better’ legislation, that has been hiked to \$65 per metric ton. So, according to Amy Westervelt, CCS is not only a “fake climate solution”: it has been a way to swindle “taxpayers out of billions”.³⁰

So it goes.

Engineering

Then there are the geoengineering and climate engineering ‘solutions’. Seeding the oceans with iron filings, growing huge algae beds, shooting millions of tons of reflective sulphur dioxide particulates miles up into the upper atmosphere in an attempt to mask solar radiation by mimicking the cooling effect of volcanoes - the latter suggested back in 2006 by Dutch Nobel prize winner Paul Crutzen.³¹

By the way, the climate impact of major volcanic eruptions is nowadays accepted scientific fact. Eg, after perhaps a thousand years of dormancy, Indonesia’s Mount Tambora started to rumble and then exploded in April 1815. Huge amounts of ash and aerosols plumed up into the atmosphere and darkened the sun - 1816 was famously the ‘year without summer’. Global average temperatures are thought to have dropped by 3°C (there were dreadful crop failures in Europe and North America and all manner of disruptive social consequences).³²

While Crutzen deployed the term, ‘geoengineering’, he never actually advocated such a course. Presumably he knew better. Despite that, his work has spawned a veritable swarm of research institutes, global networks, conferences, computer simulations, feasibility studies and government consultations. And amongst those who want to urgently move from theory to practice with Crutzen’s thought-experiment are Bill Gates, George Soros, Dustin Moskovitz and a whole slew of other billionaires and well-endowed foundations. So there is more than plenty of money sloshing around to buy up climate publications, researchers and university departments, and establish an army of well-funded advocacy groups.

By reflecting solar radiation back into outer space, the claim is that temperatures on earth could be reduced by a few fractions of a degree and give capitalism enough time to come to the rescue with the green technologies needed to wean the system off fossil fuels. Probably the likes of Gates and Soros are motivated in part by a genuine desire to prevent civilisational collapse. But, surely, they also see a good business opportunity, when it presents itself. Green technologies such as alternative energy, EVs and CCS/EOR all promise good profit returns

There are other such proposed sunlight reflection methods (SRMs) on the table too. Eg, deploy a giant, 2,000-kilometre-diameter eye patch in space - estimated cost around \$5 trillion (plus). Then there is building massive cloud-generating machines; whitening low-level clouds by spraying them with seawater; etc.

Elizabeth Kolbert, a Pulitzer prize-winning author, pinpoints the faulty logic of the would-be geoengineers: “If control is the problem, then, by the logic of the Anthropocene, still more control must be the solution.”³³ In effect, the modern geoengineers want to treat greenhouse gas emissions in the same way as the Victorian engineer, Joseph Bazalgette, dealt with London’s sewage crisis following the notorious 1858 ‘great stink’ - so bad was the smell emanating from the Thames that there was talk of suspending parliament and moving to Oxford or St Albans. Not insignificantly, Bill Gates proudly says in his recent book: “I think more like an engineer than a political scientist, and I don’t have a solution to the politics of climate change.”³⁴

However, the climate system is hugely more complex than the river Thames: everything is connected to everything else. Physics, biology, chemistry, humanity and political economy form an interconnected and interacting whole. So, in all probability, if one (or a number) of these pseudo-solutions was implemented, it would, surely, let loose a Pandora’s box of demons. For example, there is the danger of “slowing or reversing” the recovery of the ozone layer and reducing global rainfall and turning it more acidic (editors, *Scientific American*³⁵). And, once the SRM programme of upper atmosphere seeding is finally terminated, there exists the “potentially dangerous” consequence of a temperature spike, which would be “two to four times larger” than would otherwise have been the case.³⁶

Such dangers are known knows. But, inevitably, there are the unknowns. Not inconceivably, geoengineering could trigger a climate crisis far worse than the climate crisis remorselessly reported on each year by the IPCC. Geoengineering would, certainly, if it initially goes well, breed political complacency. Saved from the immediate prospect of climate catastrophe, big business carries on as before, emitting more greenhouse gases, as it furiously pursues its overriding objective: M-C-M’.

Rival national interests represent another obvious barrier. What would China do if the US unilaterally placed a giant solar eye patch above its territory in near space? There would, surely, have to be an agreement between all the rival major powers - not impossible, but unlikely. Surveying the sorry results of past efforts to ‘solve nature’s problems’, Michael and Joyce Huesmann argue, not unreasonably, that humans cannot “substantially modify natural world systems without creating unanticipated and undesirable consequences”.³⁷

So it goes.

Accelerationists

With all that in mind, there are far too many on the ‘left’ who advocate techno-fixes. This approach can be seen in recent times with accelerationists such as Nick Land, Mark Fisher, Paul Mason, Nick Srnicek and Aaron Bastani. Technology is held out as the means of overcoming climate change, third-world poverty, etc, etc. Technology is even credited with a fabulous ability to deliver “fully automated luxury communism”. Instead of organising the working class into a party - so *passé* - we have the relentless forward march of technology. That, not the working class, undermines capitalism and duly holds out the promise of human freedom. Through supercomputers, through embracing automation, through whizz-bang space rockets, through mining asteroids, through following the “leadingedge” political vanguard of Alexis Tsipras and Pablo Iglesias, we are promised a 10-hour working week, more equality and all manner of tawdry luxury commodities

- yes, taken from an article that is over five years old.³⁸

The whole, almost instantly dated, utterly banal, ‘left’ accelerationist programme clearly owes rather more to Eduard Bernstein, HG Wells and Isaac Asimov than Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.

Orthodox(ish)

Not that orthodox(ish) Marxism can be entirely excused. Here is what Leon Trotsky - still near the pinnacle of political power in 1924 - wrote about refashioning nature:

The present distribution of mountains and rivers, of fields, of meadows, of steppes, of forests and of seashores cannot be considered final. Man has already made changes in the map of nature that are not few nor insignificant. But they are mere pupils’ practice in comparison with what is coming. Faith merely promises to move mountains; but technology, which takes nothing ‘on faith’, is actually able to cut down mountains and move them. Up to now this was done for industrial purposes (mines) or for railways (tunnels); in the future this will be done on an immeasurably larger scale, according to a general industrial and artistic plan. Man will occupy himself with re-registering mountains and rivers, and will earnestly and repeatedly make improvements in nature. In the end, he will have rebuilt the Earth - if not in his own image, at least according to his own taste. We have not the slightest fear that this taste will be bad.³⁹

And the approach to nature Trotsky preached, Joseph Stalin and his successors put into practice - not in order to realise some global artistic grand design: rather, more prosaically, to provide the state (and in due course, its citizens) with more and more use-values. However, this could not be achieved with genuine socialist planning, which relies on the active participation, the positive control, of the associated producers. The bureaucratic elite pursued the interests of the state (along with its own narrow self-interest).

True, between 1928 and 1973 there were impressive economic growth rates - largely for real. True, between 1953 and 1973 living standards rose substantially - largely for real. But what people experienced in terms of everyday life was shortages, poor quality, being lied to and the necessity of lying in return. A vicious circle that was bound to eventually close.

Under such inherently irrational circumstances, the top leadership blamed foreign experts, old Bolsheviks, former *kulaks*, first-generation Stalinite cadre, lazy workers, hidebound managers, etc, for the litany of failures ... and all that went hand-in-hand with the desperate attempt to find and implement all manner of gigantic techno-fixes. Surely an object lesson, when it comes to climate change. Leave aside the radioactive waste littered over Kazakhstan, the open-cast mining, the oil spills and the ruinous industrial practices which caused choking air pollution, poisoned rivers and killed lakes.

Let us focus on agriculture. We will see why Marx argued that what is needed for rational agriculture is either the “small farmer living by his own labour or the control of associated producers.”⁴⁰ Expropriating the peasants through forced collectivization in the late-1920s and early-1930s caused agricultural production to crash. The cities went hungry. The countryside starved. Millions died.

However, joining together the country’s peasant farms even without

the necessary tractors and combines meant that the regime would never again be held to ransom by richer peasants, the *kulaks*. Throughout the 1920s they had held back grain when prices were considered too low. The state had to respond, either by increasing prices (and thereby denying industry, the army, etc) or by sending out special armed detachments to seize grain supplies.

But collectivization merely collectivized primitiveness. The peasants were, to all intents and purposes, re-enslaved. They were state helots. When tractors and combines eventually came on stream, productivity remained notoriously low. Collective farm members had to be allocated individual plots to grow fruit and vegetables for their own consumption and for sale in special, private, markets established in the towns and cities. Despite lacking machinery, productivity on the individual plots was far higher than on the *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz*.

As one of many techno-fixes, in the second half of the 1940s Stalin proposed his ‘Great Plan for the Transformation of Nature’ - a superambitious response to the 1946 drought, which in 1947 left an estimated half to one million dead. Huge bands of land were to be forested in the southern steppe to provide a network of shelterbelts. Rivers feeding into the Aral Sea were to be diverted - once the world’s fourth largest lake, it has now virtually disappeared. Irrigation canals, reservoirs and countless ponds were going to upgrade the thin soils. Trofim Lysenko’s “elite strains of seed”, so went the presumption, would ensure fabulously high yields.

Lysenko, of course, contemptuously dismissed the Mendelian theory of gene inheritance as an example of “metaphysics and idealism”.⁴¹ Instead he upheld a neo-Lamarckian doctrine of crops passing on environmentally acquired characteristics, such as cold resistance and drought resistance.

This was vigorously opposed in Britain by the CPGB’s scientific superstar, JBS Haldane (much to the chagrin of the official leadership faction).⁴² Haldane was famously one of the originators of the Darwinian-Mendelian synthesis⁴³ and eventually resigned from the CPGB in 1950. A great loss.

Lysenkoism had been elevated into official doctrine in the Soviet Union. Those who disagreed were viciously denounced, dismissed from academic posts and often ended up in the gulag. That or they were simply shot. The message was clear: politics, not scientific facts - certainly not nature - was in command. In 1948, Lysenko made his notorious speech to the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences. He rhetorically asked: “What is the attitude of the central committee of the party to my report?” He answers: “the central committee has examined my report and approves of it (Stormy applause. Ovation. All rise).” The “most chilling passage in all the literature of the 20th century science”, writes Stephen Jay Gould.⁴⁴

The Great Plan ended in complete failure. The trees were of the wrong kind, went untended and died. The crops were of the wrong kind too, and froze or wilted. Topsoils were quickly exhausted and were washed away by rain or blown away on the winds (they contained, of course, the highest concentrates of organic matter and microorganisms). All negative and unintended consequences.

Once upon a time it was lazily assumed - and not only by the paid apologists for the Soviet regime - that, untrammelled by the capitalist profit motive, with universal nationalisation, and hence the ability to organise on a vast scale, environmental protection was guaranteed.

So no, it does not go ●

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CULTURE WARS



Vedder Highsmith 'Corrupt legislation' (1896)

Free speech, including for opponents

Labour has dumped Tory culture war 'free speech' legislation. Mike Macnair explains why any left promotion of speech control legitimises the imposition of speech controls by the right

On Friday July 26 the Labour government, in the person of higher education minister Bridget Phillipson, announced that it was annulling the commencement of the Tories' Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act passed last year. The 'official' explanation offered is that

... there is widespread concern about the negative impact of the act from vulnerable groups. For example, there are fears that the legislation could protect those using hate speech on campuses, and that it could also push providers to overlook the safety and wellbeing of minority groups, including Jewish students.

There are also fears the act could expose higher education providers, like universities, to costly legal action that would impact teaching and learning.¹

'Whitehall sources' quoted by the press alleged that the act "would have opened the way for holocaust deniers to be allowed on campus, and was an 'anti-Semite charter'" and that it "may have built a platform for people like Tommy Robinson, the founder of the English Defence League, David Irving, a prominent holocaust denier, and Geert Wilders, the leader of the Dutch far-right Freedom Party, who was sworn into government earlier this month".²

The decision was predictably welcomed by the 'Russell Group' of 'elite' universities, by the National Union of Students, by the Universities and Colleges Union - and by the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Union of Jewish Students. It was, equally predictably, condemned by Tory spokespeople, the Tory press - notably a *Times* leader (July 29) - and by a variety of rightwing 'free speech' campaigners and groups.³

I put 'free speech' in scare-quotes here because, as I have argued before, the legislation was in fact carefully designed to protect *conservative* speech, while *preserving* cancellation and no-platforming for leftwing speech, anti-Zionist speech, and so on.⁴ Hence objections to it from the Board of Deputies and UJS have to be understood both as a silly failure to understand an act that was no more than a Tory culture-wars election scam, and as an objection to the *principle* of free speech on campus.

Board of Deputies

This Board of Deputies and UJS argument *ought* to be enough to prevent elements of the left arguing that the act should not have been dropped, because it "could protect those using hate speech on campuses" - that is, that it would block no-platforming initiatives against the far right, against 'gender-critical feminists', and so on.

'Ought to be' rather than 'is', because it shows that the *actual* arguments are about opposing free speech as a principle, in order to maintain the *government and mass media* no-platforming campaign against anti-Zionists.

'Ought to be' rather than 'is', because the case of the Scottish 'Hate crime and public order' Act shows the Socialist Workers' Party only three months ago playing the role of turkeys voting for an early Christmas on the question of free speech.⁵ It is perhaps noteworthy that the *Morning Star* has maintained a discreet silence on the decision to abandon commencement of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act, and the same seems at the time of writing to be true also of *Socialist Worker*.

It follows that the decision to abandon commencement of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act should be welcomed -

but *not* because we do not want to fight for freedom of speech or against 'cancel culture' or 'no-platforming'.

Rather, it is to be welcomed because the HE(FS)A was like the Rwanda scheme: an entirely fraudulent waste of public money, for the benefit *only* of Conservative Party election campaigning through the support of the equally fraudulent Tory press. The impact assessment as of July 2022 costed the HE(FS)A at £45.4 million for introduction costs and £4.7 million a year running costs.⁶ This is a lot cheaper than the £700 million wasted on the Rwanda scheme,⁷ but the principle is identical: both schemes were public money wasted on Conservative Party spin operations, with context in both cases showing an absence of honest belief on the part of ministers in the schemes having real operational effects.

In the case of the Rwanda scheme, it *purported* to tackle public concern about immigration, while the Tory government was simultaneously (and massively) expanding net (legal) immigration - until 2024 on the explicit basis that, in 'shortage occupations', wage levels would be undercut.⁸

In the case of the HE(FS)A, the fact that the scheme would not *actually* protect free speech in universities can be demonstrated from the text of the act: in particular, that it protected only 'lawful' speech while leaving untouched the vastly over-broad definition of harassment under section 26 of the Equality Act 2010, which was and is the normal basis of 'cancel culture', and also subordinating the principle of free speech to the equally over-broad and indeterminate 'Prevent duty' to 'prevent' students being 'drawn into extremism' by subordinating speech at universities to the views of the security service about what counts as 'extremism'.

But, although we should welcome getting rid of this scam, unlike the Board of Deputies and UJS, or the Russell Group, the UCU and NUS we should *not* welcome the continuation of the existing regime of speech controls at universities and elsewhere. On the contrary, we should be fighting for *real* defence of free speech, as opposed to the Tories' *sham* defence.

Restating the why

It is worth restating why communists, and the workers' movement more generally, need to fight unambiguously for free speech, including free speech for our opponents.

In the first place, we urgently need to develop effective collective decision-making for collective action. The 'we' here is, on the largest possible scale, and at the largest end of the problem, humans as a species. On the smaller, immediate and more immediately 'actionable' end of the problem, 'we' is the working class as a class, the workers' movement, and the left as a component of that movement.

That humanity as a species needs to develop effective collective decision-making for collective action flows from the present threats to the habitability of the planet: from human-induced global warming; and from the USA's apparent strategy to deal with it, by deindustrialising the rest of the world by military force (starting with Russia; Russia is merely on the road to war with China, and after China, Europe) in order to preserve the carbon emissions-intensive 'American way of life'. The US approach threatens to lead to a generalised nuclear exchange, leading to a 'nuclear winter'; or *at best* (if it succeeds) the 'Somalification' of the whole world outside the US.

It is perfectly clear that these

problems cannot be solved within the framework either of the existing global system of states, whose competing economic and geostrategic interests prevent effective action on climate; or within the framework of capitalism as such, which both *requires* the system of competing states, and also requires random 'growth' (which means assuming the absence of natural limits) as its underlying ground of legitimacy.⁹

Humanity therefore needs - globally, and soon - to develop effective forms of collective decision-making that can allow *planning* of our common productive activities in ways consistent with human needs and with the natural limits that have become obvious, thanks to human-induced global warming; in such a way that we can supersede or limit both capitalist markets and the regime of multiple competing bureaucratic-coercive states.

What the political class and the advertising-funded media currently call 'democracy' is neither the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's version ("a constitution in which the free-born and poor control the government - being at the same time a majority"¹⁰) nor that of Abraham Lincoln: "government of the people, by the people, for the people". It is a plutocratic oligarchy, in which "the people" have an occasional opportunity to vote between two gangs of bribe-takers or to register a protest by voting for outsiders. And even this is subject to veto powers in the control of agenda-setting speech by the press barons, in the sale of private access to ministers and elected representatives by lobbying firms, and in the sale of justice by the free market in legal services. This regime (and the capitalist class rule that it expresses) is *responsible* for the threats of global warming and, in the alternative, of global war.

Trying to restore the old Stalinist regime - or the social democratic forms that capital allowed to the frontline European states in the cold war in order to stave off Stalinism - is not a serious alternative. The memory of what these regimes were really like is lost to the younger generation, with the result that there is a degree of nostalgia around for them. Understandable, given the disasters that have followed 1989-91. But it is important to remember that *the Soviet bureaucratic leadership itself* decided to collapse the regime and to restore capitalism: and that its constitutional regime meant that neither the enserfed 'eastern' working class nor anyone else was able to resist this collapse.

It collapsed the regime because of the plain irrationalities of its own system, in which bans on parties and factions, and controls on speech and communication, meant that no-one could contradict the self-serving lies of the officials and the managers with a view to keeping their jobs. Hence 'planning' was dominated by 'garbage in, garbage out' decision-making, ending with the workers' joke that 'they pretend to pay us and we pretend to work'.

'Planning irrationalities' of this sort, though in a less extreme form, can be found in every regime that gives managers levers to control flows of information, enabling them to cover their arses: there are plenty of examples in the British public sector, in which press-driven 'target' regimes and 'league tables', combined with 'marketisation' and 'cost centres', have produced combinations of market and planning irrationalities. Bureaucratic regimes in the workers' movement, including its left, similarly produce planning irrationalities through the officials clinging to their jobs, and hence refusing to admit mistakes, leading to degraded decision-making and dumbing down the membership.

Neither rule-of-law constitutionalism (falsely called 'democracy') nor bureaucratic-managerialist regimes are practically useful to solve the problem of *planning human beings' common productive activities* - which we urgently need because of the dynamics of the 21st century. The same is true with equal force of the problems of the workers' movement and the left; and this is something on which the left as a whole could by voluntary choices make an immediate difference.

Movement

The recent strike wave in Britain clearly displays the potential of working class solidarity. But it started from a very low baseline and has remained mainly as *protest strikes* rather than any real threat to *force* concessions. To overcome this problem requires a higher level of mobilisation of *members* of the unions; and this, in turn, requires them developing in their *localities* a sense that the union is really 'their' organisation, whose decisions they own - one that they can use as a vehicle of their own creativity.

In politics, we saw in 2015-19 a mass Corbynite movement (hundreds of thousands joining the Labour Party in the hope that it might offer an escape from the stifling embrace of 'sensible' centre-ground politics), which ran very rapidly into the sand. It did so because the mass of Corbynistas placed undue trust in their top-table leadership. And these leaders were determined to preserve an alliance with the Labour right (which had the knives out for the left throughout) and for that purpose crushed any prospect of broad self-organisation of the new members through, for example, bureaucratic control of Momentum.

Further left, the norm of top-table-dominated rallies, and the forms of bureaucratic controls of communication, and bureaucratic procedural manipulations learned in the student unions and trade unions, dominate the political practice of the far left both inside and outside the Labour Party. The effect is, as with bureaucratic control in the trade unions and the Labour Party itself, to demobilise and to diseducate the ranks. This result *serves capital*.

There is, then, a strong practical need for alternative decision procedures that can involve *everyone* and allow local and sectoral self-government - in contrast both to rule-of-law constitutionalism and to bureaucratic management.

Freedom of speech and communication is a fundamental element of overcoming the managerialist regime and developing alternative decision-making procedures. Regimes of speech and communication control can be seen from the experience of the Soviet regime, and of the labour movement since the 1980s, to be immensely destructive and demobilising. Every regime of speech control entails that there must be a policeman or judge to enforce it: and that policeman/judge acts in their own interest at the expense of those below. In the workers' movement, the policeman/judge is the labour bureaucracy: visible, for example, in the 2009 'Unison monkey trial', in which SPEW activists were accused of racism for the benefit of the Unison bureaucracy.¹¹

To this must be added that any left promotion of speech control regimes *legitimises* the imposition of such controls by the right. This is visible in Ron de Santis's Florida attack on freedom of speech at universities.¹² Visible, equally, in the anti-Semitism smear campaign. The success of this campaign in capturing the German Die Linke and subsequently in 'doing' the Corbyn movement has led to its extension, both geographically, and in point of time, and towards smearing opposition to capitalism as such (not merely anti-Zionism or anti-imperialism) as anti-Semitic.¹³

This point, of course, brings us back to the Labour government's reasons for rejecting the HE(FS) A - that is, to defend and maintain the *government and mass media no-platforming campaign* based on the 'anti-Semitism' smear.

The anti-Semitism smear campaign is presumably orchestrated by some part of the security service or related agencies (otherwise the mass media would not be quite as unanimous as they have been on it). But it is a campaign primarily *run through* the mass media. This illustrates a point that has been made by Slavko Splichal, and which I have also made myself: that is, that freedom of the press and freedom of speech are counterposed ideas.¹⁴ 'Freedom of the press' is the freedom of concrete concentrations of capital - newspapers, TV stations, social media sites and so on - over those below them. It is thus analogous to, in Magna Carta, the freedom of the English church in chapter 1, or the freedom of the barons from royal jurisdiction 'taking away their courts' in chapter 34: in both cases freedom to tyrannise over those below.

For example, trans rights activists no-platforming 'gender-critical feminists' are actually campaigns supported by quite small minorities. The same is, in reality, true of Zionist students' complaints of 'harassment' by the existence of anti-Israel resolutions in student Labour Clubs (the February 2016 first step in the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign) or by Palestine protests. Why do university bureaucracies treat them seriously?

The answer is *partly* the impact of section 26 of the Equalities Act 2010, which defines 'harassment' in a way inconsistent with the continued existence of freedom of speech. But it is also because the impact of these minority actions is played up as a threat by the advertising-funded media *in the interests of their funders and in the interests of the Conservative Party* in its attempt to copy US Republicans' culture-wars frauds. This media amplification then leads universities' 'image managers' to try to make the adverse publicity go away.

Freedom of the press is not the same as freedom of speech. It is freedom to *amplify* speech - by way of the capital assets employed, of copyright, which was introduced in order to facilitate political control of the press, and of advertising revenue as subsidising the operation. It is thus freedom of the amplified speaker to drown out contrary points of view. Imagine, for the sake of argument, that MPs were allowed to bring public address systems into the parliament chamber, or lawyers to bring PA systems into court, to drown out their opponents. No real debate could take place. And, for instance, the USA has used amplification as a military weapon.¹⁵

This phenomenon of freedom of the press as the freedom to use amplification to drown opposing points of view is intimately linked with the phenomenon of political corruption. I made this point 18 years ago, in response to the 'sleaze' stories round the Blair government: as long as the capitalists control the large bulk of the media, politicians will be *forced* to take bribes and engage in dodgy dealings (to depend on capitalist donations) in order to get favourable media coverage.¹⁶ The destruction of the Corbyn movement and its replacement by the business-funded seurocrat, Sir Keir Starmer, at the head of Labour is a symptom. Also a symptom is the inability even of the Starmer leadership to call out the Tories on their lies about taxes and so on until *after* Labour had won the election.

The advertising-funded media - as Karl Kautsky called it in 1905, the "*käufliche Presse*" (the 'buyable press') - is a pillar of the regime of political corruption, through which capital (in its money form as a necessary phase of the circuit M-C-P-C'-M') rules. Not the only pillar: it stands alongside direct donations to politicians both before and (in Blair's case) after office, the commercial lobbying industry, the sale and denial of justice through the free market in legal services, and so on.

What to do?

The CPGB's *Draft Programme* in its 2023 version contains this subsection on these issues - 3.1.2. Freedom:

The interests of the working class require the open struggle of ideas and the ability to freely organise.

Therefore communists demand:

- Unrestricted freedom of speech, publication, conscience, association and assembly.
- An end to state bans and censorship. No laws against 'hate speech', which will inevitably be turned against the workers' movement and the left.
- No bans on controversial organisations and individuals in civil society institutions, such as universities and student unions. Bigoted and reactionary viewpoints must be fought in the open, not via bureaucratic no-platform, safeguarding or safe spaces policies.
- Oppose state secrets. Demand free access to all state files, cabinet papers, diplomatic agreements, etc.
- Abolish copyright laws, patents and other so-called intellectual

property rights.

■ Socialisation of internet service providers, public cloud infrastructure and other natural monopolies in communications. An end to the corruption of advertising-funded media.

It is worth repeating my argument in 2006 in support of the last of these points - "An end to the corruption of advertising-funded media".

Capitalist control

The problem of capitalist control of the mass media was discussed widely in the Labour Party in the 1970s and 80s. These Labour left discussions generally pointed towards the sort of nationalist regulatory regimes of control of media ownership found in some continental countries. It should be clear enough that this leads only to a form of censorship and does not affect the underlying capitalist control of the press.

It is a widespread belief among people influenced by anarchism that the internet provides the solution, replacing centralised media by decentralised and 'networked' arrangements. But the web's infrastructural core involves capital investment comparable to railways. The Chinese government has shown that considerable state control of internet content is possible; more generally, the web has moved towards full commercial control *and* towards censorship of content (with the US Democrats gung-ho advocates).

The democratic-republican solution to the problem of capitalist ownership is not media nationalisation. It is to eliminate capitalist subsidies to news media, both directly and in the form of commercial advertising. If the media were forced to rely on sales, subscriptions, individual donations and those subsidies that could be obtained from supporting political parties for the whole of its income, it might well be the case that there would still be a mass market for Tory media - even after the working class had taken power in the form of a democratic republic and the accompanying destruction of the deeper structures of the capitalists' political power. There would certainly be a niche market for it. But this would not in itself be a form of capitalist political power, since it would not be political power created by the ownership of the means of production.

There is, of course, no immediate practical chance of obtaining legislation against subsidies from capitalist business and from commercial advertising in news media. But what certainly is possible, because it has been done before, is for the workers' movement to break the capitalist monopoly of the means of information. To do so does not mean in the first place setting up a competing commercial national daily, run by the Labour or trade union bureaucracy or their nominees: this has been tried before and the result is utterly boring. The core of the answer is to revive democratic face-to-face and door-to-door politics at the base: the original basis of the workers' movement and a practice still successfully exploited by the Lib Dems and the Greens.

But to do this requires breaking with the control of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy in local party politics and in the unions themselves. And it requires abandoning the illusion that it is possible to get a democratic and pro-worker government through playing the game dictated by the capitalist-controlled media.

More than anything else, it requires the struggle for a workers'

party which is able to openly identify the capitalist character of the media and the extent to which this corrupts political life in general. That in turn implies a party that is willing to be anti-constitutional and to stand openly for the working class to take political power. In other words, a Communist Party.

I noted earlier the silence of both the *Morning Star* and *Socialist Worker* on the suspension of the HE(FS)A.¹⁷ This embarrassed silence reflects the managerialist character of both organisations. Hence their failure to grasp that both proposing a serious alternative to capitalism and overcoming the decline and demoralisation of the workers' movement require open campaigning for freedom of speech and against managerialist and bureaucratic speech controls.

And the first step to any serious struggle is to make the far left Marxist and communist in its real aims, not just in names or pretensions ●

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Notes

1. educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/07/26/free-speech-act-what-you-need-to-know. See also the Office for Students press release at www.gov.uk/government/news/government-watchdog-to-help-stabilise-university-finances.
2. www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cv2gjl1l1nmo; www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/07/26/education-secretary-shelves-university-free-speech-law.
3. See the articles cited above in note 2 - and, in addition: www.theguardian.com/education/article/2024/jul/26/labour-halts-tory-law-freedom-of-speech-universities-education; and news.sky.com/story/controversial-free-speech-law-delayed-over-anti-semitism-fears-13185403; and afcom.org.uk/2024/07/27/freedom-of-speech-act-suspended (the 'Campaign for Academic Freedom' of Nigel Biggar et al); and www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/07/26/labour-has-jury-peer-claire-fox-formerly-of-the-revolutionary-communist-party-and-spiked).
4. 'No-platforming fraud' *Weekly Worker* June 24 2021 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1353/no-platforming-fraud); 'Knavery and folly' June 8 2023 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1446/knavery-and-folly).
5. 'Further criminalising speech' *Weekly Worker* April 18 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1487/further-criminalising-speech).
6. 'Updated impact assessment' June 14 2022, at bills.parliament.uk/bills/2862/publications.
7. www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1rw47l2xxgo.
8. www.gov.uk/government/publications/statement-of-changes-to-the-immigration-rules-hc-1160-9-march-2023/immigration-rules-salary-changes-impact-assessment-accessible; www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-67623131 (December 5 2023).
9. See, for example, Michael Roberts, 'Capitalism is the cause of, not the solution to, runaway climate change' *Weekly Worker* October 18 2018 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1223/capitalism-is-the-cause-of-not-the-solution-to-run); J Conrad, 'Climate change and system change', September 5 2019 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1265/climate-change-and-system-change); and numerous other articles in this paper, as well as a mass of literature elsewhere. On the narrower point that capitalism "requires the system of competing states", see my series of supplements entitled 'Imperialism and the state' *Weekly Worker* March 17, 24, April 7, 14, 2022; from a pro-capitalist point of view, the point that capitalism needs multiple competing states is argued by W Scheidel in *Escape from Rome: the failure of empire and the road to prosperity* Princeton 2019.
10. E Barker (trans) *Politics* 1290b, Oxford 1948, p193.
11. 'The Unison monkey trial' *Weekly Worker* September 10 2009 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/784/the-unison-monkey-trial).
12. C Mudde, 'What is behind Ron DeSantis's Stop-Woke Act?' *The Guardian* February 6.
13. Googling 'anti-capitalism anti-Semitism' produces 776,000 hits. On one 'left' version of the theoretical claims underlying this smear, see M Sommer *Anti-Postone* Cosmonaut Press 2022.
14. S Splichal *Principles of publicity and press freedom* Lanham MD 2002; M Macnair, 'Marxism and freedom of communication' *Critique* No37 (2009), pp565-77.
15. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-40090809.
16. 'Sleaze is back' *Weekly Worker* July 20 2006 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/634/sleaze-is-back).
17. 'Anti-Capitalist Resistance' is also, so far, silent; *The Socialist* and the AWL's *Western Solidarity* are currently on their summer holidays.

POLEMIC

In search of a synthesis

General strikes can be a tactic. But do they amount to a strategy? Steve Bloom calls for a positive resolution of the differences he has with Mike Macnair's *Revolutionary strategy*

*There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on
to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat;
And we must take the current when it
serves,
Or lose our ventures.*

The words above, spoken by Brutus in Shakespeare's play, hold a deep significance for those who want to think systematically about revolutionary strategy. It is a significance we will discuss shortly, but first a few introductory remarks.

This is not the article I started out to write after reading Mike Macnair's book titled *Revolutionary strategy*. Indeed, I not only started writing a different article: I actually completed it and submitted it for publication to the *Weekly Worker*. My submission prompted a personal exchange with Mike, in which he convinced me that I was misunderstanding a fundamental aspect of his book by identifying an electoral road to the dictatorship of the proletariat as its underlying premise. I had come to the conclusion that this was the book's premise primarily because of one ambiguous sentence. Mike clarified the intended syntax, which completely changed its meaning.

I had also come to my conclusion about the underlying premise of the book because it does not include a clear explanation of how Mike conceives the historical moment of transition from a bourgeois state to a workers' state. I therefore filled in the blank - in a way that was consistent with my incorrect interpretation of Mike's syntax. In our correspondence, however, Mike filled in the blank for me in a different way.

The result is the present article, with the same basic thrust, but, I am confident, based on a better appreciation of what Mike is calling for in terms of a strategy for transforming society.

Mike and I will offer you dramatically different assessments regarding a series of important events in revolutionary history - and he talks a lot about revolutionary history in his book. I will be submitting a follow-up article in which I plan to take a look at some of these differences, because (a) they are of interest, and (b) it will help us to explore important points of methodological divergence. But on the big question of revolutionary strategy itself, which is the most important question, I do not perceive an unbridgeable divide. That was my conclusion, even when I thought Mike was conceiving an electoral road to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

With my revised appreciation of his outlook I now see even less of a gap between us. Indeed, I see essentially a convergence on overall strategy, with a need to further clarify the one aspect which is missing in Mike's book: how do we conceive the actual process of transition - the insurrectionary moment, in which a bourgeois state can be overturned and replaced with the dictatorship of the proletariat/workers' state?

I therefore start the present comment as I did my original: by holding out my hand to Mike in hopes that he will join me in the search for a synthesis that can combine the many deep insights he contributes in *Revolutionary strategy* with something he firmly (but mistakenly in my view) rejects in



Belgium's general strike: Eugène Laermans 'Un soir de grève' (1893)

the same pages: the importance of the mass-strike or 'dual-power' approach to revolutionary change.

Misunderstanding

First, however, let us take a closer look at the primary source of my original error, since doing so will help us in developing our proposal for a synthesis. Mike makes it clear that he uses the words, "extreme democracy", as a description of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Here is an example from the text:

This understanding enables us to formulate a core political minimum platform for the participation of communists in a government. The key is to replace the illusory idea of 'All power to the soviets' and the empty one of 'All power to the Communist Party' with the original Marxist idea of the undiluted democratic republic, or 'extreme democracy', as the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat" (p119, emphasis added).

I will defer a discussion about whether the slogan, 'All power to the soviets', is "illusory" until my promised excursion into some of the more interesting differences I have with Mike on historical and theoretical matters. For now let us simply note that if "extreme democracy" is a description of the proletarian dictatorship, then another passage, two pages later, originally made no sense to me: "The Kautskyans were right on a fundamental point. Communists can only take power when we have won majority support for working class rule through extreme democracy" (p121, emphasis added).

This seemed completely contradictory. "Extreme democracy," I thought to myself, cannot be both a synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the method by which we win a majority for working class rule before taking power. If "extreme democracy" means the dictatorship of the proletariat, then it is clearly unavailable to us as a structure through which we can win a majority before the working class takes power - because it does not yet exist.

As noted, this takes the syntax of the sentence in question to read:

'Communists can only take power when we have won majority support ... through extreme democracy'. Mike wrote back that, no, what he was trying to say is: 'Communists can only take power when we have won majority support for working class rule.' 'Extreme democracy' in this sentence is a description of the method by which the working class will rule, not the means by which we will convince a majority.

In our correspondence Mike also provided an explanation of his conception of the transition, and of the non-electoral process of winning a majority that leads up to the transition - something that might have helped me to interpret the sentence in question correctly, had it been in the book. I quote extensively, with Mike's permission, from an email he sent to me on July 22 (all emphasis in the original):

What is the means by which we get to workers' power? The answer is to build up the organisations of the working class as a large minority 'state within a state' like the parties of the Second International ...

This 'state within a state' is also prefigurative to the extent that democratic centralism operates, meaning the norms of the pre-1914 SPD and related organisations, and as opposed to the theft of the name in 1919 for the militarised party; so there is self-government for the branches, fractions, associated societies, and so on; with the result that, when the existing state falls into crisis, there is a large minority already existing which can think of socialist collective action as an alternative way of making decisions, and hence possibly running society, and this large minority can be converted into a majority.

It is perfectly possible that the form of the crisis will start with a left victory in a general election, or with a military mutiny, or with OTT repression in response to minor terrorist activity triggering a radical loss of legitimacy and collapse of the state, as in Ireland in 1918 and Cuba in 1958-59; or whatever. (It can also start with military defeat in a war, which is the essence of Russia 1917 and Germany and

Austria 1918-19 underneath the superficial appearances.) It does not have to take the form of the mass strike.

How do we judge whether we have a majority? We need to have a party large enough and rooted enough to make such judgments (the Trotskyists routinely radically underestimate the actual size and weight of the RSDLP (Bolsheviks) in 1912-14 and even in February 1917, in the hope that their own grouplets could 'leap' into leadership under crisis conditions). Even so Lenin's famous judgments about the time being right were based as much on local government (Zemstvo) elections in July-September 1917 as on soviet elections. And, as Trotsky pointed out in 1923 and 1931, the soviets of 1905 were created by the Mensheviks (in imitation of British trades councils) and in most of Russia those of 1917 by the Mensheviks and Right SRs, in the belief that they would support the war effort (justified until the failure of the June 1917 offensive).

As a general sketch of revolutionary tasks in the period leading up to an insurrectionary moment, and even of the revolutionary moment itself, this is all more than reasonable. I have disagreements with details and specific formulations, but they are not fundamental. So we will set them aside at least for now.

The primary difficulty which remains is that Mike, in his book, mistakenly rejects the "general strike" or "dual power" model, rather than integrating it as *one possible* form (and a likely one based on historical experience) that might trigger the moment "when the existing state falls into crisis". More importantly, even if it is not the trigger, the mass strike is still a powerful political tool the working class can turn to in its attempt to resolve such a crisis by taking power. I agree with the passage above, where Mike writes: "It is perfectly possible that the form of the crisis will start with a left victory in a general election, or with a military mutiny, or with OTT repression in response to minor terrorist activity triggering a radical loss of legitimacy and collapse of the state", etc. But, when he then

concludes: "It does not have to take the form of the mass strike", he makes a counterposition that is conceptually confusing - in essence comparing apples and oranges.

No, it does not have to start with the mass strike. But the most important question is not the way in which the crisis starts, but the way in which it ends. No matter how the crisis originates - and it *might* originate with a general strike - such a strike is surely an available political tool by which the masses can resolve the crisis, helping to create the social conditions which will allow a genuine working class government to take power.

If Mike wants to argue that the mass strike/dual power concept was overtheorised by the Trotskyist movement historically, as the one and only 'true' revolutionary model, then I will acknowledge that this is correct. Our overtheorisation made it extremely difficult for us to figure out what was happening, when confronted with the Chinese and Cuban revolutions in particular. These events were hard to fit into our theory without twisting our analyses into pretzel-like shapes. So let us agree that we should not overtheorise the mass strike. But let us also not discard it as a valid element in our strategic thinking about the insurrectionary moment (that moment when "a large minority ... can be converted into a majority" and actively engage in the project of taking power). This is, in short, the synthesis that I am asking Mike to consider and join me in adopting.

At least in part our problem may flow from the use of the same word ('strategy') in two different senses, suggesting that two elements should be compared/contrasted to each other, when in fact this is not the case. I would say that 'tactics' and 'strategy' are fluid concepts. What is a strategy in relation to something smaller than itself can be a tactic in relation to something bigger than itself. Mike is using 'strategy' in his book to discuss a years-long process of constructing a mass working class opposition force that can become strong enough to take power, when there is a crisis of bourgeois rule. In relation to this project, the mass strike can only be properly thought of as a tactic, something that comes into play at a particular moment - and a relatively fleeting moment at that (though also a decisive one). On the other hand, if we are considering just that moment of social crisis, it is perfectly reasonable to talk about the mass strike as the keystone in an insurrectionary 'strategy', with a whole host of smaller tactical questions arising in that context: Who will call the strike? When? What will its demands be? etc.

If we remain cognisant of the fact that, when the word 'strategy' is used by proponents of the mass strike, they are not using it in the same way that Mike is in the title of his book, it should help us to avoid counterposing two 'strategies' that actually need to be combined, as we think about the nuts and bolts of a revolutionary process.

Marxist concept

Mike's polemic against the mass strike in *Revolutionary strategy* responds to a version that presents such a strike as a self-contained formula for revolution. Let me offer another fairly long quotation which will illustrate his approach and thus give us the background we need for a proper discussion:

Let us imagine for a moment a general strike which is both truly general (everyone who works for a wage withdraws their labour) and indefinite, to continue until certain demands are met, happening in a fully capitalist country like Britain. Power supplies are cut off, and with them water supplies and the telephone system. No trains or buses run, and ... petrol ... soon runs out. The supermarkets are closed, and no deliveries are made to those small owner-run shops that remain open. The hospitals and doctors' surgeries are closed. It should at once be apparent that this cannot continue for more than a few days. If the result is not to be general catastrophe, the workers need not simply to withdraw their labour, but to organise positively to take over the capitalists' facilities and run them in the interests of the working class. A truly all-out indefinite general strike, therefore, immediately demands the effective *de facto* expropriation of the capitalists. As a result, it at once poses the question: will the state protect the capitalists' property rights? In other words, it poses the question of political power.

Now, of course, what the advocates of the mass strike strategy were calling for was not such a truly all-out, indefinite general strike, called by the political party. The reality of mass strike movements is something a great deal more messy, of the sort described, for Russia, in Luxemburg's *The mass strike*, but seen since then in many different countries at different times. The political regime falls into crisis. Some spark sets off the mass movement. Rather than a single, planned, truly all-out, indefinite general strike, there is a wave of mass strikes - some protest actions for political demands; some partial struggles for economic demands. They begin to overlap and are accompanied by political radicalisation.

But a movement of this sort *still* poses the question of political power, and for exactly the same reasons. A mass strike wave disrupts normal supply chains. This can be true even of a strike in a single industry, like the miners' strikes in Britain in 1972 and 1974. Equally, however, the capitalists' property rights are, from their point of view, not merely rights to things, but rights to the streams of income (ie, of social surplus product) which can be made to flow from the social relations which ownership of these things represents. The strike is therefore *in itself* an interference with their property, and a mass strike wave threatens the security of their property. They begin to disinvest, and to press the state for stronger action against strikers. The economy begins to come unravelling. The loss of the normal (capitalist) mechanisms of authority (decision-making) impacts on the broad masses in the form of dislocation and shortages of goods. A strike wave or revolutionary crisis can last longer than a truly all-out, indefinite general strike, but it cannot last longer than a period of months - at most a couple of years. In this situation, if the workers' movement does not offer an alternative form of authority ... the existing social structures of authority are necessarily reaffirmed. Either the military moves in (Spain in 1873-74 and 1936, etc) or the reformists, put in power, re-establish capitalist order (Ebert-Scheidemann in 1918; everywhere in Europe in the immediate aftermath of World War II; in a much weaker sense, the 1974-79 Wilson-Callaghan government in Britain).

The 'mass strike strategy' thus precisely fails to resolve the strategic problem of authority which the negative aspect of the left's approach - the critique of the struggle for reforms - posed (pp41-42).

What is most interesting to me is that Mike's understanding of the limits of a mass strike - in particular his observation that such an event actively poses, but cannot on its own resolve, the question of power - is part of the ABCs I learned as a new member of the Young Socialist Alliance (youth group of the US Socialist Workers Party), while the May-June 1968 strike wave was unfolding in France. The ideology of the SWP was firmly rooted in the mass-strike/dual power concept. It was also rooted in the understanding that Mike offers us above. The solution to the limitations of the mass strike developed by the SWP's theory was the construction of a political party that is capable of taking power, precisely at that moment when the mass strike poses this as a social necessity. Unlike in the version of the mass strike strategy that Mike polemicalises against, therefore, the SWP did not envision the strike, by itself, as the sum total of what is needed - something that would, on its own, answer the fundamental *political* question that such an event puts on the agenda. The role of the strike is merely to pose the question of power in an immediate sense, thus enabling the *political* forces of revolution to offer a solution that has, suddenly, transformed itself from a mere propaganda slogan into a realistic call to action.

General strike

And thus we come back to the theoretical synthesis I propose now to Mike. Rather than seeing the mass strike as *counterposed* to the kind of party-building (majority-building) effort he quite correctly puts at the centre of his strategic orientation, let us simply agree that we need to appreciate the ways in which both elements have essential roles to play. The general strike - or some other variety of mass response to a social crisis - is unable to resolve the question of power that it poses without the pre-existence of a revolutionary party. At the same time a revolutionary party is unable to achieve its goal of establishing the proletarian dictatorship without a mass strike, or similar development, which actively poses the question of power as an immediate social issue, visible to tens and even hundreds of millions.

What we are talking about is a *revolutionary Marxist* concept of the mass strike and its role in the process of creating conditions that can lead to working class power. Mike most often makes reference to the Bakuninist and anarchist conceptions of a mass strike in his book and I make no assertions about the validity of his polemic in relation to these theories. His argument falls short, however, if we are considering a different understanding of the mass strike concept: one that attempts to integrate this phenomenon into a more rounded revolutionary strategy that includes a longer-term party-building perspective.

Note also that in the discussion above I leave open the question of what kind of party we need in order to fill the vacuum of power at the moment when this vacuum is created by a mass strike or similar social crisis. The vision of that party held by the US SWP in the 1960s was quite different from the one Mike presents. At this stage of my life, and at this stage of the class struggle in the USA and on a global scale, I am far more partial to Mike's general conception. That is why I call for a synthesis, rather than simply defending the old theory that

I learned in the 1960s.¹ We have to combine Mike's general appreciation of what kind of party we need with the *revolutionary Marxist* conception of the role that *can* be played by a mass strike as part of a generalised social crisis leading to the potential for revolution.

Winning a majority

Mike repeatedly portrays the mass strike strategy as an effort by a minority party to trick the masses into taking power, something we would resort to only if we are attempting to avoid the hard work of winning a majority. Again a couple of quotations:

■ "It also means the struggle against the ideas of short cuts to power that evade the problem of winning a majority, through either coalitionism or 'conning the working class into taking power' via the mass strike" (p149).

■ "All ideas of an enlightened minority conning the working class into taking power, whether through coalitions, through the mass strike or, more generally, through one or another sort of frontist arrangement of the minority party cog driving the bigger wheel (front, soviet, etc), have to be rejected" (p153).

In the first example Mike even offers us the words, "conning the working class into taking power", in quotes, as if this is a stated approach by those who believe the mass strike to be an important element in our strategic thinking. But this is a complete misunderstanding/misrepresentation of what the mass strike strategy is, at least in the version that I and other revolutionary Marxists advocate. The mass strike is, in reality, simply a different yardstick by which we can measure whether there is a majority in favour of socialist revolution.

In the French May-June 1968 referred to above there were simultaneous demonstrations across the nation, in which 10 million human beings marched in the streets waving red flags - in a country with a total population of 40 million. I think it is fair to say that, if 25% of the population is actually out in the streets participating in a demonstration, this is proof of majority support for the demands of that demonstration (in this case the demand for socialist revolution).

Thus the Marxist advocates of a mass strike strategy do not reject the idea that we must win a majority in order to make the socialist revolution. We simply assert that the breadth of the mass strike itself can be a legitimate means by which we measure whether we have succeeded in achieving that majority.

This brings us to the quote from Shakespeare with which I began. The socialist revolution can only be made when it represents a majority. But in the world we inhabit majorities and minorities on such big questions as this (and even on smaller questions, of course) are never static. They are in a constant state of flux. As Mike correctly notes, a general strike is not a permanent state of mobilisation. It is, by its very nature, fleeting. And yet it is at this fleeting moment of general strike when the majority sentiment that can produce revolutionary change is at its height, and when the active mobilisation of that majority sentiment, which is essential for smashing the old state (more on this in a moment), is also at its height. This is "the tide in the affairs of men" that we must take at the flood "or lose our ventures".

Taken at the flood, the mass sentiment for social change reflected in the general strike can succeed in smashing the old state, establishing extreme democracy and achieving all the rest. Allowed to ebb - because the potential of the mass strike movement was not taken at the flood - and the inevitable result is demoralisation (or at least demobilisation) that begins to

set in, as the old order re-establishes itself to fill the vacuum of power. The majority sentiment demonstrated by the strike begins to be transformed into its opposite. Such a process of transformation can be completed in a relatively brief time.

This was the danger Lenin noted in 1917, when he objected to Trotsky's plan to wait until the Congress of Soviets to give the Bolsheviks a clear democratic mandate for the insurrection. Lenin feared that even a delay of weeks might result in an ebb in the mass sentiment for revolution, making insurrection more difficult or even impossible. Lenin's fears turned out to be unfounded. But they were based in a proper understanding of how revolutionary situations unfold - in particular how they come upon us and then disappear in a matter of weeks or months, if we fail to take advantage, in a timely way, of the majority sentiment in favour of revolution that has developed, while some tangible form of mass mobilisation is ascendant. Our strategy must understand that the height of this ascendancy, the height of the mass mobilisation, is the prime moment for taking a genuinely revolutionary initiative, because it is also the moment when our majority is at its peak.

Agreement

Below I will make reference to strategic elements, and there are many, on which I find myself in agreement with Mike Macnair. Before we leave our conversation about the mass strike, however, one of these needs to be highlighted in particular. Mike and I agree that "the existing capitalist ... state has to be 'smashed up'" (p70). This is an essential programmatic point, without which agreement on other matters of revolutionary strategy would be meaningless in my judgment.

Yet, if we are going to 'smash up' the existing state, we need a mechanism to do so. That mechanism can only be a mobilised mass movement, armed for self-defence against the existing military and police forces (and any new armed force created by the counterrevolution) - a mass movement that is also capable of making deep inroads into the consciousness of these existing repressive forces and thus neutralising them, to the greatest possible degree, as a tool to be used against the revolution. As noted above, this mobilised mass movement is also at its height during the days or weeks that a mass strike is taking place.

This, too, points to the "tide in the affairs of men" and the need to take that tide "at the flood". It is a key strategic aspect of our understanding of the mass strike as part of a revolutionary perspective (note: not the sum total of a revolutionary strategy, but one key element within it).

At the end of his book Mike offers us a list of 14 summary points. One of these, point 7, seems like a useful clarification to me, but not really a point of strategy in itself. So I will address the other 13. I wrote either "excellent," "very good," or "good" in the margins of eight, so there is no need to discuss them further at the moment. Points 4, 5 and 6 reflect the problem with Mike's misunderstanding/rejection of the mass strike and can, therefore, be fairly easily adjusted if we are able to accept the synthesis proposal I make above.

Thus we have strong potential agreement on a whole series of issues related to party building as part of an effort to win a majority; the need for democracy in the party, in the mass movement, and in society as a whole, extending all the way to "extreme democracy" as the expected form of the proletarian dictatorship; a rejection of bureaucratic centralism; revolutionary patience (at least in non-revolutionary times); and a number of other questions.

This leaves two formulations I consider problematic:

Mike's point 1 addresses the relationship between the explicitly working class struggle and other forms of resistance against oppression. His take on this reflects an ongoing discussion, in which I have a somewhat different viewpoint. I believe that Mike and I (and by implication any revolutionary current that is guided by the other 11 points on which we are potentially united) can agree to disagree on this for now, allowing a continued interaction with actual struggles against oppression to help us resolve our disagreement through an ongoing conversation.

Point 12 is also problematic in my view. It tries to answer a question I promise to consider at greater length in my next article: How does the dialectic of a socialist revolution that must be international in its scope unfold in a world that is divided into nation-states, with the class struggle (and therefore revolutionary potentials) reflecting such a substantial unevenness between nations? The solution Mike suggests - attempting to generate a simultaneity on at least a continental scale - does not seem like a practical orientation to me. And yet here, too, there is no urgency for us to agree on a solution. The problem is off in the future at the present moment. We can continue to discuss, while at the same time understanding that the actual dynamics of future events, as they unfold, will most likely offer some clues that can help us to resolve this problem one way or another on the theoretical level. This is similar to the manner in which the debate between Lenin and Trotsky about the class nature of the coming Russian revolution (a conversation that took place between 1905 and the outbreak of the revolution itself) was resolved by the lived experience of 1917.

With such an extensive level of agreement it is, I believe, reasonable to hope that a common approach to revolutionary strategy can emerge from a conversation between Mike and me (and, of course, other readers of/contributors to the *Weekly Worker*), leading potentially to the development of a stronger organisational presence for revolutionary forces in the USA - where I have been engaged in a parallel exchange with members of the Marxist Unity Group through their publication, *Cosmonaut* - perhaps in Britain too. And if we want to include another 'perhaps', it might even suggest a way in the longer term to develop a meaningful rebirth of a revolutionary international movement worthy of the name.

Reaching such a synthesis would be a demonstration, even if only a small one, that it is possible for revolutionaries to seek unity based on an honest exchange of views despite substantive disagreements on questions of history and theory, and therefore without recourse to either diplomatic formulas that paper over differences or pretending that such differences have no meaningful consequences. I agree with everything Mike Macnair says in his book about "unity" that is achieved in one of these two ways ●

Notes

1. I am inclined to think that, as we consider this in more detail, it will become clear that on the party-building question we also need a synthesis, since elements of what traditionalists might tell us about the need for a 'vanguard party' continue to be correct, even if their overall approach demonstrably leads to the creation of sects rather than revolutionary parties. Our synthesis must combine the essential elements of their analysis with the kind of structural and conceptual approach that Mike proposes in order to avoid the previous trend toward bureaucratic leaderships, unnecessary and debilitating splits, and an effort to promote monolithism within most self-proclaimed 'vanguard' organisations.

MIDDLE EAST**Trying to provoke a wider conflict**

Assassinating a Hezbollah, then a Hamas leader, is yet another dangerous escalation. Meanwhile, notes **Yassamine Mather**, general Sir Roly Walker talks about an 'axis of upheaval' and being three years from war

After the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, one has to ask two questions: why kill him now? And why in Iran, while he was attending the inauguration ceremonies of a 'reformist' president? After all, it would have been much easier to kill Haniyeh in Qatar or any Arab capital he visited.

The answer to both questions is simple: Benjamin Netanyahu and his rightwing coalition government are desperate to start a regional war. While in the US the Israeli prime minister came under some pressure from the current US administration and the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, Kamala Harris, over a ceasefire.

We do not know what was said in his meeting with Donald Trump, but let us not forget that the relationship between the two is not as warm as it once was - Trump having remarked on the fact that he cannot forgive Netanyahu for being one of the first heads of government to congratulate Biden in what he considered "rigged elections in 2020".

Public opinion in the US and its allies is weary of the rising death toll in Gaza. The 39,000 figure is just the tip of the iceberg. We know that polio, diarrhoea and other diseases are spreading fast in high temperatures, as contaminated streams are the only source of water for many. After months of appeasing the genocidal regime in Tel Aviv, western governments are finally putting some pressure on it and calling for a ceasefire.

It is also clear that the Israeli regime is also concerned by political changes in Tehran. This week, as Iran's new president, Masoud Pezeshkian, took office, he appointed veteran 'reformist' Mohammad Reza Aref, who was vice-president under Muhammad Khatami, to that post again. More significantly he named Abbas Araçchi - the architect of the Iran nuclear deal and diplomat who had detailed negotiations with the 5+1 powers regarding that deal in 2015, as Iran's foreign minister. All this could potentially pave the way for new nuclear talks and negotiations with whoever is in power in Washington. Again terrible news for the Zionist state, with its obsession about 'nuclear Iran'.

Of course, the country considered by imperialists to be the 'only democracy' in the Middle East has so far assassinated a number of Hamas and Hezbollah leaders, in clear acts of 'terror'.

Since Hamas's establishment in 1987, Israel has killed a whole number of its leaders. The most important include:

■ Yahya Ayyash, nicknamed 'the engineer', who was killed when his mobile phone exploded in his hand in Gaza in 1996.

■ Khaled Mashaal - killed in 1997 after Israeli agents injected him with poison outside his office in Amman, the capital of Jordan. The operation was ordered by Benjamin Netanyahu and angered King Hussein of Jordan to such an extent that he said he would hang the perpetrators and tear up the agreement with Israel unless an antidote was provided to him. Israel provided the antidote and freed the spiritual leader and founder of Hamas, Ahmed Yassin.

■ Seven years later, Yassin himself was targeted and killed by a missile fired from a helicopter after leaving a mosque.

■ Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, who took the place of Ahmed Yassin, was killed by a missile fired from a helicopter in April 2004. After that, the leaders of



Ismail Haniyeh with supreme leader

Hamas started a secret life and refused to announce who had replaced al-Rantisi.

■ Adnan al-Ghoul, who was known as the 'mastermind' of Qassam bombs and rockets, was killed in an airstrike in 2004.

■ Nizar Rayan, one of the most radical leaders of Hamas, was killed along with his two wives and seven children in the bombing of the Jabalia refugee camp in 2009.

■ Saleh al-Arouri, deputy to Palestinian premier Ismail Haniyeh, was killed in a drone attack in Beirut seven months ago.

Iran's failure

The assassination of Haniyeh cannot be considered good news for the Islamic Republic. He was killed in a 'special secure zone' of Tehran, right under the eyes of the Revolutionary Guards. The organisation claiming to be the 'leading force' of the axis of resistance could not even protect an ally in Iran's capital city.

There are also repercussions for the Islamic Republic's security forces. Who gave the information about the logistics of Haniyeh's whereabouts? Once more there will be legitimate accusations that the regime's elite 'intelligence' services have been infiltrated by Mossad. While the security forces boast about CCTV cameras capable of detecting the location of women who have failed to adhere to the strict rules on wearing the hijab, they managed to miss a drone/missile targeting a 'distinguished guest'.

Last week it was clear that Netanyahu was also keen to start a new conflict with Hezbollah, with the clear aim of dragging Iran into a regional war. There is nothing new about low-level skirmishes between Israel and Hezbollah. However, it is quite clear that in the last few weeks

Israel has escalated such attacks, prompting Hezbollah's retaliation. It is in this context that we should evaluate the current changes in Iran.

Although the Islamic Republic's rhetoric continues to be anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian, uninterrupted secret talks with the US have so far maintained a dangerous, but controlled, situation in the region and both sides are very keen to maintain what has been called Iran's "calibrated" response to regional conflicts, with rumours that the clerical state is ready to compromise.

The worst incident happened on July 28, when the Druze community in the Golan Heights became a target and 12 young people were killed in a missile strike. Despite the months of daily rocket fire and air strikes between Israel and southern Lebanon, the carnage came as a shock. Although Hezbollah strongly denies it, it is possible that an attack aimed at a nearby Israeli military barracks hit the wrong target. The Druze population have little sympathy for Hezbollah, but they are no ally of the Zionist state either. Angry crowds confronted the Israeli minister who tried to join mourners on July 28.

However the incident has given Israel the best opportunity for aggravating the situation. On July 30 we had the bombing of Beirut's southern neighbourhood, with the declared aim of killing Hezbollah's senior advisor on military affairs, Fuad Shukur. He was killed hours before Haniyeh. The attack on Dahiya, the densely populated Hezbollah stronghold in southern Beirut, was a provocation that could drag Hezbollah and in the long term Iran into a bloody war with Israel.

In the Middle East the stakes are high. Every day there are signs of imminent war and occasional hopes for peace. But a minor skirmish can

lead to full-scale war. In all this the main victims are the Palestinians, the Arab peoples of the region, Iranians, Kurds, Turks ... with authoritarian regimes and unpopular elected governments, such as Netanyahu's fragile coalition, clinging to power, and playing with peoples lives.

Keynote speech

Last week General Sir Roly Walker, the head of the British army, gave the keynote closing speech at Royal United Services Institute's land warfare conference. He warned that war might come sooner than anyone thinks. According to him, 2027-28 could be the moment when Russian rearmament, China's threat to Taiwan and Iran's nuclear ambitions come together in a "singularity". He went on to describe China, Iran, North Korea and Russia as the "axis of upheaval".

Although the term, "axis of upheaval", made the headlines in the UK, it was hardly an original idea. In April 2024, Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Richard Fontaine, writing for the website of the Center for a New American Security, used the title, 'The axis of upheaval: how America's adversaries are uniting to overturn the global order'.

Of course, Iran's Islamic Republic has been associated with many axes. In January 2002, at a time when a 'reformist' president in Iran, Mohammad Khatami, was showing willingness and indeed enthusiasm in supporting US's war efforts in Afghanistan and promising further assistance to the world hegemon regarding the proposed war in Iraq, George W Bush used his state of the union address to declare: "Iran aggressively pursues these weapons [of mass destruction] and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom ... States like these, and their

terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world."

We all know that was dishonest, as the Islamic Republic had done its utmost during the war in Afghanistan to help the US as the enemy of its enemy (the Taliban). At the time the Islamic Republic's opposition to the Taliban and its al-Qa'eda ally was such that Tehran cooperated with Washington in the preparation of 'Operation Enduring Freedom' and during the attack by providing vital intelligence support to the US invasion.

Bush's speech and the subsequent animosity shown by the US made a lasting impression on the country's supreme leader, who one can presume had authorised support for the US military actions. But since then we have seen dramatic and regular increases in sanctions imposed on Iran, along with direct threats of war by the US and Israel.

So what do China, Iran, North Korea and Russia have in common? They are authoritarian regimes, but by no means the only such countries, particularly when it comes to the Middle East. How would one describe Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt ...?

The difference here is alignment with the world hegemon power. North Korea, Iran and Russia have to be punished for dissing the United States, while China is trying to replace the US as the world hegemon. So far their efforts have led nowhere, of course.

The coordination between these countries is no accident. Faced with complete economic isolation as a result of punitive sanctions imposed by the US and supported by many European countries, the 'rogue' states can only increase trade with each other. It is estimated that in 2023 China saved \$10 billion by purchasing crude oil from two major sanctioned, oil-producing countries, Iran and Russia. In January, the *Nikkei Asia* website claimed: "Iran's exports of crude oil grew by roughly 50% last year to a five-year high of about 1.29 million barrels per day, with the vast majority going to China, helping to prevent a sharp increase in prices triggered by conflict in the Middle East."¹ Of course, Russia remains China's largest oil supplier. However, since 2022, China has increased its purchase of cheaper Russian oil - all the direct result of unprecedented sanctions.

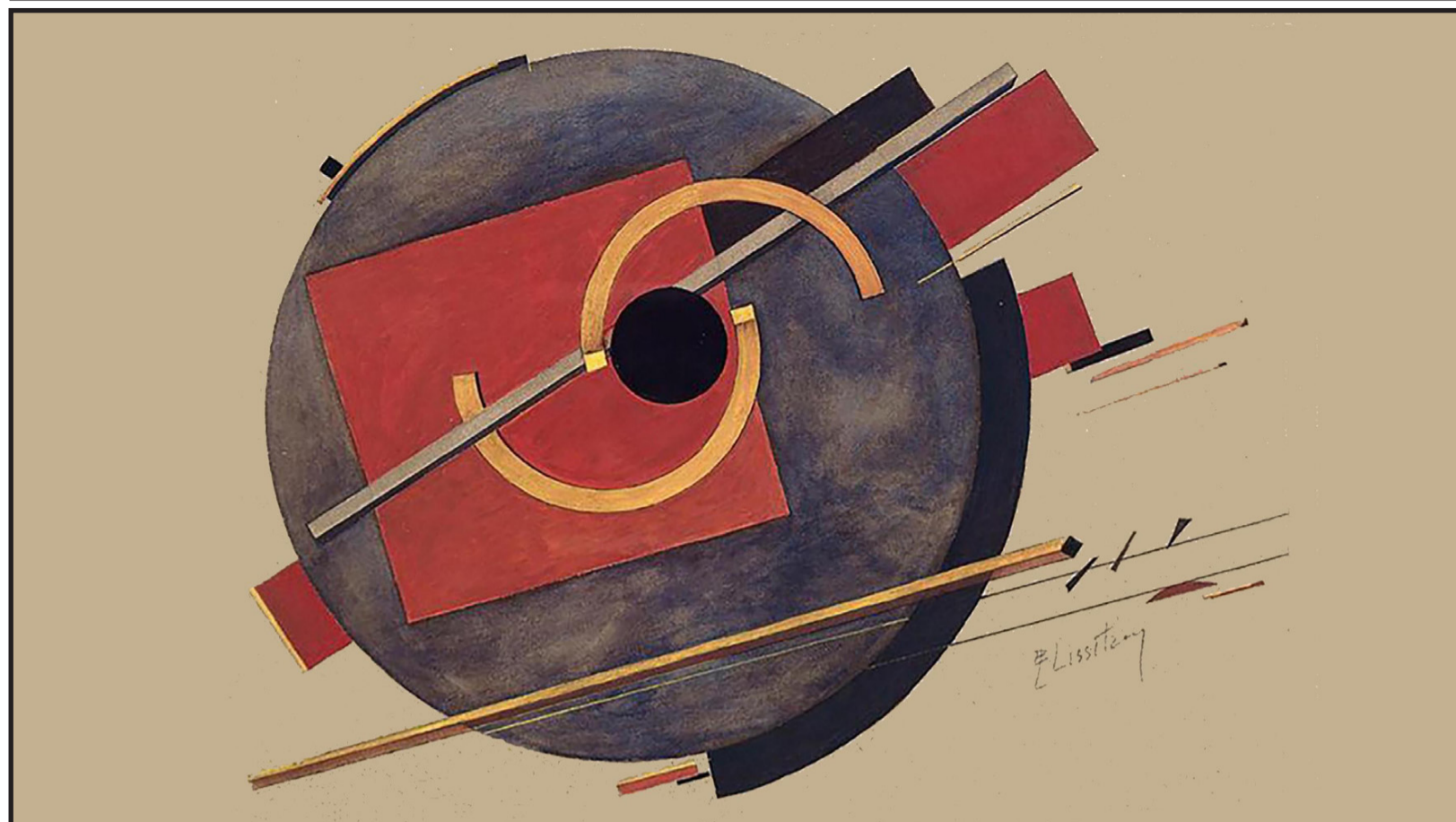
Irrespective of whether they are evil or just opportunist, the political, economic and military alliance of these countries is based on necessity. Apart from being authoritarian (and in this they are not unique) they have very little in common. Russia is led by a rightwing, nationalist president backed by mafia-style security forces, China is an emerging global power pursuing an ambitious programme of ruthless competition with the current world hegemon, North Korea seems to exist in a previous century, and Iran's Islamic Republic is a complex Shia theocracy - full of contradictions, but determined to survive.

What unites them is the fact that the US and its allies want to isolate them, so no-one should be surprised that they have come together. An opportunist alliance that the west can easily break, should it try and approach one component of the 'axis of upheaval' with an offer to come in out of the cold ●

Notes

1. asia.nikkei.com/Business/Markets/Commodities/Iran-s-oil-exports-reach-5-year-high-with-China-as-top-buyer.

CU24



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Date	10am to 12.30pm	Lunch	2pm to 4.15pm	Break	4.45pm to 7pm
Saturday August 3	Registration from 12 noon		Mike Macnair Uses and abuses: Lenin's Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism		Jack Conrad July 4 general election and the left
Sunday August 4	Ben Lewis Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel: the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71		Chris Knight Theories of language: how did we learn to speak?		Moshé Machover and Yasmine Mather Israel's war of genocide and how to stop it
Monday August 5	Ian Spencer Health and communism		Paul Demarty Fiction: utopian and scientific		Lawrence Parker Joseph Stalin, father of 'official' CPGB's British road to socialism programme
Tuesday August 6	Anne McShane Creating illusions in a Sinn Féin government, opportunism and the Irish left		Ed Griffiths British racism and British nativeness		Bruno Leipold Citizen Marx: republicanism and the politics of democracy and freedom
Wednesday August 7	Yasmine Mather War in Gaza: Iran and the Iranian opposition		Cat Rylance Communist future: a discussion		Parker McQueeney (Marxist Unity Group) How should the Democratic Socialists of America respond to the threat of a second Trump presidency?
Thursday August 8	Marcus Strom Philosophy and science - is Marxism compatible with emerging 'new physics'?		Marc Mulholland Those utopian socialists were also wonderfully critical socialists		Thomas Nail Marx in motion and his dissertation
Friday August 9	Marcus Strom AUKUS: why UK and Australian Labo(ur) are going all the way with the USA to encircle China		Tina Werkmann Why there was never a chance of Corbyn coming to power		Moshé Machover The ideology of Zionist colonisation
Saturday August 10	Jack Conrad Climate crisis: the limits of capital and the despotic dangers that lie beyond	Shorter lunch	Starting at 1.30pm: Mike Macnair Peoples' fronts and revolutionary strategy	No break	Immediately following previous session: Evaluation of Communist University

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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Nothing to see here

Protests are erupting against overtourism, but the problem is unlikely to go away without fundamental changes to the political economy, argues Paul Demarty

Over the last few months, there has been a scattering of stories in the news covering demonstrations of local people in tourist hotspots around the world, most especially in southern Europe.

From Barcelona to Venice, Mallorca to Athens, the pathologies associated with modern tourism are boiling over. In several Spanish cities, angry locals have taken to spraying tourists with water pistols as a rather desperate form of direct action. Their grievances are diverse: skyrocketing rents, environmental damage, terroristic stag parties, the replacement of local businesses with vapid souvenir stores; the list goes on.

It all seems very familiar to your humble correspondent, I must admit. School is out for the summer and down here in the far south-west of England, our towns are increasingly transformed into luxury staycation resorts. Along with the usual leftie fare stickered to every surface here in Plymouth - Palestine and trans rights flags, Extinction Rebellion hourglasses, and so forth - one finds designs denouncing the encroachments of Airbnb.

And that is just Plymouth, which is still a little downmarket to bear the brunt of the 'grockles', as we call them, flooding in our general direction. The Cornish coast is increasingly dominated by the home counties tourist trade (the Cornish call them 'emmetts', meaning ants; we have never been able to agree with them about anything), which, of course, largely dries up by the end of September. Locals are pushed out of the picturesque places, into downmarket towns nearby.

But these are minor problems compared to those of, say, Venice, whose intrinsically scarce real estate is even more exposed to the distortions of the property market, and which has become a stopping-off point for innumerable vast cruise ships. The cruise ships are the worst actors here, dumping hundreds or thousands of passengers out for 12 hours or less, hardly enough to provide even the dubious benefits of local economic stimulus, but enough to transform the main attractions - places, in theory, of extraordinary beauty - into mobbed-out hell-holes. There is also the small matter of rising sea levels ...

This is not to say that various governments have been entirely unresponsive. Venice has limited the number of cruise ships allowed to dock, and it also began charging an entrance fee, at a modest €5 (though some locals are concerned that this rather concedes the transformation of their city into a tacky amusement park). The difficulties are obvious, however: it is not clear what Venice is *for*, at this point, if not tourism. The local authorities in Amsterdam conducted a large-scale anti-marketing campaign directed at young men, warning them not to come unless they were going to be well-behaved. It is not clear if it worked. But if it did, at



Everyone wants to snap ... but not see

least it remains a major European city with financial and industrial sectors. Such measures are not obviously open to the governments of Palma de Mallorca, Venice or St Ives.

Old objections

Objections to mass tourism are in fact as old as the phenomenon itself, which really kicked into gear in the 19th century, with railways and steamships dramatically increasing the mobility of at least the bourgeoisie and aristocracy. The famous 'grand tour' of Italy brought the wealthy of the dominant states of the time to what was then a fractious assemblage of statelets and spheres of influence. The visitors found it easy to procure artefacts that ought to have been priceless, but in the poverty of the Italy of the time certainly were not. The modern stereotype of the indolent Italian began to fester in the English (and French, and later American) mind. The steady growth of Alpine tourism from the mid-1850s aggravated those German Romantics most committed to the love of nature.

At that time, however, international and long-distance travel remained a minority pursuit. Tourism among the popular classes was more localised (pilgrimages aside). The growth of the railways in Britain, for example, produced the grand ring of seaside resort towns, from Scarborough to Brighton to Bournemouth to Bangor. What were, for the most part, small fishing villages became grand attractions. Brighton's population began the 19th century at around 7,500, and ended it at 120,000, having acquired vast hotels, piers and a whole economy - legal and illegal - dedicated to offering travellers from London a good time, for a fair price.

That began to change in the later 20th century, as air travel became dramatically cheaper. Foreign holidays crept into the reach of the popular classes. This proved lethal for many of the once thriving British resort towns - why suffer the drizzle and the silty Severn water at Weston-Super-Mare if you could just as easily be in Mallorca? The strange half-existence of the tourist trap was instead concentrated in the sunniest places within easy reach of the chillier northern European nations - now able to visit Spain, Greece and so on rather more easily. English and German tourists began to battle over scarce Spanish beach-space like a sunburnt rematch of the Somme. It is these kinds of tourists that vex the Mallorcans and Greeks, at least in the most 'beachy' destinations.

Cheap flights, however, equally enabled a different kind of tourism - a sort of stunted, distant cousin of the original Grand Tour: the city break. There are more and less elevated versions of this - at one end, the wild Prague stag-do, and at the other, the desperate completism of the part-time culture vulture, trying to take in all the major museums of Paris in three days. There is a certain completism afoot in the culture at large, these days: the need to 'do' the Louvre because it is on one's 'bucket list', as if it were a Pokémon to be collected.

That is bad enough from the point of view of actual aesthetic experience, but, combined with the endless contemporary incentives to self-documentation, the result is tourism as a kind of exhibitionist fantasy - you do not look at the art, so much as try to be *looked at* looking at the art. Pity the poor fool trying to actually enjoy the Monets in the Musée d'Orsay, squinting through a crowd of wannabe

influencers pouting for their friends' iPhone cameras. (Fortunately, nobody seems to try this with the Toulouse-Lautrecs.)

People spend so much time looking forward to their holidays (which we will discuss later) that it is easy to miss the fact that they are so often disappointing. Your getaway to a Greek island lands you on a beach more crowded than Leicester Square on a Saturday afternoon. Your stag party ends in a fight and a night in the cells. Your zeal for self-enrichment means you never really *see* any beautiful object you put your face in front of for a few desultory seconds.

Meanwhile, the places you visit become dead zones. They must continue the pretence of being the places that were worth visiting in the first place - the quaint fishing village, the bustling Bohemian metropolis. Yet these were not arrangements of buildings and natural features, but also of people - the people who are edged out. The Venetians are right to worry: tourism turns everything into an immersive theme park - a version of the fake peasant village in the gardens of Versailles, where Marie Antoinette and her highborn friends would play-act at rustic life.

The most recent disadvantage for the actual 'peasants' has come in the form of Airbnb, which in practice monopolises a scam whereby houses and apartments theoretically zoned for people to actually live in are instead used as an investment vehicle. Day for day, holiday lets will net you much more money in rent than permanent tenants. Why, then, have your second home on the market for mere ordinary people in the locality? Blaming Airbnb is somewhat off the point - it is merely the most egregious phenomenon of the underlying trend for whole economies to be put at the service of the financial sector, and in many countries merely to keep property asset prices on a permanent upward trajectory. In Britain in particular, this has become the all-purpose substitute for general economic health.

Fixing tourism

The denizens of the world's tourist traps, then, have a great deal to complain about. Going around super-soaking random tourists is, nonetheless, a hopeless cause. Suppose it actually had the desired effect of halving the numbers of tourists in Barcelona - these sharpshooters would still be at the mercy of their landlords. Indeed, most of their 'victims' are in the same position back home; the details differ, but there is remarkable commonality of grievance and thus the potential for solidarity at least. It is a pity to waste that potential and, while tourists do not vote in Catalan elections, these problems are in fact - as we have argued - effects of quite *global* dynamics of political economy and culture that cannot be fixed locally.

Barcelona could at least survive it: it remains, like Paris and Amsterdam, a major city that does more than

entertain tourists. The problem for Venice and the seasonal towns of Cornwall is that there is nothing much else left. Thinking of their problems as ones of 'overtourism' is true enough, but we should also look at the issue through the other end of the telescope, bearing in mind the 'undertourism' of abandoned resorts like modern Hastings or Ramsgate. *Really* unshackling these places from the whims of visitors would mean having them *do* something else.

This is certainly painfully obvious here in the south-west. The holidaymaker in St Ives will, sooner or later, find herself on Wharf Road, weaving around other pedestrians and creeping cars. It is picturesque (and famously a popular subject for painters): the quayside of a fishing town. Yet there is one thing missing: fishermen. The toney restaurants get their seafood from elsewhere. Walking out from other such towns, one often comes across the ruins of tin mines - the death of that industry being a very real grievance even a century later. Moderating the influence of the tourist trade is inseparable from building some kind of economic life *apart from tourism*: something that will even allow you to say 'no' in the first place.

That is the grain of truth in the just-so story told by the likes of Tony Blair and, across the pond, Barack Obama, that people need to be reskilled for the 'new' economy; that, in the contemporary cliché, unemployed fishermen need to 'learn to code'. (Indeed, the fibre-optic cables that connect us to the American internet make landfall in Bude ...) In the hands of such people, of course, the point becomes purely apologetic. Instead, there needs to be a 'new economy' that provides a meaningful life for people in more than a few cities in a particular country.

So much for the 'supply side' of the overtourism problem - but much the same may be said for the demand side. There is much wrong with Theodor Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's account of the "culture industry", but one of their more perceptive observations is the tendency for the working day to produce, as its complement, leisure time as an increasingly regimented period away from work: something that becomes a mere necessity rather than a *positive* opportunity for relaxation, play and enjoyment.

An economy that did not work some half to death and leave others in unemployment and penury, we expect, would simply need fewer beach holidays, because daily life itself would be far less enervating. Its cultural life would not devolve into a giant checklist of officially important things to see and go through - and so, instead of skidding lightly across a hundred cities, we could fall in love with - indeed, live in - a few. We could be less like tourists, and more like locals ●