

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly
worker



Trans issues: communists want to abolish gender hierarchies. But do we want to abolish gender as such?

- Letters and debate
- Labour's rentiers
- Israel's fascist threat
- Nuclear's useful idiots

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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IT AIN'T OVER YET



LETTERS



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

Far right

Of course, if we can spend some time, as Carl Collins suggests, challenging the spread of far-right ideas online, we might as well decide as to what precisely we're up against ('Combat the far right online', August 22). This could be the assertion about numbers of migrants and their 'effect on the infrastructure' or claims that all male asylum-seekers are criminal.

Then there's that favourite theme shared with nationalists in France, Hungary, Germany and the US: the Great Replacement conspiracy theory. This offers a simple explanation, where the globalist liberal elite are importing migrants, many of them Muslim, to undermine, reduce or indeed exterminate white European populations. (See 'White genocide conspiracy theory' on Wikipedia.)

This makes all kinds of appeal: it provides a total world view which contextualises places

lacking in jobs, public services and self-respect; it's a justification for attacks on local Muslims (not just Iran) and calls up antagonism to an imaginary group of posh traitors, whether they be red, 'woke' or simply upper class.

The spreaders of this rubbish need not attain a fascist state, but they may already be discreetly influencing enough people of all classes to make allusions to parts of the theory, like 'two-tier policing', while supplying validation for those parties who wish to appear in favour of tight borders and military confrontation with Muslims.

Mike Belbin
email

Dan Lazare

In the interests of openness readers ought to know why the *Weekly Worker* decided to part company with Daniel Lazare. We have towards that end put the entire two-way exchange between myself and comrade Lazare up on our website - weeklyworker.co.uk/assets/w/w/pdf/lazare-correspondence.pdf.

It should be stressed that

the CPGB and *Weekly Worker* remain committed to debate and fighting the battle of ideas. We shall continue to publish articles with which we profoundly disagree. Eg, last week's pieces by Carl Collins ('Combat the far right online') and Emil Jacobs ('Nature's gift to humanity?'). Certainly our letters page is often dominated by those who can only be considered opponents of principled communist unity - even opponents of communism itself.

Comrade Lazare wrote many good articles for the paper. He also, however, wrote not a few with which we had important differences. On occasion we signalled our disapproval by including a 'critical' strap introducing the article - that or by directly replying either in the same or a subsequent issue.

But when it came to dismissing the whole notion of genocide in Gaza/Palestine as "garbage" and putting an equals sign between Hamas and Israel, that, in our opinion, disbarred him as a regular *Weekly Worker* writer. It is not only the terrible suffering of the Palestinian people: Britain and, crucially, the US are acting as Israel's enablers. Communists have a duty to expose the genocidal logic of Zionist settler-colonialism, not provide excuses.

We stopped commissioning articles from comrade Lazare and tried to persuade him of the errors of his views. We clearly failed.

Perhaps, given time, he will change his mind. Meanwhile we wish him well.

Jack Conrad
London

Identity

I note the letters in recent issues on identity and the CPGB's *Draft programme*, and would like to recommend some further reading to comrades for further reflection, as I suspect letters will be insufficient space for this (none of these are through any personal affiliation);

1. The Communist Party of Britain Women's Commission public statement on sex work (www.comunistparty.org.uk/communist-party-statement-on-prostitution) makes a strong case to challenge the idea that 'sex work is work'.

2. Jane Clare Jones's *Annals of the TERF wars* (www.amazon.co.uk/Annals-TERF-Wars-Other-Writing-ebook/dp/B0B3P6M8B6). Jones is a materialist, and she looks at the progressive (or not) nature of transgender ideology.

3. The Anarchist Communist Group pamphlet *The politics of division: an engagement with identity politics* (not perfect, but a useful contribution - www.anarchistcommunism.org/product/the-politics-of-division-an-engagement-with-identity-politics).

Kieron Smith
email

Wrecking ball

According to Andrew Northall in his letter of August 22, it's not legitimate for Moshé Machover to analyse Judaism. However, the critique of religion is a salient and needed exercise and has deep socialist roots. It's essential to understand the role of religion in the Zionist state.

Judaism is fair game for scrutiny, since Israel claims to represent Jews and Judaism and, for example, Israel justifies its

Zionist holocaust by exploiting Europe's Nazi holocaust. It's an affront by Northall to try to shut down criticism of Judaism by fear-mongering - that is, warning that the citing of barbarism that's contained in the *Bible* will be used to bolster the barbarism of the Zionists. (Incidentally, there's a long history of Jews being accused of enabling of anti-Semitism because of their criticism of the religion).

Northall touts Marxist secularism, yet can't abide opposition to religious reaction. This is an ironic and absurd contradiction for someone who seems to be an experienced (self-described) socialist; his motives are necessarily suspect.

Moshé Machover did a great service by pointing out some of the evil precepts in the *Bible*; in some ways he follows the honourable tradition of Israel Shahak, who didn't shy away from heroically uncovering the profound, destructive connections between Judaism and Zionism. This scholarship can help explain what makes the Zionist monster tick, and to understand Zionism is the key to fighting it - as the Palestinian resistance has learned from the long, bloody years of Zionist state terror.

The idea of a broad socialist revolution in the Middle East is a principle and vision to be preserved, promoted and never relegated to the 'dustbin of history', yet Northall criticises Machover for advocating "a form of mythical ultra-left regional socialist revolution". We lose sight of socialist objectives when we play fast and loose with the term, 'ultra-left'. And for Northall to indicate that Machover, a knowledgeable socialist, is somehow ignorant about current material conditions and the politics of 'minimum demands' regarding the Palestine question is not credible.

The *Weekly Worker* is very fortunate to have high-calibre, pro-Palestinian voices such as Moshé Machover and Tony Greenstein, but instead of appreciation of these writers I hear a lot of vilification coming from Andrew Northall. There's nothing that Northall can say that can tarnish the socialist *bona fides* of Machover and Greenstein, both of whom we obviously don't have to agree with on every point.

"It is not for people living in Britain - the original colonial and imperialist power - to prescribe specific state configurations or constitutional outcomes for the peoples engaged in struggle for their national liberation..." Why shouldn't they? Northall isn't the only one who is entitled to opine and theorise about the Palestinian struggle. We all have a responsibility to express our

opinions and try to carefully steer people in a socialist direction; that doesn't mean we should be high-minded and tell Arab and Muslim people what to do.

Northall denies that the *Weekly Worker* supports "genuinely secular and Marxist-Leninist currents and formations, especially within the Palestinian resistance and national liberation movement" and says: "It would be good to see the *Weekly Worker* on the side of these". There are no grounds for this ridiculous allegation that, basically, this paper is not a Marxist project. The excuse given by Northall for this criticism, is that there are no Marxist, pro-Palestinian writers, which is false.

The *Weekly Worker*, which represents the CPGB, published an article recently with the following statement: "Communists need to take the lead in the fight for pan-Arab unity. A task inseparable from the struggle for socialist revolution and the formation of a mass Communist Party - first in each Arab country and then throughout the Arab world. A Communist Party of Arabia" (Jack Conrad, June 6).

The *Weekly Worker* is on the right side of history.

GG
USA

Cracking down?

Look at what is being done to women and girls in Afghanistan and Iraq. Iraq used to win awards from the UN for progress in their education - that was before 2003.

If Yvette Cooper wants to crack down on extremism in general, and on extreme misogyny in particular, then she should start with the people who waged, supported and continue to defend those wars - for nothing in the end in Afghanistan, and to make matters vastly worse in Iraq.

David Lindsay
Lanchester

Apology

Tony Clark (Letters, August 22) quite rightly points out my mistake in my letter on migrants headlined "Welcome here" (August 1). I meant to say that the red-brown Workers Party of Britain wants the Royal Navy to 'stop' the boats crossing the English Channel - not "sink" the boats, as I wrote in my letter. George Galloway outlined the WPB's policy in an interview with GB News Channel on June 19, when he was launching its manifesto for the general election.

I apologise to Tony and all other comrades for the confusion caused.

John Smithee
Cambridgeshire

End the genocide - stop arming Israel

Saturday September 7, 12 noon

National demonstration

Assemble Pall Mall, London SW1

March to the Israeli embassy

Demand the government immediately ends all complicity in Israel's violence and apartheid, and pushes for a permanent ceasefire now

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign

www.facebook.com/palestinesolidarityuk

Online Communist Forum



Sunday September 1 5pm

Israel moves to turn the West Bank into another Gaza and drag the whole region into war - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

Use this link to register:
communistparty.co.uk/ocf

Organised by CPGB: communistparty.co.uk and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk
For further information, email Stan Keable at Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain

LABOUR

Things can only get worse

With three of the top five landlords in parliament Labour MPs, we are seeing a petty-bourgeoisification at the top of the party, writes Eddie Ford

With Sir Keir Starmer saying things will get worse before they get better, claiming that the Tories left a £22 billion black hole in this year's budget, you might be wondering what happened to that 'crisis of expectations' touted by the more stupid sections of the left. It is certainly a far cry from the official optimism we got with Tony Blair's landslide in 1997, when you could hardly escape D:Ream's 'Things can only get better' - maybe the band can do a new remix to get with the times.

You might be wondering even more when you look at the profile of Labour MPs in the new parliament, some of whom are not exactly horny-handed sons of toil - as revealed by an analysis of UK parliament's register of interests. Parliamentarians are obliged to declare how much income they get from various sources, and amongst the requirements is to declare if they get more than £10,000 a year from renting out properties.

Numbers

This shows that the rentier class is a force of its own in parliament, with 85 MPs now classified as rentiers, representing 13% of parliamentarians - owning 184 rental properties between them. The biggest group of rentiers comes from our very own bourgeois workers' party, Labour, which has 44 such landlords under the official definition, equating to 11% of the parliamentary party. The Tories have 28, just under a quarter of its MPs. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats have eight among their 72 MPs.

This is when the statistics start to get interesting. In the last parliament, Labour had 18 landlord MPs and the Conservatives had 83. Meaning that Labour more than doubled its rentier presence in the Commons following its crushing victory in July. Of course, the Tories are much diminished in numbers, but landlords still amount to a significant percentage of its parliamentary presence. However, even more to the point, three of the top five landlords in parliament are now Labour MPs.

There is Gurinder Josan, MP for Smethwick in the West Midlands, who owns eight rental properties alongside members of his family, and Southeast East MP Bayo Alaba, who owns seven, also with family members. But very top of the list is Jas Athwal, the Labour MP for Ilford South in London. He rents out 15 residential and three commercial properties, all co-owned with a family member - a collection that outshines that of shadow chancellor Jeremy Hunt, a multi-millionaire who owns nine rental properties, according to the register.

There are also a large number of MPs, 158, who declare second homes or land from which they do not receive a rental income. One is Tom Tugendhat, the Arabic-speaking shadow minister for security, now running to become Conservative leader, who co-owns four flats and some agricultural land in France with various family members. Not forgetting those MPs under investigation for failing to declare rental income, like Tulip Siddiq, a treasury minister and MP for Hampstead and Highgate - apologetically saying it was an "administrative oversight".¹

Jas Athwal himself became leader of Redbridge council in east London in October 2011, and he rose to prominence, such as it was, in 2022, when he defeated sitting Labour MP and Socialist Campaign Group member Sam Tarry, in a contest to replace him as the party's candidate in Ilford South, Athwal's home



Honoré Daumier 'Two rentiers' (1834)

constituency. Tarry was dismissed from his shadow cabinet position after a high-profile appearance on an Aslef picket not long after Keir Starmer had issued an edict instructing shadow cabinet members to stay away from strikes. He was deselected in a trigger ballot, because rightwing unions like Usdaw, Unison and Community threw their weight behind Athwal and Labour's regional officials encouraged the right sort of members to turn out on the day - job done! The *Financial Times* describes Tarry as "a supporter of former leftwing leader Jeremy Corbyn", but that is not accurate at all. At the time, *Weekly Worker* described his support for striking railworkers as "posturing", suggesting that his rediscovery of industrial militancy was precisely because he was under threat of deselection - therefore needed to attract more support.² Up until then, Tarry had been a fairly anonymous, if not typically spineless, SCG member and MP.

Rentiers

If we think about the Parliamentary Labour Party in the not so recent past, there would be plenty of MPs from a trade union background. This has massively declined over the years - a phenomenon that has been impossible to ignore. Instead, what you get is people more or less coming directly from universities and student unions. They might have served in a union office, but more often what they do is go straight into parliament as a researcher, a bag carrier, for some minister or aspiring minister.

However, there is this new element of what you can only call the petty bourgeoisie that have moved in to the Labour Party - Athwal being a perfect example. But in this context we must also mention the leader of the Scottish Labour Party, Anas Sarwar. He owns a quarter share of his family's cash-and-carry wholesale business, United Wholesale (Scotland), that was valued in 2016 as worth between £2.7 million and £4.8 million. Now, that sounds like quite a lot to you or me. Yet you need think about it in terms of what actual income he is likely to derive from it, especially as in 2017 he transferred his shareholding to a discretionary trust for the benefit of his three children, so that he could not personally access the assets or dividends. Naturally, his children attended a £10,000-a-year private school.

In other words, we are talking about the lower end of the bourgeoisie - which is why it is fair to describe it as the 'petty-bourgeoisification' of Labour. Of course, it has always been politically bourgeois, right from the very beginning - which is why Lenin described it as a bourgeois workers' party. There was no leftwing golden

age, as some deludedly think. But there has been an identifiable change in the sort of petty bourgeois layer that goes into the party. Shifting from trade union officials who live a petty bourgeois lifestyle as part of their role as an intermediary between capital and labour (historically an invaluable role for the ruling class) to people who actually live at least in part from renting and from capital - who clearly represent the bourgeois side of the party sociologically.

Regarding the likes of Athwal, it is quite legitimate to be worried about the possible influence they might exert over a government that has vowed to outlaw the practice of 'no-fault evictions' by landlords as part of its plan to reform the private rented market in England. In the run-up to the election, Keir Starmer also said he would "introduce a law" to prevent landlords from encouraging bidding wars between prospective tenants, with a Labour spokesperson recently saying it "will take the tough decisions that the last Tory government refused to, and we'll give renters stability and security" - better protect renters "against damp, mould and cold". Fine words, but will it amount to anything?

Billions

Going in a slightly different (but instructive) direction, it is still the case that Rishi Sunak is the richest MP in parliament. He has a combined wealth with his wife of some £651 million, at least according to the *Sunday Times* Rich List of July this year - putting them ahead of the monarch, who has to somehow manage on £605 million. We can only understand Sunak's anger at those who suggest that his huge wealth puts him out of touch with voters or ordinary British people.

But what a lot of people do not realise, including some *Weekly Worker* readers no doubt, is that the second richest person in parliament - insofar as you can establish these things, as they are inherently murky - is actually the former Labour MP, Margaret Hodge, hater of everything that Jeremy Corbyn stood for. She was given a life peerage in August this year for service rendered, and now sits in the House of Lords as Baroness Hodge of Barking. A quick Google comes up with some estimates putting her personal wealth at \$100 million as a result of her being a major shareholder in the family-owned steel-trading corporation, Stemcor. This is one of the world's largest privately held steel companies, with an annual turnover of over £6 billion in 2011.

In June 2010 she was elected by MPs as chair of the Public Accounts Committee. Some quickly raised the issue of Hodge's suitability for such a position, *The Daily Telegraph* running a story about how her family's company paid just 0.01% tax on £2.1 billion of business generated in the UK. In the end, this led to an investigation into the tax arrangements of a number of American companies operating in Britain.

With the steady petty-bourgeoisification of Labour, its cash from private donors now dwarfing donations from unions, the party seems to be ever more pro-business in the narrowest possible sense. Many Labour MPs are pro-business because they are in business ●

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Notes

1. bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cnd064lx50lo.
2. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1415/rout-on-all-fronts.

ACTION

Divest for Palestine

Saturday August 31: Nationwide day of action. Local government pension schemes invest £4 billion in companies complicit in Israel's oppression of Palestinians. Demand councils divest for Palestine. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/divest-for-palestine-day-of-action.

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.

Lenin as an economist

Sunday September 1, 3pm: Online talk presented by Michael Roberts, Marxist economist and author. Part of a series commemorating 100 years since Lenin's death. Registration free. Organised by Lenin 100 in Britain: eventbrite.co.uk/e/lenin-as-an-economist-tickets-891004647887.

Wigan Diggers festival

Saturday September 7, 11.15am 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/events/493278123654982.

Don't let the far right divide us

Saturday September 7, 12 noon: Counter-protest, George Square, Glasgow G2. Refugees welcome - nae Nazis in Glasgow. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: www.instagram.com/p/C-GUANmKDqG.

Stand up for choice

Saturday September 7, 2pm: 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.

War, peace and Palestine - trade union issues

Monday September 9, 6.30pm: TUC fringe meeting, Friends House, Ship Street, Brighton BN1. British-made bombs rain down on Gaza, while the Ukraine military is equipped with British-made arms. Ordinary people pay with their lives. Workers need welfare, not warfare. Speakers include Fran Heathcote (PCS) and Alex Gordon (RMT). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

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.

From revolving door to open-plan office

Wednesday September 18, 7pm: Online and onsite report launch, 4th Floor Studios, 255 Commercial Road, Whitechapel, London E1. Exposing the ever-closer union between the UK government and the arms industry. Registration free. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: caat.org.uk/events/report-launch-open-plan-office.

The racket

Wednesday September 18, 7pm: Book event, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Declassified UK journalist Matt Kennard introduces his book, *The racket: a rogue reporter vs the American empire*. Followed by Q and A. Tickets £3 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: housmans.com/events.

Stop Farage - protest Reform UK conference

Friday September 20, 5pm: Protest outside Reform UK conference, NEC, Birmingham B40. Reform MPs give confidence to far-right thugs on the streets by whipping up Islamophobia, racism and anti-migrant rhetoric. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: www.instagram.com/p/C-78NscIfQD.

Labour Party conference Palestine protest

Saturday September 21, 12 noon: Liverpool protest, venue tbc. Call on the government to push for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and immediately end its support for apartheid Israel's genocide. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Stop the far right - no fascists in London

Saturday September 28, 12 noon: Counter protest, central London, venue tbc. Oppose the far-right attempts to spread racism, hate and division. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: www.instagram.com/p/C-44Slkoihm.

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.

USA

End of the beginning

With the Democratic national convention safely wound up, Paul Demarty assesses the presidential race and peers into an uncertain future

It is strange to think that the national conventions of American political parties used to be *decision-making* bodies.

They were never terribly democratic, of course. Instead, their delegates emerged from the various local party machines and, having emerged, they spent endless hours horse-trading over who would get the nomination. The Republican convention that nominated Abraham Lincoln did so on the third ballot, while his thousands of supporters cheered on and made the best attempt possible to intimidate the electors by hooting and whistling. A contemporary observer compared the noise to “all the hogs ever slaughtered in Cincinnati giving their death-squeals together”.

164 years later, it is a different picture, though it is at least equally possible to imagine fans of the Republican nominee making the most bizarre noises. Donald Trump, in theory, went through a contested primary (primaries are a relatively recent innovation). No competitor laid a glove on him, and indeed he did not so much as bother to turn up to the debates. The idea that anyone else could be selected was preposterous from the beginning. Those staffing the Republican hierarchy plainly feel it more fitting to impose their agenda on him than try to impose another candidate on the electorate.

The closest anyone came to keeping him off the ballot was Thomas Crooks, the alienated youth who attempted to off him with a gun from a Pennsylvania rooftop, but only nicked his ear. Kamala Harris’s journey to the top of the ticket did not involve any votes at all, of course, which drama we will rehearse in a moment.

Theatre

And so both the Republican and Democrat conventions were essentially theatrical performances, in which speakers lined up to effuse over the virtues of the pre-ordained nominee, and denounce the perfidy of the ‘other guy/girl’. The Republican convention took place immediately after the assassination attempt, and was notable principally for the Trumpite hysteria among attendees, many of whom wore bandages over their ears in honour of the great helmsman. Trump formally nominated JD Vance - the Ohio senator and Peter Thiel creature, who once considered him a new Hitler, but has since become a spectacularly obsequious toady, and merged into the general online far-right scene.

There was a certain amount of triumphalism involved at that time, since a mortally wounded Joe Biden was still at the top of the Democratic ticket; but that was short-lived, when various Democratic bigwigs - notably former House leader Nancy Pelosi (a woman so Machiavellian and stupendously corrupt that she really does recall the glory days of Tammany Hall) - succeeded in bullying Biden into giving way. There was some talk of a contested convention (largely regarded with horror by the party elite), before everyone involved was brought around to back Harris. She selected for her running mate Tim Walz, the Minnesota governor and folksy former high-school football coach, on the theory that a black woman candidate needed the whitest imaginable man as co-pilot to achieve victory.

The Democratic convention, so



Netanyahu with Kamala Harris: she is the continuity candidate

far as it had any specifically *political* purpose, was an opportunity to divide the left and bring some big hitters on side. Those included representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, (AOC, the supporter of the Democratic Socialists of America, elected as a Congress Democrat) who gushed about Harris’s “tireless” work for a ceasefire in Gaza (having previously set herself up absurdly as a ‘Biden or bust’ character earlier in the whole drama). Needless to say, this is believed only by those who want to believe - those with real moral objections to Israel’s genocide, who nonetheless fear a new Trump presidency more than death itself. To them, she - and Bernie Sanders, and others - offered an off-ramp.

It is welcome that protestors made themselves a nuisance, that the ‘uncommitted’ movement, which ostentatiously refused to back Biden in the laughable primary process that nominated him, made a great hue and cry about being cut out of the show. Hopes - and worries - that the Chicago convention would produce scenes like that of 1968 were nevertheless dashed. And that is not surprising: the mere fact of replacing the semi-conscious Biden with someone fully in command of her faculties has reinvigorated Democrat activists. They feel they have something to fight for, and can thus bring themselves to tune out dissenting voices.

Battleground

So the rival forces are arrayed. How do their chances look? Before Biden’s decision to accept the inevitable, it seemed inevitable that Trump would walk it. No especially complicated calculus is necessary to see why. His opponent was in acute cognitive decline; Trump was simply Trump. Polls suggested a real beating.

With the Harris coup, it is a very different picture: she leads in national polls. The swing in her direction is

astonishing and unprecedented, but then so were the circumstances that led her to become the candidate. Republican attacks on her have the reek of desperation. Can anyone believe that she is secretly a ‘communist’, when she has been in government for three and a half years? Beyond that, there is merely the stale racist trope that she is a ‘diversity hire’ - but that is for voters to decide, surely, and is frankly unfair, given the ruthless manner in which she has conducted her own career. Perhaps she could have made a great Nancy Pelosi.

Yet this is not a straight national election. The electoral college system means that it will be fought out primarily in a handful of battleground states, including Pennsylvania, Michigan and Arizona. In these states, things look a lot tighter, with few polls finding either candidate with a lead greater than the 3% margin of error usually taken into account for these things. There are real worries here: after all, Michigan, for example, has a large Arab-American population deeply alienated from current policy on Israel, and over 100,000 people voted ‘Uncommitted’ in the primary. That is not far off Biden’s margin of victory in the state in 2020. All this leaves aside domestic issues like inflation - going down, but purchasing power is still badly hit compared to 2022 - and the perception of ‘chaos at the border’, to which we can expect Trump to advert endless times between now and November. He does not need that many votes.

Trump received one fillip recently with the decision of Robert F Kennedy Jr - the son of the one-time attorney general and contestant for the 1968 Democratic nomination who was assassinated that year (and, of course, the nephew of Jack Kennedy himself) - to pull out of his independent run at the presidency and endorse the Republican ticket. The younger RFK

was best known as an eco-warrior until relatively recently, but like many Green types he has fallen in with anti-vaxxers, and attempted to contest the Democratic nomination on the basis of conspiratorial anti-militarism (though he remained a fanatical Zionist).

Along the way, he burnished his reputation as one of modern America’s great eccentrics, most recently when he confessed to leaving the carcass of a bear in the middle of Manhattan’s Central Park. It is hard to tell, but he was probably taking more votes from Trump than Harris (and was running at a not-insignificant 3% in polls), and so his withdrawal principally benefits the Republicans.

Outcomes

With the result so uncertain, we need to consider both possible outcomes. Trump has promised an immediate mass deportation of illegal immigrants. It is not clear that he can achieve such a thing, but he could cause a lot of trouble trying. He promises to wrap up the Ukraine war in short order - again, easier said than done, but some recent events in that theatre suggest that the antagonists are trying to secure the best possible position before the US decides that enough is enough and pushes for a cessation of hostilities. As far as the Middle East is concerned, he backs Israel to “finish the job”, and has denounced the present US government’s hypocritical handwringing for peace and the lesser-spotted two-state solution.

There is a great deal of worry over what a Trump victory will mean for American democracy, such as it is, and it would be wrong to merely dismiss this as hysteria. Trump did, after all, set his addled followers off on a riot to overturn the results of the 2020 election, to say nothing of the less dramatic methods of lawfare and heavy manners he used to the same end. His followers gleefully await military

tribunals of his enemies. He proposes a political purge of the permanent state apparatus. His position is complicated, however, by the fact that important parts of that state apparatus, crucially the military, are obviously not inside. A Trumpist victory on January 6 2020 would most likely have resulted in a military counter-coup.

For all the soft-left wish-casting to the contrary, we expect a Harris presidency to entail more of the same: more entanglements abroad, more halting, half-cocked attempts at industrial policy, more ‘neoconisation’ of the Democratic Party. Needless to say, neither have anything to offer people shaken to political consciousness by the horrors of Gaza.

What is perhaps worth stressing is the commonalities. For all the weepiness over “kids in cages” in 2020, the Biden administration has strained every sinew to act tough on immigration. Biden’s policy was merely Trump’s policy on a four-year time delay (leaving aside that great white elephant - the big, beautiful border wall). More significantly, both are committed to the new strategic orientation towards encirclement of China and military brinksmanship in its near-abroad - indeed, so was Barack Obama - and consequently on attempting to use industrial policy to reshore critical military industries like semiconductors.

There are practical disagreements on whether this entails the break-up of Russia or backing a greater Israel in the Middle East as a local strongman there (the current, ‘lesser’ Israel is a strong enough man for the Democrats). Yet the underlying dynamic is clear. Major strategic shifts can only be achieved across different administrations. US imperialism is declining - everyone knows it, and indeed Democratic and Republican-leaning think-tankers alike recognise this as a problem. Both parties will have, as their first order of business, doing whatever they can to reverse that decline, even at the risk of great-power war.

It is in this light that we should interpret soft-left backing for Harris (and, indeed, the doomed attempts of AOC and Bernie Sanders to keep Biden on the ticket). For such people, the substantial stimulus packages offered by the Biden administration - the Inflation Reduction Act and friends - reflected their relation with Biden, as did faltering attempts to revive anti-trust enforcement, and thus a reason to get inside the tent and do ‘real politics’.

Leaving aside the moral vacuity of such a stance - what is a stimulus package compared to a genocide?! - it is simply misconceived. These are long-running policies of *the American state*, which have proven difficult to achieve, thanks to the dysfunctional political machine that has to implement them. They cannot even, really, be weighed up with US foreign policy crimes at all; they are means by which US imperialism proposes to get away with more crimes.

The American left needs an independent policy - which need not imply universally refusing (extremely) critical support to this or that leftwing Democrat, but certainly does imply extreme opposition to the bipartisan political apparatus, the military state machine, and in the end the pseudo-democratic structure of the US constitution itself ●

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ISRAEL

Fascism threatens 'democracy'

If Israel is not yet a fascist state, it is teetering on the brink, says Steve Freeman of the Republican Labour Education Forum. The comrade restates his case for a federal republic

A week ago Ehud Barak - former Israeli prime minister and leader of the Labor Party - issued a 'revolutionary' call to action. He warned:

Under cover of the war, a governmental and constitutional putsch is now taking place in Israel without a shot being fired. If this putsch isn't stopped, it will turn Israel into a *de facto* dictatorship within weeks. Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government are assassinating democracy.¹

He does not use the word 'fascism', but makes reference to past experience, saying, "Over the last century, entire societies have been dragged into the abyss in this way. We must not let this happen to us". Israeli society is in a life and death struggle between fascism and liberal democracy, according to Yair Golan, former Israel Defence Forces general turned politician, who declared he was "not sure Israel is a democracy any more".² Israel is in a full-blown 'crisis of democracy'. If it is not yet a fascist state it is teetering on the brink.

Liberal democracy and the rule of law provide restraint on executive power. Barak says:

Remove that constraint, and you're living in a dictatorship in which nothing is guaranteed - not individual freedom and individual rights, not minorities' freedom and minority rights, not the government's commitment to its citizens, not the existence of free elections and not the moral authority to send soldiers into battle.³

He demands that the attorney general orders the Shin Bet security force and the justice ministry to investigate "the fact that some 13,000 guns have been handed out in violation of the law. As an interim preventive measure, she should also order all these guns to be collected. Otherwise, they will also be used to shoot Israelis". He forgets, or does not care, that Israeli fascists are using these guns to kill Palestinians in the West Bank.

The present policy of the Israel government is permanent war - with military dictatorship, ethnic cleansing and genocide in a war extended to Lebanon, Yemen and Iran, etc. There is no Chinese wall between a 'fascist' foreign policy outside Israel's borders and 'domestic' policy. The blowback infects the whole of Israeli society, as currently constituted. The laws and institutions of Zionist 'democracy' are no defence against the fury of fascism with its pogroms and mass murder.

Barak declares: "These aren't normal times, but an emergency - a clear and present danger to Israel's very existence as a democracy." Therefore Israelis must "take off the gloves and work with all their might to stop this criminal putsch". He appeals to "the spirit of the [Zionist] Declaration of Independence" - perhaps unaware that the source of the current crisis of democracy can be traced back to the constitutional foundations of the Israeli state.

Barak calls for revolutionary action, mass action on the streets and direct action within the state apparatus. He says: "The only way to prevent a dictatorship at such a late stage is by shutting down the country through large-scale, non-violent civil disobedience, 24/7, until this government falls". He adds it is vital



An old cliché, but not without foundations

that a section of the Israeli state acts to defend Israeli 'democracy'.

There are two responses to Barak in *Haaretz*. 'JL' says: "Mr Barak, you may find the civil conflict will come up short against Israel's now dominant anti-democratic forces." He adds: "Your choice will be to enlist the active support of the Palestinian people (perhaps beginning with Palestinian citizens of Israel) to preserve and expand Israeli democracy." Second, 'Haim' writes: "The only possible solution is for the Jewish population to reach out to the repressed Palestinian population in order to overcome fascism. It's not coexistence we need to work for, but co-resistance".⁴

These comments go to the heart of the matter. Zionist 'democracy' cannot be saved from Israeli fascism without winning the support of Arab Israelis and Palestinians in a joint struggle for democratic rights and civil liberties.

Programme

Communists and social democrats must address the crisis of democracy in Israel with a democratic programme - independent of wealthy, liberal Zionists such as Barak, and connected to the struggle of Arab Israelis and the Palestinian people for democracy against fascism. Looking at this crisis 'from afar' does not absolve us of the responsibility of debating the kind of democratic programme that can unite the working class. This is a role that the *Weekly Worker* can provide and the purpose of this reply to Jack Conrad and Mike Macnair.

There is some common ground. There is no national solution to the problems facing the working class in the Middle East - not least because of the role of US imperialism in supporting local ruling classes. This does not mean ignoring the class struggle for democracy in the various states and nations. On the contrary, the struggle of the working class for democracy in Israel, Iran and Egypt, for example, can bring victories,

which lead towards regional and international solutions.

Democratic demands are in minimum conditions proposed by Moshé Machover and put forward by Jack Conrad. Jack himself has demanded that "any consistently democratic programme must be squarely based on contemporary realities - crucially human facts on the ground".⁵ He continues: "Abolition of Zionist Israel, legal equality for all, secularism, halting expansionism and withdrawing from the occupied territories are basic (minimal) programmatic demands." These demands constitute a democratic secular republic in all but name.

The demand for a democratic, secular, federal republic of Israel-Palestine (DSFR) is a revolutionary democratic demand. That this is a democratic demand should be more than obvious: 'Israel' here is a democratic Israel, not a Zionist Israel. It is a revolutionary demand because of the minimum condition that the existing Zionist republic and constitution must be abolished. More than this, it is the recognition of two nations and a rejection of the imperialist policy of a two-state solution.

There is no reason why the CPGB could not support the demand for an Israel-Palestine DSFR. If this were a debate with the Socialist Workers Party or the Socialist Party in England and Wales, this demand would contradict their general, economic version of Marxism. This is not the case with the CPGB, where this demand slots neatly into place like a missing piece in the party's political jigsaw of the world. The CPGB already calls for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, and a federal, secular republic of Israel-Palestine is a horse from the same stable. Hence trying to construct a case against it is like opposing your own 'natural' political self.

Hence Jack Conrad and Mike Macnair have given themselves the

impossible task of defeating the case they know makes sense. Jack says: "The 'secular federal republic' advocated by Steve Freeman ... now a little England republican socialist - is no more than a variation on the theme". Leaving aside the question of 'little England' versus 'greater England', the "secular federal republic" is no more than a variation on a CPGB theme.

Jack tries to claim that the federal republic is economism (ie, reformism and ultra-leftism). He says a federal republic is *on a par* with those economists who clutch at "protests, such as the anti-judicial reform movement and common economic struggles in Israel". This is like claiming the demand for a united Irish republic is equivalent to trade union demands for higher wages and civil rights or that Lenin's social democratic 'tribune of the people' is on a par with a trade union branch secretary.

This false equivalence allows Jack to connect the federal republic with "the likes of the AWL, CPB ... and various Labour left odds and sods" who "clutch at protests". Strikes and protests within the Zionist constitution are one thing, and not to be dismissed or sneered at. But a reformed Jewish Israel is like comparing chalk and cheese.

There is a second string to Jack's bow in the claim that a DSFR is impossible because the Zionist majority is conservative as a result of its material benefits. War puts people in the grip of fear and militaristic fascism. But it also upsets the apple cart or heightens the contradictions in society that make change almost inevitable.

Jack says: "In Israel-Palestine there is no overwhelming oppressed national majority. There is no threat of a revolutionary explosion. The odds are completely stacked in Israel's favour." There is, of course, the overwhelming oppressed nation of Palestine and an oppressed minority of Arab Israelis and a section of liberal Israelis seeing their future in Israel threatened by fascism and ultra-orthodox Jews being forced into the IDF. There is plenty of explosive alienation. Yet it is true that "The odds are completely stacked in Israel's favour" - or, more precisely, the Zionist state and its reactionary nationalist supporters. Jack's "odds stacked" against the oppressed does not mean *impossible*, but rather the need for a working class party to change the odds.

Jack objects to my statement that Zionism is "building up its own gravedigger in the Israeli-Palestinian working class" as a delusion.⁶ This is no delusion, but simply a misunderstanding of what I was arguing. Israel-Palestine is a very different economic space today than it was in 1950. Capitalism, technology and population have expanded and so have the Israeli-Palestinian working class. There is a much larger working class organised in some cases under advanced forms of capital. There are many millions more gravediggers in China and in Israel-Palestine today, with mechanical diggers instead of spades and shovels. This does not mean these workers will start digging, because, as Jack says, "in fact Zionism remains committed to keeping workers inside Israel structurally divided".

Ireland

Mike Macnair takes up cudgels against "the democratic federal republic of Israel and Palestine - one state and two nations" - by drawing a direct parallel between Israel-Palestine and

the partition of Ireland between the Irish republic and Northern Ireland. He says: "We have to ask whether comrade Freeman would equally urge on the Irish ... 'a federal republic of Loyalist and Nationalist - one state and two nations'." He delivers his *coup de grâce* by saying, "I rather doubt it; and if comrade Freeman is prepared to avow this policy for Ireland, I hope that it would serve to discredit his views".

Sorry to disappoint Mike here. The first point is that every national democratic question has specific features that do not mean we have to automatically transpose one 'solution' onto another nation. That said, working class democratic politics has some principles that guide us. I have always been in favour of British withdrawal from Ireland and thus an end to the British union.

Two nations

We can recognise two nations in Israel and Palestine, but not two nations in Ireland. A united Irish republic could take the form of a federal republic not because there are two nations, but as a means of bringing people from two parts of the Irish nation with different cultural traditions into one state. Hence the case for a united Irish federal republic is not predicated on the continuing existence of two nations, but on a political case for a peaceful unification of the Irish people in a transitional constitutional settlement.

There is an Irish nation, but not a Northern Irish nation. A section of those living in the north identify with the British nation. Loyalists have a British identity as being loyal to the British crown. British identity in Ireland is real enough, but contingent on the existence of the British state. A political decision by the British crown to withdraw from Ireland, Scotland or Wales would dissolve the British nation. Hence Mike's very idea of a federal republic of loyalists and nationalists makes no sense at all since, loyalism ends with the political act of British withdrawal.

As Marx and Lenin argued, a democratically centralised republic would be the best form for the working class majority to maximise its political influence. But a federal republic is better in some circumstances, because it can provide a means of bringing together a politically divided working class peacefully, with the minimum of communal violence, into one state.

In summary, there is a deep crisis of democracy and the threat of fascism in Israel and its practice in Palestine. The working class in both nations needs to unite in the fight for democracy against fascism and war. A democratic programme is necessary, as Moshé and Jack have recognised, for the majority of the two nations to unite against fascism.

The CPGB's long-standing recognition of the demand for a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales must now be applied to this political crisis and the objections against it are not valid ●

Notes

1. *Haaretz* August 14.
2. *Haaretz* August 12.
3. *Haaretz* August 14.
4. *Ibid*.
5. 'Searching for solutions' *Weekly Worker* July 4: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1498/searching-for-solutions.
6. 'Marching towards what solution?' *Weekly Worker* May 16: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1491/marching-towards-what-solution.
7. 'Minimum programme again' *Weekly Worker* June 27: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1497/minimum-programme-again.

TRANS ISSUES

Solidarity, not sectionalism

While communists want to abolish existing gender hierarchies, it does not follow that we should want to abolish gender as such. Mike Macnair responds to proposals for a communist programme on trans liberation

This article is a response to the exchange of letters in the *Weekly Worker* between Brunhilde O and Jack Conrad on the alleged absence of ideas for trans liberation in the Communist Party of Great Britain's current *Draft Programme* (July 25, August 1, August 22). Since they are also immediately pertinent to this issue, I also respond to Roxy Hall's *Ten theses on the gender question - revisited*, which has been published in June 2024 by *The Partyist* website, since *The Partyist* has made the issue of trans rights a point of difference with the CPGB; and to the Marxist Unity Group's February 2023 *Statement on trans liberation*.¹

I select these pieces for response because both *The Partyist* and the MUG are in some respects politically close to CPGB, as is the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (Australia), of which comrade Brunhilde O is a member - in particular, around partyism and the centrality of programme. There is utility in polemicising with people whose views are far-distant from your own (including the right). And there has been an enormous mass of leftist literature on the 'trans question' over the last 30 years, which contains at least useful discussions of theory and historical information, even though usually framed by the Eurocommunist anti-class and anti-materialist premises of the dominant left discourse. But there is some particular benefit to a discussion where there is substantial common ground on general politics.

Here the common ground, as I understand it, is that we agree on the need for a Communist Party - grounded not on agreement to some body of theory, but on a short, summary political programme. Secondly, we agree that the nature of the programme needed is maximum-minimum: that is, that it contains both an outline account of the goal of communism as a classless, stateless society and a body of immediate demands that are the minimum conditions on which the party would be prepared to enter government.

Thirdly, the central core of the minimum programme is democratic-republican in character; the economic and/or 'social' demands of the minimum programme are more adapted to local circumstances, but are generally aimed at *strengthening the position of the working class as a class* in a society that remains either capitalist or a 'mixed economy' under workers' political rule.²

In this context the issue is, first, what material on the trans liberation issue should be incorporated into the party's maximum or minimum programme? And, second, beyond that, should we be adopting a set of theses or a statement on the issue, as we have done on a number of issues where we think it appropriate to adopt formal positions, but not to incorporate them in the party programme?³

The several texts I propose to discuss in this article have this character. Comrade Brunhilde O's first letter put to us the relevant immediate demands contained in the RCO's *Road to workers' power* draft programme. Roxy Hall's *Ten theses* is largely a theoretical text, but certainly carries implications for programme (at least for the maximum programme). The MUG statement is precisely a public statement about the distinct issue. I will discuss each in turn, rather than attempting a thematic approach that might weave them together.



Number of radical youth who identify as trans has markedly grown

As I said in my series on trans rights issues last year,⁴ this article is *my personal view*, not a CPGB formal position. And it is to a considerable degree tentative. It tries to draw issues out of the articles studied: not, yet, to formulate a clear, positive line.

Theses?

I should begin by saying that, first, I do not think a major amendment to the CPGB *Draft programme* is appropriate. The reason for this will largely appear in my discussion of the RCO text that comrade Brunhilde O put to us. There is a real danger of over-specificity, and this is not just a matter of too much text, but of constructing the programme as a sort of intersectional coalition agreement based on the cumulation of the specific demands of specific groups. This latter approach is anti-solidaristic: not just in relation to trans, but equally in relation to women, racial minorities, and so on.

But, second, there is a significant case for us to try to draft theses or a public statement on the topic. The context for these views is, in essence, that down to 2017 trans rights was a pretty much acceptable liberal cause, with three positive US TV portrayals in 2015-16 (most notably *I am Cait* on the Republican former sporting figure, Caitlyn Jenner).⁵ In 2017 *Conservative* prime minister Theresa May proposed the reforms to gender recognition legislation that later became controversial.⁶

In the late 20-teens, however, US conservatives' recent defeats on race and sexuality led them to cast around for a new topic for a culture-war political wedge, and they hit on the issue of trans as a threat to women and to 'family life': whether in the form of trans women as 'actually men' in relation to sports and to single-sex facilities, or in that of gender-affirming medical treatment, especially of teenagers, as destroying fertility and leading to regrets.⁷ As a result, 'gender-critical feminists', or, to their opponents, 'trans-exclusionary radical feminists' (terfs) suddenly obtained a

mass-media platform that they had not previously had. The Murdoch press has been a major promoter of this culture-war operation in the UK.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the coin, there has been a marked increase in trans identification among radical youth. A 2023 UK study found a *general* rise in trans identification between 2000 and 2018, "from about one in 15,000 in 2000, to just over one in 2,500 in 2018", with the largest increase among those between 16 and 29.⁸ In the USA, a 2022 study finds significantly higher proportions of teenagers identifying as trans in recent years.⁹ Quinnehtukqut McLamore argued plausibly in January 2023 that this development was primarily a result of the removal of prior *obstacles* to trans identification, leading to understatement of numbers at the earlier period.¹⁰

The absolute numbers remain very small; but there is overrepresentation among *radical* youth. The explanation for this is *probably* that the late-20 teens turn to conservative culture-war operations round the issue has produced more general radicalisation among trans youth, in response to being targeted. But there certainly exist, and have existed since the 1990s, left trans rights activists who argue that gender transition is *in itself* an act of resistance against the capitalist patriarchy regime. This is a mistaken idea, like 1970s arguments that homosexuality was in itself an act of resistance, or the arguments of Pat Califia in the 1981 book *Samois* that BDSM activity could be in itself an act of resistance.

Our reluctance in the CPGB to taking formal positions on the issue came about at an earlier stage of this story: in the first two decades of the century, when the politics was not on a mass scale, and 'terf wars' appeared as a pure piece of 'intersectional' sectarianism among small groups of radicals, like 'cultural appropriation' and other forms of sub-western-soft-Maoist 'trashing' operations.

I think that the more recent

developments, taking the issues into mass politics, mean that we do have to try to formulate positions. In fact, I had hoped that comrades who disagreed would respond critically to my 2023 discussion series on trans rights issues, which might have progressed the discussion towards definite positions.

Instead, one comrade chose to split from us, insisting on no-platforming as a principle - and this demand for no-platforming remains a substantive issue of difference with *The Partyist*, who assert in their *Founding statement* that "The [*Weekly Worker*]'s editorial apathy towards allowance of transphobia and queerphobia in the journal is not only condemnable, but thoroughly brings it into disrepute".¹¹ I am not in this article going to defend the CPGB's position on the no-platforming issue. If it is not obvious to comrades by now that no-platforming 'terf hate speech' politically aids the imperialist state's (far more effective) efforts to no-platform anti-Zionists for 'anti-Semitic hate speech', it is unlikely that any polemic now will help.

RCO

Comrade Brunhilde O quotes trans-relevant demands from *The road to workers' power*, in section 3.8.8. 'Sexual and gender freedom':

- Full provision of healthcare for trans people, paid by the state. For community control over gender clinics, easy provision of hormones and access to medical support and advice. Expansion of youth gender clinics.

- For state protection of intersex individuals, and a prohibition on unnecessary 'corrective' surgeries on intersex children.

- State funding for fertility treatment. Full rights to adoption for queer families.

- Against any attempt to criminalise sex workers. For the self-organisation of sex workers to improve their conditions. Sex workers should have access to

specialised healthcare and other services to reduce the hazards of their work.

- Abolition of legal recognition of gender with regard to government documentation. The right to change name or identity to be made simple.

I should begin by observing that comrade Brunhilde in her second letter objects to Jack Conrad, in his letter, connecting trans rights to sexual freedom: "trans rights are not 'sexual freedom': they are an entirely separate issue". But the RCO itself makes the connection, in the section where it places the trans-relevant demands.

And it is impossible *not* to make the connection. First, because gender itself as a social practice is - however indirectly - connected with heterosexual conduct. Second, the right wing's culture-war operation is about trans women as a supposed sexual threat to cis women and about trans men (and less so, trans women) as tragically losing their fertility (and hence their parents' chances of grandchildren). Hence, to treat the *right to transition* as an entirely separate issue, while leaving standing the general public regulation of sexuality and reproduction, will inevitably fail to win mass support.

Turning to the specific demands, the first bullet point on health services largely duplicates what is already in section 3.8.2, 'Healthcare and social care', and in the CPGB's *Draft programme* in 3.9, 'Health'. Some differences arise from the fact that the NHS remains (so far) a tax-funded public health system, while the Australian system is a public-private, compulsory insurance-based system.

The major difference is "easy provision of hormones". The problem with this formulation is that it sounds like "easy provision of antibiotics" (overprescription of antibiotics is a notorious problem). The problem the formulation attempts to address is doctors using their authority as gatekeepers against trans people for religious or political reasons.

There is a problem of method here, which arises also in bullet point 3 (fertility treatment and adoption rights). In bullet point 3, the existing *law* allows fertility treatment, and adoption, by queer families, both in the UK and Australia. The practical problem, as with access to hormones, is that doctors and social workers are both prone to use their gatekeeping authority to promote christianist and conservative agendas - as are police officers and lawyers. The practice applies not only against trans people (and lesbians and gay men) but also against women (whether 'cis' or trans) and against racialised minorities. The slogan of "easy provision of hormones" attempts to address the *specific* problem of conservative abuse of power by professionals *against trans people*, while leaving standing the *general* problem of conservative abuse of power by professionals.

The second bullet point is a strong one after the comma: "a prohibition on unnecessary 'corrective' surgeries on intersex children". But what does "state protection of intersex individuals" mean? It appears on its face to be a demand for increased state repression of some sort, going beyond the second point. Communists do not in general place trust in the capitalist state to police backward ideas among the population. The fourth bullet point, on sex work, is substantially the same as the CPGB's *Draft programme*, except it omits the

point that “Measures must be put in place to give prostitutes wider social opportunities”. This addresses the fact that a great deal of sex work is a matter of economic necessity rather than free choice.

The fifth bullet point is excellent as to its first sentence: “Abolition of legal recognition of gender with regard to government documentation”. Far better than “gender recognition” legislation. The second sentence, though relevant in Australia, which has variant name-change rules affecting the Federal government and the states, is irrelevant in the UK, where legal name can be changed easily under existing law.

Hall

Roxy Hall’s *Ten theses* is a summary version of a complex theoretical argument about the gender issue. The first thesis - “Neither sex-essentialism nor gender-identitarianism offers a constructive path for a revolutionary account of gender” - is certainly correct, and the argument offered in support of it is broadly sound. I would offer only the minor point that the ‘sex-essentialist’ standpoint is not only concerned with “the social category of woman”, but also with the social category of man.

Thesis 2 asserts - also correctly - that “the question of gender is ultimately that of a social division of labour”. The argument in support is, however, much more problematic. To begin with,

With the emergence of the familial mode of social organisation, and thus patriarchy, reproduction and production are systematically disconnected, with this connection reaching its apex in capitalist societies. This produces interrelated but separate modes of production, and modes of reproduction.

This formula identifies a “familial mode of social organisation” that is undefined. It then projects back onto this “familial mode” phenomena specific to capitalism: that is, the separation of production and reproduction: the large bulk of production in ancient and feudal society is sited in the family household. It should, I guess, also be flagged that capitalist production, except insofar as it produces a social surplus product, is also reproduction.¹²

The text goes on to point out, correctly, the existence of a variety of ‘third gender’ positions in pre-capitalist societies. Missing are the episodically documented cases of biological women who lived as men and vice versa *outside* these ‘third gender’ frames, and on a larger scale, forms of ritual gender inversion in public festivals. But then it goes on to a most peculiar claim about the division of labour:

The forms of labour ascribed to each gender in contemporary capitalist societies are well documented (men dig, women weave, men build, women clean, men philosophise, women admire), but the core of the problem is not simply a division - it is a hierarchy. The labour of women is systematically undervalued and marginalised, reflecting its position as part of the secondary, ‘domestic’ sphere that is removed from public life.

This projects onto “contemporary capitalist societies” an *ancient Athenian* (upper class) sexual division of labour, and possibly the image of the suburban family of Victorian England or the 1950s USA, perhaps as theorised by Eli Zaretsky’s 1976 *Capitalism, the family and personal life*; comrade Hall also relies on Simone de Beauvoir’s 1949 *The second sex*, which starts from the analogous conditions of

mid-20th century France. It is wildly disconnected to today’s world of a heavily feminised workforce, with men having a higher unemployment rate.¹³

At the same time, it *omits* the fundamental basis of labour-market discrimination against women: that is, pregnancy and childcare. It is peculiar to analyse gender in terms of a division of labour (correct) in which women’s labour is downvalued (correct) and yet *leave out* the biological-social aspect that is central to this construct. There is a real risk that taking this approach gives hostages to fortune to the “gender-critical feminists”.

Moreover, is gender *in itself* hierarchy? I have referred before now to the argument of Camilla Power and Ian Watts that gender as distinct from biological sex *begins with* ritual gender inversion in hunter-gatherer society.¹⁴ Hunter-gatherer societies are the nearest approach known to a non-hierarchical or anti-hierarchical social order, and the ritual gender inversion they discuss is itself anti-hierarchical. Communists should, certainly, want to abolish gender hierarchies, but it is not clear that we should want to abolish gender play in this sense.

Thesis 3 is: “Gender is more than just identity, but identity plays a central role in its construction.” This formula is question-begging about what is “identity”, and this remains true in the argumentation, which deploys elements of Freudian psychoanalysis (“ego-ideal”) and of Althusser (“ideological interpellation”). I am not persuaded that this is operatively useful. The argument ends with the proposition that “ultimately people live as gendered agents, being gendered by society and their peers, and their condition is internalised through that process. We are all in the process of becoming gendered through our lives ...” That is to say, that gender is an aspect of social relations, which have to be analysed in their contradictory and hence dynamic aspects; and neither Freud, who makes claims about deep transhistorical human psychological structures on the basis of limited and questionable late 19th-early 20th century evidence, nor Althusser, whose foundational arguments are *against* a dynamic understanding (synchrony overdetermines diachrony) can provide method for this approach.

Thesis 4 is: “It is not possible to define gender in unitary terms, because it has no singular point of origin.” The argument offered is that gender is an abstraction, like ‘chair’ as a general class. This is true, but adds nothing to the argument (*all* theorisation involves abstraction).

Thesis 5 is that “The cult of ‘biological sex’ is itself a manifestation of gender ideology.” This is a half-truth and unhelpful. On the one hand, the conservative and ‘gender-critical feminist’ insistence that gender begins and ends with biological sex is obviously fatuous. In the case of *la plume de ma tante* (‘my aunt’s pen’), my aunt might be biologically female, but her pen has no more than an ascribed gender. From a different angle, in *Olive v Ingram* (1739) the question was whether a woman could be elected parish sexton, and whether women could vote in the election. Kettleby, the barrister for the defendant (the woman who claimed to have been elected) began his argument with the statement: “Though women are not allowed to wear breeches, it is to be hoped that their petticoats shall not be taken from them.”¹⁵ The gender rules about what men and women could do and wear stated in this argument are now wholly obsolete - with the exception that men wearing dresses remains dodgy to official society.

On the other hand, comrade Hall claims:

... in the relationship between sex

and gender (the sex-gender dyad) it is gender that overdetermines sex. For sex (meaning the sexed body) is regularly intervened in order to maintain a gendered world. Intersex conditions are ‘treated’ and the children that have them are ‘restored to normal’. Women around the world shave their legs and armpits, remove facial hair, and otherwise practice merciless beauty standards on themselves and others in order to perform to a standard of femininity necessary to be treated as proper women. Men modify their bodies, often with hormonal treatments, to better embody a masculine ideal. These interventions - leaving aside trans experiences - are clearly attempts to make the body conform to the ideal of gender: the body is sexed by gender, not the other way around.

These practices do not in the least show that “gender overdetermines sex”. What they show is that body modification is commonplace. With the exception of intersex conditions, the modifications listed are not about being “treated as proper women”, but about competition for sexual partners. Other gender-specific body modifications may be religious or due to medical fads (eg, male circumcision) or simply patriarchalist (female circumcision).

What follows is a polemic against gender-critical feminism’s commitments to biological sex, ending with a misconceived claim about “feminist revolution”:

The aim of the feminist revolution is not to reify and defend womanhood as a concept, or to uphold ‘females’ as a caste - just as it is not the role of the proletarian revolution to maintain and uplift the social category of ‘worker’. It is the role of the feminist revolution to break the chain of signification between the sexed body and the gender system, between certain genitals and certain kinds of work, between certain relations and certain ways of dressing, or living. That revolution is against biological sex as ideology, not in its defence.

This is a false analogy and an arbitrary conception of what counts as ‘feminism’. Certainly, in Marx’s conception of proletarian revolution the proletariat aims to abolish all classes and therefore itself as a class. The reason behind this is that the full emancipation of the proletariat as a class is only possible through superseding the wages system and with it the order of classes as such. But there is no equivalent political obligation on feminists, who claim *as such* only to defend the interests of women as a group, to abolish the differences between men and women. There can be and is conservative feminism, libertarian feminism, liberal feminism, radical and revolutionary feminism, ‘socialist’ (meaning Eurocommunist) feminism, and Marxist feminism, to name only some of the possibilities. None of the feminist trends have sought to abolish *women*, though some radical and revolutionary feminists imagined a tech breakthrough that could abolish *men*.

Thesis 6 is: “Women are the null-space within which resistance to gender germinates.” This draws on de Beauvoir, but adds nothing to the argument already made. Thesis 7 is: “Gender-rebels negate gender’s hierarchy.” I have already discussed this sort of argument briefly above: the same mistake as the idea that homosexuality *as such* was a rebellion against gender hierarchy, by virtue of the fact that homosexuals were targeted by gender-policing conservatives and so on.

Thesis 8 is: “Trans identitarianism is an obstacle to the abolition of gender.” Comrade Hall argues that “The project of constructing a fixed, politically palatable transgender identity, which is at best ignorant of, and at worst hostile to gender abolition, revolutionary feminism and psychoanalytic Marxism, is a project of liberal integration with the existing order.” That this is a project of liberal integration is certainly true. But I would argue that there are excellent reasons for rejecting “revolutionary feminism” (at least in the meaning this has traditionally had: that is, as a very radical form of separatism), and psychoanalytic Marxism (IMO an oxymoron). As I have argued above, the abolition of gender *hierarchy* is a proper aim; it is not clear that all gender is gender hierarchy. Thesis 9 is that “The meaningful existence of transgender people is self-evident”; this is obviously true.

Finally, Thesis 10 is: “Transfeminist Marxism does not seek to overturn women’s liberation, but to complete it.” Much of this is merely rhetoric; but the conclusion is:

the emancipation of women and queer people will come only when the proletariat can organise as a class to seize power and establish its class dictatorship so as to ensure the transition to a classless society - a society that must, by definition, be free of gendered hierarchies too.

For a revolutionary transfeminist Marxism, the abolition of gender itself is the only goal that makes sense. In such a revolutionary struggle, all old identities and categories will be broken apart, and new, emancipated humanity will take its place. The twilight of the patriarchs will be the triumph of queer liberation, and herald the coming of communism.

That the fundamental aim is general human emancipation and a classless society, and that this can only be achieved through proletarian power, is clearly correct. That this entails “the abolition of gender itself” depends on the analytical claim, in Thesis 2, that gender is *in itself* hierarchy.

MUG

The Marxist Unity Group’s *Statement on trans liberation* is a lot shorter. It begins with identifying the right’s campaign against transgender people, using both legislation and extra-legal terrorism. It goes on:

It is the Democratic Socialists of America’s duty as the vanguard of democratic revolution to fight for the liberties of transgender people. This means advocating for the self-defence of the community, for DSA representatives to put forward legislation protecting trans people, and for DSA to create programs supporting the needs of working-class LGBTQ communities.

The basic point here is plainly sound. But “advocating for the self-defence of the community” is hopeless in relation to a small minority group, not geographically concentrated, which is under attack. Certainly, the labour movement should defend trans people who are victimised by prosecution for self-defence against attacks. But the larger argument should surely be for the labour movement itself to organise defence of trans people against far-right pogromists.

The other two points - “to put forward legislation protecting trans people”, and “for DSA to create programs supporting the needs of working-class LGBTQ communities” are both valid, but far too indeterminate to draw a clear line.

The statement goes on to reject left support for conservative rhetoric on

the issue, and the separation of trans liberation from socialism. It asserts that, as I said earlier, trans people are “in the vanguard of every struggle”. It ends with a ringing declaration:

Liberty means the collective development of all human beings, free from domination. It consists of the power to do whatever does not injure another. It is the Promethean drive of humanity that pushes us beyond the limits seemingly set by nature, the arbitrary dogmas of religious bigotry, and the conservative gender norms of the bourgeois family. Under socialism, all of us will be free to alter our bodies as we see fit, no longer bound by property, patriarchy and the tyranny of the state.

The grandiose aspiration for socialism (communism) expressed here is to be celebrated, as is Roxy Hall’s call for a society free of gendered hierarchies. They are great examples of what thinking with the maximum programme can allow.

I would be a little more cautious about the limits set by nature, since with human-induced climate change we are running hard up against the natural limits on our activities. And I would add that communism will free us not only from “property, patriarchy and the tyranny of the state”, but also from the various fetishisms created by generalised commodity production. The result is that it is probably as hard for us today to identify what we will *want* in full communism as it would be for radicals of the 1500s to imagine 19th century Britain.

We should be bold in aspiring to the liberation of trans people, and to the overthrow of sex and gender hierarchy in general. At the same time, we should be careful in promoting a politics of solidarity - not a politics of sectionalism ●

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Notes

1. thepartyist.com/2024/06/02/ten-theses-on-the-gender-question-revisited; MUG statement, linked at www.marxistunity.com/statements.
2. I am less than entirely clear that this last point is common ground; it is not made so explicitly in MUG, RCO or *Partyist* texts online.
3. communistparty.co.uk/resources/theses-resolutions.
4. ‘Devolution non-recognition’ *Weekly Worker* February 2 2023; ‘Clearing the ground’, February 9; ‘Moving towards the positive’, February 16; ‘Gender, class and capitalism’, February 23; ‘Effective collectivity is key’, March 2; ‘Tailism cannot deliver’, March 9.
5. There is, of course, a more complex story here. Wikipedia has a useful outline discussion with references to more in-depth literature: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_portrayals_of_transgender_people.
6. ‘Theresa May plans to let people change gender without medical checks’ *The Guardian* October 18 2017.
7. www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/10/23/christian-right-tips-fight-transgender-rights-separate-t-lgb; and useful reporting of Terry Schilling, president of the conservative think tank, ‘American Principles Project’, at abcnews.go.com/US/culture-wars-identity-center-politics-america/story?id=100768380 (July 7 2023).
8. www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2023/nov/increase-number-people-identifying-transgender-uk.
9. JL Herman, AR Flores and KK O’Neill *How many adults and youth identify as transgender in the United States? : williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Trans-Pop-Update-Jun-2022.pdf*.
10. aeon.co/essays/the-real-reason-why-theresa-a-global-rise-in-trans-youth.
11. thepartyist.com/2024/06/02/the-founding-statement-of-the-partyist.
12. Besides a variety of references in *Capital* see, for example, the recent article by PM Rey-Araujo: ‘Social reproduction theory and the capitalist “form” of social reproduction’ *New Political Economy* Vol 29 (2024), pp432-46.
13. On women in the workforce globally: ourworldindata.org/female-labor-supply; for the UK: www.statista.com/statistics/280236/unemployment-rate-by-gender-in-the-uk.
14. ‘First gender, wrong sex’ in HL Moore, T Sanders and B Kaare (eds) *Those who play with fire* London 1999, chapter 4.
15. *Modern Reports* Vol 7, p263, in *English Reports* Vol 87, p1230.

DEBATE

Historical and methodological differences

Because revolutions have failed, that does not mean they were bound to fail. Steve Bloom continues his exploration of revolutionary strategy and history

This is the companion article I promised in my submission titled 'In search of a synthesis',¹ which focuses on one strategic disagreement I have with Mike Macnair, but in a context of considerable convergence on other matters relating to revolutionary strategy.

Here we will focus on some of the historical and methodological issues on which Mike and I disagree - these are quite extensive. I once again want to stress at the outset, therefore, that our general convergence on a range of *strategic* and *programmatic* questions remains central in my view. This is the context in which I undertake this historical investigation. The ability of people with historical and theoretical disagreements to converge on questions of programme and strategy is, or should be, decisive in terms of finding unity in common revolutionary organisations.

The points I raise here, extensive as they are, by no means exhaust the difficulties I have with Mike's exposition in his book titled *Revolutionary strategy*.² They do, however, cover what to me seem like the most important points - with two exceptions that we will simply note at the end.

1. Expiration

What was the expiration date of the Russian Revolution? Mike writes:

In 1917 the Bolsheviks led the soviets to take political power - a gamble on the Russian Revolution triggering a generalised socialist revolution in central and western Europe. The gamble failed. In all probability, it had already failed by January 1918. At that point it was clear that Red Guards and fraternisation attempts were unable to stop the renewed German advance, let alone trigger the German revolution. As a result the March 1918 treaty of Brest-Litovsk destroyed both majority support for the Bolshevik government in Russia, and any serious prospect of a German revolution before the military victory of the Entente powers on the western front. Certainly it had failed by 1921. (pp8-9)

And then:

Once the gamble on the European revolution had failed by 1921, the outcome which actually materialised - the bureaucratic dictatorship, itself irreversibly on the road back to capitalism, and standing as a road-block against the working class taking power in the central capitalist countries - was by a long way the most probable outcome of the Bolsheviks' decision to attempt to hold on to political power. (p10)

See point 4 below regarding the question of historical gambles. Here I will focus on the date 1921, which Mike relies on throughout his book as the basis for an assessment of subsequent events. His conclusion - that the obituary of the Russian Revolution could have been written by 1921 - runs like a thread through his entire analysis.

But give me the victory of the Spanish revolution, which was not definitively defeated until 1939, and I will assert that the entire history of the world, including of the USSR - in the process of degeneration, yes, but of a degeneration that was still reversible - would almost surely have turned out differently. In the 1920s and 30s



Kamenev, Lenin, Trotsky celebrate second anniversary of revolution: was everything already lost?

there were revolutionary events in Germany, France, Britain, Italy and elsewhere. Give me a revolutionary victory in any one of these struggles and I can make the same statement.

So, no, the USSR was not "irreversibly on the road back to capitalism" by 1921, not even 'most probably' on that road. Mike commits the common fallacy of mistaking the beginning of a process for its conclusion - something that is easy for us to do when we already know the conclusion. I will insist, however, that the degeneration of the USSR to the point where even the Stalinist remnants of 1917 were overthrown was far from a *fait accompli* in 1921.

I will also dispute Mike's assertion that "the March 1918 treaty of Brest-Litovsk destroyed ... majority support for the Bolshevik government in Russia". The victory of the new revolutionary power in the civil war that raged from 1918 to 1921 totally contradicts this assessment. A victory in this civil war would have been impossible, had the Bolshevik government been unable to maintain and, more importantly, actively mobilise massive popular support from the workers and peasants of the USSR during this period.

2. Method

Let us now deal with questions of method; first, hindsight and the bridge-collapse analogy. Mike acknowledges that his entire assessment is based on historical hindsight:

The use of hindsight is justifiable and necessary, because the point of the whole exercise is to study history for what it can tell us about where we are now, how we got here and where we should (try to) go next. In this sense it is loosely analogous to the sort of exercise that has to be undertaken if a bridge falls down. Why did the bridge fall down? If it was hit by a meteorite, we may well rebuild it in exactly the same form. But if the collapse was caused by problems which will predictably recur in future (like severe storms or an increased weight of traffic), we should redesign the bridge, in the light of hindsight, to meet these problems. The fact that the problems which caused the collapse may not have been originally predictable affects

the moral responsibility of the original designers, but it does not in the least alter our present tasks. (p20)

This is OK so far as it goes, but like any analogy it has its limits. Mike acknowledges this when he uses the word "loosely". But he then far exceeds the actual limits of his 'loose' analogy, writing as if he is indeed an engineer designing a new bridge, able to assess the collapse of the old one with pinpoint precision. Let us consider a few difficulties with this approach:

■ When a bridge collapses due to weather or increased traffic, there is, most likely, a single design flaw that can be identified and corrected. When a revolution fails, there is a complex of multiple and interconnecting factors to blame.

■ Similarly, when we design a bridge, every aspect of that design is under our control. When we make revolution there is only a very limited number of elements that we control. Most of the process unfolds in ways that no-one can control.

■ A steel girder of a certain specification will behave exactly the same way in every bridge we might want to construct. By contrast no two countries are equal to each other in terms of their social formation, their histories of struggle, their relationships with other nations, etc.

■ When we construct a bridge, we know what the final result will look like before we begin. When we make revolution, however, we cannot foresee what tomorrow is going to look like. We may begin with a design in mind, but our design will have to be adjusted constantly, even as we are in the process of construction. Thus we need a method that prepares us for designing on the fly, not one that attempts to generate a neat and self-contained blueprint for revolution in advance.

■ Mike does not place a moral blame on those who held onto power in the USSR after 1921, who built the Comintern and, later, the Trotskyist movement in an effort to maintain/expand the Russian Revolution and who, in his judgment, got the fundamental principles of bridge construction wrong. But he does hold them politically responsible. That is much the same thing in my judgment.

Our historical hindsight regarding political processes is not at all like engineering hindsight after a bridge collapses. Any conclusions we draw about future expectations/actions must be far more qualified. Yet Mike draws absolute and sweeping generalisations from his hindsight, which are completely unwarranted. It is this, not the use of hindsight *per se*, that leads to a series of historical and methodological mistakes in my judgment.

3. Potential

Next we have the historical potential for political revolution in the USSR. Mike writes:

Under the Soviet-style bureaucratic regimes there was no objective tendency towards independent self-organisation of the working class. Rather, there were episodic explosions; but, to the extent that the bureaucracy did not succeed in putting a political cap on these, they tended towards a pro-capitalist development. The strategic line of a worker revolution against the bureaucracy - whether it was called 'political revolution', as it was by the orthodox Trotskyists, or 'social revolution' by state-capitalism and bureaucratic-collectivism theorists - lacked a material basis. (p7)

The material basis for the strategic concept of political revolution in the USSR was twofold:

(a) The power of the mass mobilisation that had been central to the Russian Revolution itself in 1917. This remained alive through the 1920s and 30s, even the 40s and 50s, when the generation that made the revolution was alive and very much a factor in social life. I would suggest that this power was still alive even until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, though in a weaker and weaker form as time passed.

(b) The historical tendency of human beings to rebel against oppressive regimes.

Stalin understood the power of these two material factors quite well, especially point (a), which is why he erected the Gulag and a secret police apparatus specifically targeted, at least initially, against those who had been active participants in 1917. Think of the Moscow Trials of 1938, in which

the overwhelming majority of the Bolshevik Central Committee that helped to lead the October Revolution was framed up and executed, thereby neutralising these individuals as a nucleus around which an opposition to Stalin's rule could develop.

And, while it is a relatively minor point, let us note that the "episodic explosions" Mike refers to were not "capped" by the bureaucratic regime - a word that implies cooptation or having their immediate demands met. They were, rather, suppressed with Soviet tanks and/or a massive police-state repression.

An empirical look at the actual history also fails to sustain Mike's assertion that such rebellions against bureaucracy "tended towards a pro-capitalist development". Neither the Hungarian uprising in 1956 nor the Prague Spring in 1968 - the two most important of these "explosions" - represented "pro-capitalist" developments. They were consciously revolutionary socialist. Even into the 1970s opposition voices continued to be heard within the USSR which counterposed a democratic pro-socialist perspective to Stalinism. The one major event which definitively moved in a pro-capitalist direction came quite late, in Poland, with the rise of Solidarność. Even here, however, although this formation ended up as a major tool in the process of capitalist restoration, a struggle with consciously pro-socialist voices was required before that outcome could be achieved.

4. Lessons

What lessons can we properly draw from historical gambles that fail? Mike writes: "Given the failure of the gamble, the Trotskyist account does not explain why any attempt to repeat a revolution in the image of 1917 would not end in the same way" (p9). And then:

The 'victory of the Russian Revolution' on its own, or the course of the revolution after late 1917-early 1918, can no longer be taken as evidence for Bolshevik strategy as a package. What it led to was not a strategic gain for the world working class, but a 60-year impasse of the global workers' movement and the severe weakness of this movement at the present date. (p10)

Mike's assessment that the Bolshevik revolution was a historical gamble which failed is indisputable. His conclusion - that this failure proves the gamble was a political mistake from which we can generalise no useful lessons for the future - is not.

Before the colony of St Augustine (1565) and Jamestown (1607) were founded, all initial attempts of Europeans to colonise North America failed. Following Mike Macnair's method of analysis, the failure of these first attempts should have caused others to conclude that the very concept of colonising North America was fatally flawed and ought never to be tried again.

Suppose slaves in Haiti had consulted Mike Macnair about whether they should revolt in 1791. If they followed the logic he suggests they would, surely, have taken a look at centuries of failed slave revolts, been unable to see any reason why theirs "would not end in the same way", and concluded that such an undertaking would not be prudent.

(What, by the way, is the "material basis" for slave revolts, since there is no "objective tendency towards

independent self-organisation” of slaves? The answer is, of course, the same one that we gave in terms of the “material basis” for political revolution above. There is a *subjective* tendency toward the self-organisation of slaves: the inborn tendency of human beings to rebel against enslavement.)

Every revolution, or attempted revolution, is a gamble. Most of these gambles fail. The Paris Commune was another revolutionary gamble that failed. Che and Fidel succeeded with their revolutionary gamble in Cuba, but Che then failed with the same gamble in Bolivia, and tens of thousands perished in the failed effort to duplicate the Cuban success elsewhere in Latin America. This is the flipside of understanding that we cannot declare all gambles of a particular type wrong because the first one failed. In this case we cannot declare all gambles of a particular type correct because the first one succeeded.

The question of whether a particular historical gamble is strategically justified depends on the odds. This is obvious if we consider gambles of a different type. Let us say there is a lottery with a prize of \$1 million. Whether it is right or wrong to buy a \$1 ticket depends on the odds. If the odds are 10 million to one, then it is a fool's choice. If the odds are a million to one then it is even money. If the odds are 100 to one then you should enter every time, even though you will still lose your bet 99 times out of 100.

In my judgment the odds for the gamble the Bolsheviks took in 1917 were far closer to 100 to one in a million dollar lottery than they were to 10 million to one. It was correct to take the gamble, even though this happened to be one of the 99 times out of 100 when the gamble failed to pay off.

And then there are the historical gambles that are taken simply because the pressure cooker of social oppression decides this is the moment when things explode, when the oppressed classes rebel (because that is what they have to do at the moment) without ever stopping to calculate the odds - and, by the way, without asking permission from whatever conscious revolutionary political forces might exist. That, too, is an experience history has gone through over and over again, sometimes even leading to a revolutionary success (once again we can point to Haiti).

What conscious revolutionaries do during such moments cannot guarantee that there will be a success despite the odds. But we should still do whatever we can to increase the potential for success, because revolutionaries who fail to act in this way have discarded any hope of ever influencing masses of people in the future. Those masses who, on their own and without consulting first, make the choice to gamble will simply discard any and all ‘revolutionaries’ who fail to join their revolt.

Mike may object to everything I say in this section by asserting that the difficulty he cites is not so much the initial gamble of 1917 as it is the decision of the Bolsheviks to hold onto power after 1921. Leaving aside the deep historical irony of a choice by the Bolsheviks to give up power immediately after winning a traumatic civil war to maintain it, I can only refer you to points one and three above.

5. Soviets

In my previous article I promised to revisit Mike's characterisation of the slogan, ‘All power to the soviets’ as ‘illusory’ (p119). This, too, is an essential building block of his entire historical analysis. The approach is summed up in the following passage:

Subsequent history confirms this judgment. Workers' councils and similar forms have appeared in many strike waves and revolutionary crises since 1917. In none have these forms been able to offer an alternative centre of authority, an alternative decision-making mechanism for the whole society. This role is unavoidably played by a government - either based on the surviving military-bureaucratic state core, or on the existing organisations of the workers' movement ... The point is simply that the problem of decision-making authority is not solved by the creation of workers' councils arising out of a mass strike movement. (p44)

The choice should not, however, be formulated as being between soviet power *or* power exercised by political parties. What is needed is soviet power *and* power exercised by parties. Both elements are essential.

It is true that workers' councils do not, by their mere emergence, solve the problem of a decision-making authority. This is precisely the difficulty that the slogan, ‘All power to the soviets’, is designed to address. The slogan is *premised* on the idea that “this role is unavoidably played by a government”, and it therefore calls on the workers' councils to become the governmental form *through which* “the existing organisations of the workers' movement” can then “solve the problem of decision-making authority”.

Indeed, if we do not have a new governmental form, if we are talking simply about one or another of “the existing organisations of the workers' movement” solving the question of power *without* a new governmental form, it is hard for me to see how we avoid ‘All power to the Communist Party’ as the outcome - a solution Mike refers to as “empty” in the same sentence on p119, where he characterises ‘All power to the soviets’ as “illusory”. In this case I essentially agree with Mike's characterisation.

Mike also talks about another aspect that we should consider in relation to his assertion about the “illusory” nature of Soviet power: “Almost as soon as the Bolsheviks had taken power, they were forced to move from a militia to a regular army, and with it came logistics and the need for a state bureaucracy” (pp36-37).

But “the need for a state bureaucracy”, and even a standing army, is not in contradiction to “soviet power” any more than the need for a state bureaucracy and standing army in the USA is in contradiction to the constitutional power of the president and Congress. These things are, rather, the means through which the president and Congress exercise their power. Yes, our image of a proletarian revolution would dispense with the standing army at least, and rely on a militia.

If this is your response to what I just wrote, then please go back and reread point 2 above. Making revolution is not like building a bridge. Our blueprint changes, based on the actual experience as the revolution is in the process of construction. And it turned out that in the USSR after 1917 the construction of a standing army proved to be necessary.

The outcome Mike describes in terms of a declining soviet power in Russia after October 1917 was not the result of some inherent weakness in the idea of ‘All power to the soviets’. The specific conditions that imposed themselves on the new Soviet republic when the German revolution failed to materialise and come to its aid are what led to the state bureaucracy and standing army coming to *dominate* the soviets rather than the other way around. There is no basis for the kind of generalisation about what soviet

power does and does not represent theoretically *simply* because of this *specific* historical result.

6. Tactics

We need to think about the question of strategy and tactics. In my last article I wrote:

Mike is using the term ‘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’ ...

If we remain cognisant of the fact that, when the word ‘strategy’ is used by proponents of the mass strike, they are not using that term 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.

I am now thinking that this relationship might be reformulated more productively as follows: There are two interconnected aspects to a revolutionary strategy:

- (1) Creating a party that can grow to reflect a large minority sentiment for ‘extreme democracy’.
- (2) Merging that minority party with a social majority that begins to demand the redress of grievances, thereby generating a governmental crisis which allows us to engineer the actual insurrectionary moment, displacing the old state and replacing it with the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Mike has focused intelligently on part one of that strategy. But part two remains undertheorised in his approach. What we need is a rounded revolutionary strategy that accounts theoretically for both elements.

Our conclusion remains essentially the same: the ‘mass strike’, ‘dual power’, ‘All power to the soviets’ (all elements of the solution to problem number 2) need to be understood in the context of a broader strategic synthesis, not rejected because by themselves they fail to solve problem number 1.

7. Context

We need to place historical developments in their contemporary context. In this section we will consider three developments that unfolded during the 1920s and 30s: the early years of the Comintern, the emergence of the Trotskyist movement and (connected to the emergence of Trotskyism) the founding of the Fourth International in 1938.

Mike looks at each of these through the lens of his understanding that 1921 constituted a definitive and indisputable expiration date for the revolutionary potential that began with 1917. If we want to properly assess this history, however, we have to do so based on the reality that everything the Comintern and the Trotskyist movement did was premised by precisely the opposite appreciation of the period through which they themselves were living: that during the 1920s and 30s there was an ongoing potential for world revolution.

Any political disagreement we develop today with those who were active then has to be rooted in an appreciation of why they made the choices they did. Their actions were

a direct response to the revolutionary times through which they believed themselves to be living.

Firstly, Comintern. Mike's primary critique is that Comintern's establishment represented an incorrect codification of the split in the international workers' movement that took place in 1914: “The idea of the split itself ... started with the notion that organisational separation from the right, and the creation of a new type of International and a new type of party, would immunise the workers' movement against repeating the right's betrayals” (p60).

He adds:

This argument seeks a strategic split in two senses. On the one hand, the strategy of the regenerated movement is to be ‘revolutionary’ and not ‘reformist’. On the other, it is a strategic break from the Second International's strategy of unity, discussed in chapter one. It is, indeed, the exact opposite. By splitting from the right, the left, which represents the working class, is to *purge the workers' parties of opportunists*, to purify itself and ‘regenerate’ socialism as ‘revolutionary’”. (p80, emphasis in original)

And: “The idea that the workers' movement can be purified from ‘reformism’/‘social chauvinism’ by separation of the ‘revolutionaries’/‘internationalists’ is illusory.” (p81)

Mike is especially critical of the 21 “Conditions of admission to the Communist International”, adopted in 1920. But we cannot properly judge these 21 conditions unless we place the entire effort they represented, including the founding of the Communist International itself, in a context of the genuinely revolutionary times that the world was living through in the year 1920 - and continued to live through for the next two decades. Whatever the weaknesses of individual points - and Mike is right that some did attempt, incorrectly, to theorise what were in fact immediate pragmatic measures taken to maintain a Bolshevik government in the USSR - his overall critique is wrong, because he fails to understand that during these revolutionary times it was at least *reasonable* to attempt to build a genuinely revolutionary international. The goal was not to

“purify” the revolutionary movement or “immunise” it against reformism: it was, simply, to build an *explicitly* revolutionary formation when doing that mattered, or at least seemed to matter, because making revolution was an immediate practical possibility in much of Europe.

Let us consider one example of how Mike's failure to view the political approach of the Comintern in the context of the genuinely revolutionary times its founders believed themselves to be living through leads him to totally misunderstand a fairly simple and straightforward statement:

The most fundamental misunderstanding appears at the very beginning of the Comintern thesis. In some countries “the position of bourgeois society is particularly unstable and ... the balance of forces between the workers' parties and the bourgeoisie places the question of government on the order of the day as a practical problem requiring immediate solution”. In reality, in parliamentary regimes every general election poses the question of government - and every general round of local elections also poses it, since it indicates the electoral relationship of forces between the parties at national level. (In presidential regimes the question of government is formally only posed in presidential elections, but is indirectly posed in elections to the legislature). (p118)

The Comintern is posing the question of which *class* will be in control of the government (“the balance of forces between the workers' parties and the bourgeoisie”). Macnair tells us that this is equivalent to the far more mundane question of which *party representing the bourgeoisie* will be in control of the government - the actual question posed “in parliamentary regimes [by] every general election”.

In part 2 of this article we will continue our assessment of the revolutionary movement during the 1920s and 30s in the context of these revolutionary times ●

Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* August 15: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1502/in-search-of-a-synthesis.
2. M Macnair *Revolutionary strategy: Marxism and the challenge of left unity* London 2008.

Fighting fund

See us through!

With, as I write, three days still to go in August, we are now just £137 short of our monthly £2,250 fighting fund target. In other words, so far £2,113 has been donated to the *Weekly Worker* by our readers and supporters.

Thanks this week go to US-based comrade AP for his £100 cheque, to comrades LM (£80), GT (£35), JT (£25), AB (£20) and TT (£6) for their bank transfers/standing orders, as well as DB (£50) and EG (£6) for their monthly PayPal contributions - not to mention comrade Hassan for the fiver handed to one of our team.

I must say, however, that the £326 received in total over the last seven days is a little disappointing - quite a bit below the going rate for a single week. So now we need you to play your part over the next three days to see us through. The best, most efficient way is by bank transfer: please use our account details below to make one - preferably on Thursday or Friday (that way, it will definitely

be registered in our account before the end of the month). Alternatively, go to our website to donate via PayPal (details also below).

Whichever way you choose, we need to receive your donation by Saturday August 31. Please don't disappoint me - or, more importantly, the *Weekly Worker* team. I can't stress how committed each and every one of them are to our central aim: the building of a single, principled party uniting the entire Marxist left on a democratic basis. What the working class is sorely missing and so much needs!

With your help we can get the £137 we still need - or hopefully more! - in the last three days of the month ●

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

ENERGY

Nuclear power's useful idiots

Advocates claim that nuclear power is essential if humanity is to enjoy a life of abundance and nature is to have room to flourish. But, says **Jack Conrad**, that is falling for a big lie

Emil Jacobs' article in the last issue of *Weekly Worker* reads like a puff piece commissioned by the nuclear industry's hoodwinkers and bamboozlers association.¹ Indeed, he writes about 'we', 'us' and 'our', as if present-day society was not split, not cleaved, into antagonistic classes.

In that spirit of 'we', 'us' and 'our' - by which he appears to mean the Netherlands - the comrade indulges in liberalistic special pleading on behalf of Africa, as an undifferentiated continent, as an object of charitable pity. Crucially, he promises that the nuclear power industry - that is, BHP, EDF, Cameco, Westinghouse, TEPCO and other such capitalist transnationals - can deliver to 'us' "geopolitical energy independence". In short, the nationalist's dream of autarchy.

There is, true, a grander vision. The nuclear industry, not the class struggle, not global working class revolution, will liberate humanity from poverty and deliver a life of abundance to all ... and, yes, of course, leave "room" for nature to flourish. In other words, we have yet another sorry example of the techno-worship hawked around by 'left' accelerationists such as Nick Land, Mark Fisher, Paul Mason, Nick Smicek and Aaron Bastani.

However, as well as the Jacobs carrot there is the Jacobs stick. We are apocalyptically warned: reject the nuclear power industry, and not only do you leave Africa in poverty, there is the "peril" of failing to deal with climate change. So supporting the nuclear industry, urging it on technically, excusing its many failures, belittling the dangers and echoing its promise of delivering "thousands of highly paid and secure jobs for local communities" is presented as the duty of communists.

Yet ours is a party of extreme opposition. The role of communists is to actively encourage *distrust*, when it comes to the existing state, its constitution, its institutions, its ideology ... and, not least when it comes to the UK, its strategically important industries, such as defence, banking and energy. The nuclear industry, of course, straddles and combines defence (ie, weapons of mass destruction) with energy. Hence, we are obliged to expose the truth about the nuclear industry, not peddle lies, provide excuses, let alone constitute ourselves as advocates (useful idiots).

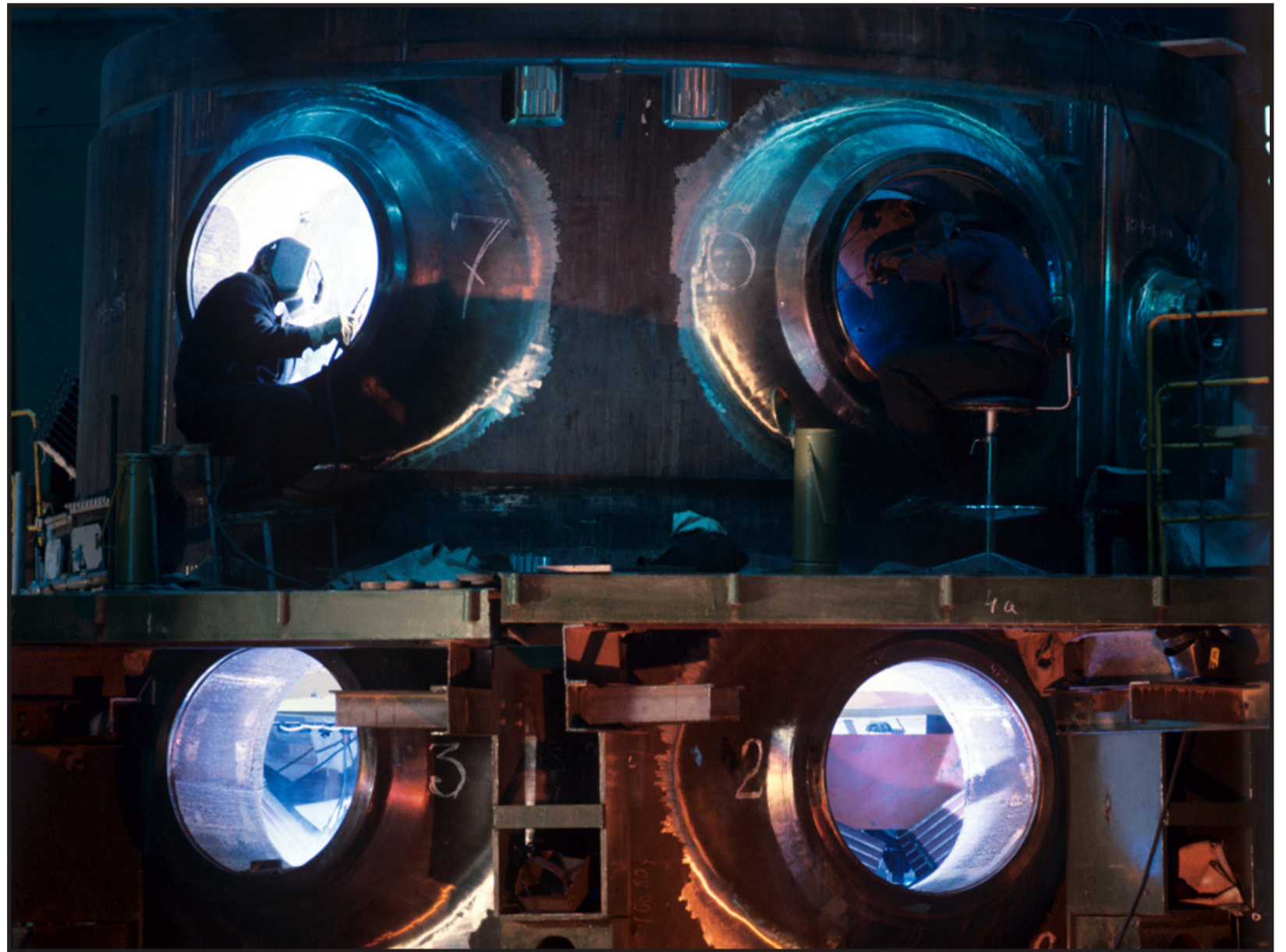
To be frank - and when it comes to friends we must be frank - what we find in comrade Jacobs' article amounts to a crime against communism and our whole approach to the class enemy.

What we want

Somewhat oddly, comrade Jacobs opens his article by saying that it is "unclear what it is that he [Jack Conrad] does want". Leave aside my modestly successful pamphlet, *The little red climate book* (2023): the CPGB has its *Draft programme* and it contains two sections, which comrade Jacobs ought to know pretty well. Firstly, '1.4 Nature', and secondly, '3.3 Environmental crisis'. The first is a statement of our basic principles. The second lists our immediate demands:

- Rapidly transition away from coal, oil, gas and nuclear power towards wind, tidal, solar, geothermal and other renewables.

- Reduce energy demand: bring home and work closer together, support workers who want flexible working arrangements; encourage online meetings, cycling, walking and staycations; introduce free local and



Working on reactor interior at Atommash

urban public transport; discourage the consumption of meat and dairy products; put limits on air travel and car use; ensure that the existing housing stock is radically upgraded and exacting building standards are enforced; impose swingeing taxes on big-scale polluters.

- Aim to go beyond carbon neutral as soon as possible.

- Where feasible, rewild: forests, natural floodplains, marshes, fens and heath land should be re-established. Strive to reintroduce the full array of native flora and fauna. Grouse moors, deer-stalking estates and upland sheep runs would be prime targets for returning to nature.

- Concrete jungles, urban sprawl, using rivers and seas as common sewers, huge farms and intensive meat and dairy production result in substantial damage to the biosphere. Nationalise the land and waterways.

- Towns and cities should be full of trees, roof gardens, planted walls, allotments, wild parks and small-scale cooperative farms.

- Destructive fishing practices such as bottom trawling should be banned. Inshore seas must include wide no-catch areas. The aim should be to fully restore marine life and thus create a sustainable fishing industry.

Perfectly clear, one would have thought.

He also says that my 'Delusions of techno-fix' article is "riddled with problems", by which he presumably means that he disagrees with us programmatically. If that is the case, that is exactly what he should say. Specifically in this case, he proposes a transition to *nuclear* as rapidly as circumstances allow.

The comrade advances two main arguments: firstly, cutting carbon

emissions; secondly - and flatly in contradiction with that urgent aim - he envisages humanity "as a whole" needing "clean energy, and lots [more?] of it". Maybe not a doubling of energy usage, which is what will happen if current trends continue till 2060 (ie, a total of 366,000 terawatt-hours). But, either way, his reasoning is very conventional, very growth-oriented.

Thankfully, comrade Jacobs appears to reject the coal-based China model of development for Africa. He is unclear. After all, he says that not allowing Africa to copy China is "social imperialism in a new jacket". Rationally, however, there are very good reasons for avoiding the China model. If it were to happen - unlikely, given that we have, not one centralised state, but over 50, each originally diced and sliced by the rival European colonial powers - the result would be climate disaster. The planet would crash through a whole series of tipping points and head inexorably towards 2°C, 2.5°C, 3°C above pre-industrial temperatures.

Nonetheless, comrade Jacobs sets himself implacably against advocates of degrowth (some of its ideologues, apparently, crazily demand a 95% drop in consumption²). But there is, surely, degrowth and degrowth.

As socialism (the first stage of communism) develops, the associated producers will, surely, degrow whole industries and radically change how life is organised. Comrade Jacobs himself writes about how energy generation can be made massively more efficient. And I am sure we agree that arms production will go entirely, along with advertising, insurance, prisons, the courts and the police. So would banking, the car economy and

urban sprawl. Individual consumption would surely undergo a fundamental alteration too. Expanding needs for high-quality housing, health, education and culture - though dismissed as "run-of the mill" by comrade Jacobs - can, with sufficient effort, be met globally.

Instead of endless novelties and the aping of kitsch celebrity culture, the emphasis shifts to enriching human relationships. Fundamentally, that is what we communists mean by abundance. Original communism, dating back 200,000 years and more, rested on material abundance, but was maintained by a militant egalitarianism. In other words, for us, social relationships, not technology, not energy output, are the main determinant.

System change

Comrade Jacobs claims, for some reason, that we advocate our own 'techno-fix' when it comes to the climate crisis. True, amongst our minimum demands there is, as listed above, the call for transitioning away from coal, oil, gas and nuclear power and going towards wind, tidal, solar, geothermal and other renewables.

Why? Coal is a killer, when it comes to both mining and air pollution - 32.72 deaths per terawatt-hour from brown coal. Equally oil, albeit a little less so - 18.43 deaths per TWh.³ Then there are the greenhouse emissions and the resulting global warming. Nuclear power is certainly a clean technology when it comes to generating electricity - there is no doubt about that. But it is hugely expensive, bound up with the arms industry and is potentially catastrophic in the event of accidents (which always happen). However, even if it were possible to fully

transition to 100% wind, tidal, solar, geothermal and other renewables - not likely - there remains capitalism and its manic compulsion to accumulate.

In other words, M-C-M' and *endlessly* producing more and more stuff (commodities) and therefore more and more CO₂. No, the fix for the climate crisis has to be social. To stop the rise in atmospheric CO₂ requires a whole raft of draconian measures that run against the logic of capitalism. To reach and go beyond carbon neutral, as we must, means transitioning away from capitalism, first and foremost by winning the battle for democracy.

Comrade Jacobs devotes most of his article to trying to show that solar and wind power is expensive, almost as expensive as nuclear. He even manages to put nuclear into the "same ballpark" when it comes to MWh by including 'firming costs', which reflect the "additional capacity needed to supplement the net capacity of the renewable resource".⁴ In other words, what do solar and wind cost when the sun is not shining and the wind is not blowing? Other sources such as coal, oil, gas and nuclear have to be included in the mix.

In that case, the consultancy firm Lazard puts solar "at between \$126 and \$141 per MWh, and wind at \$115 to \$132 per MWh". Well, yes, when it comes to the California Independent System Operator. But why not cite Thailand's SSP? Lazard does. Its costs are somewhat lower: solar between \$42 and \$60 and wind between \$30 and \$55.⁵ Meanwhile, again yes, Lazard puts the unsubsidised cost of nuclear at the \$141 - quoted by the comrade. However, it also gives a high of \$221 - which goes unquoted by him. So the most expensive renewable can be found in the same "ballpark" as

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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the cheapest nuclear. But it has to be admitted: there is something rather dodgy about the method employed by comrade Jacobs. The unkind would call it cooking the books.

He also makes much ado about infrastructure, firming and decommissioning costs being "externalised". Yes, in Britain, the new pylons and cables needed to connect solar and wind farms with customers are owned by the national grid. But licences are granted only on the basis of "minimising" levelised costs.⁶ Firming - that is bringing in other power-generating sources - eg, gas, when the sun is not shining and the wind is not blowing - costs too. Batteries will probably bring things down in price, but the problem cannot be skirted.

What of decommissioning? I do not know where the comrade gets the idea that this cost is "externalised". The UK "requires owners of renewable assets to submit decommissioning plans in their financing bids, which are signed off by the government".⁷ True, these plans are often vague, but, as far as I know, there has been no dumping decommissioning costs onto the government - only one solar farm in the UK has been decommissioned to date. My understanding is that the picture in the US is similar: "The costs of decommissioning do not fall upon the community or landowners: rather they are the responsibility of the project owner."⁸

Comrade Jacobs loves France. Why? Because of the Messmer Plan it has lots and lots of nuclear power stations. In Germany, on the other hand, "renewables" are dominant and energy prices for households are "double" what they are in France.

Once again, however, some elementary research reveals a rather different set of facts. French energy prices are about a third of the level in Germany (Britain with its nuclear power stations has German prices, while the US is about a third cheaper than France).⁹ France certainly relies heavily on nuclear energy: 18 power plants and 63% electricity generation.¹⁰

However, the explanation for Germany "deindustrialising" and having higher energy prices than France lies not in nuclear power being phased out and an energy market dominated by renewables: actually they account for 19.6% of output and fossil fuels 77.6%.¹¹ So the reason for Germany's economic woes lies not with renewables ... no, the explanation lies in Ukraine and Nato's proxy war. Germany was forced to renege on its hugely beneficial long-term trade deal with Russia for the ample supply of cheap gas (to settle the matter, there were those four deep-sea explosions, which wrecked the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines in September 2022).

Another trick

Apparently nuclear energy has "another trick up its sleeve: breeder reactors". This has been the holy grail of devotees since the very dawn of the nuclear industry. Build a plutonium-fuelled fast reactor ('fast' because the neutrons released in the fission reaction are not slowed by a moderator) that produces more plutonium than it consumes. A virtuous loop, which allows continually refuelling the reactor and using the excess plutonium to start yet more reactors (hence the 'breeder' name). Ostensibly something for nothing and a gold-plated guarantee of national energy independence.

However, admits comrade Jacobs "these reactors are still a niche, since there is plenty of cheap uranium" (Kazakhstan accounting for 43% of mined global production ... and I am sure that labour conditions there are wonderful). But comrade Jacobs waxes lyrical. Breeder reactors, if one after another was built, could use up all that nasty nuclear waste: not least

that troublesome plutonium-239 with its 24,000 years half-life. All that is "fuel waiting to be used, which could provide Europe with all its energy for many centuries" to come.

There is a problem, though. The whole model is built on "false assumptions". Breeder reactors are costly to build and costly to operate. Far more expensive than even water- and gas-cooled reactors. They are far more dangerous too: if the core of a breeder reactor heats up to the point of collapse and suffers a meltdown, "the fuel can assume a more critical configuration and blow itself apart in a small nuclear explosion".¹²

A gloomy prognosis repeated a decade later, once again in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*: "breeder and reprocessing technologies turned out to be much more challenging and expensive than expected. Altogether, they didn't make economic sense." Moreover, there is the real concern about the proliferation of nuclear weapons by "feeding plutonium, a fuel but also a nuclear explosive, into commercial channels ... and ultimately the world".¹³

Like nuclear fusion this is a technology that, since it was first mooted in the early 1960s, has always been 20 years away from realisation and looks like it always will be. That comrade Jacobs is such an enthusiast speaks volumes about his naivety.

Forty-love

Yet, strangely, having gone to such lengths to rubbish renewables and hype nuclear, comrade Jacobs collapses. You see, he cannot but concede that nuclear plants take a long time to build: five, ten, many more years. By contrast, wind and solar farms are quick to install. And, as I emphasised when opening my 'Delusions of techno-fix' article, we do not have time. This year, the next, the next and the next after that, are predicted to see global temperatures at or above the 1.5°C ceiling agreed in Paris 2015. The climate crisis is here - right now.

"This is why I think," says the heavy-hearted comrade, "we ought to deploy many solar and wind farms - despite the enormous costs, resources needed and impact on the environment - to lower our carbon emissions as fast as possible. In the longer term, beyond 2050, we can focus on steadily building more nuclear power plants, gradually replacing old solar and wind farms, when their time comes."

So, while he has not given up on his nuclear obsession, he reluctantly agrees with our immediate demand: rapidly transition to "wind, tidal, solar, geothermal and other renewables".

I call that forty-love.

Let us move on to the next set by dealing with this argument: building a nuclear power plant produces a lot of greenhouse gas emissions, but they can run for 80 years or more. Therefore, the comrade says, look at nuclear power plants in the round, over the course of their lifecycle.

I am not at all convinced about nuclear power plants running for 80 years ... safely. Heavens, the technology itself is only 70 years old (dated from Obninsk first supplying the grid on June 27 1954). Back then, remember, the gold-plated guarantee was that the nuclear power industry was about to deliver electricity "too cheap to meter" (Lewis Strauss, chair of the US Atomic Energy Commission). The Emils of the day fell for the lie hook, line and sinker. I came across them as a young communist even in the late 1960s. The truth was slow to dawn.

Yes, in the US, licences have been granted to Florida Power and Light, and to Turkey Point Units 3 and 4, allowing them to operate reactors for a lifetime of 80 years - a first. More such licences will surely follow.¹⁴ However, instead of celebrating this

as some marvellous technological achievement, we should, on the contrary, urge extreme caution and demand a regime of vigorous democratic inspection. Our blunt message is: don't trust the bastards. With that in mind, looking at the site of the International Atomic Energy Agency, we are authoritatively told that nuclear power plants have operating lifetimes of between 20 and 40 years.¹⁵

Nonetheless, the comrade is right about one thing here: while building nuclear power plants produces a lot of greenhouse emissions, when it comes to generating power, they come bottom of the Our World in Data chart. Six tonnes of emissions: that compared to wind, 11 tonnes; natural gas, 440 tonnes; oil, 720 tonnes; and coal, 970 tonnes. Solar comes in with between eight and 53 tonnes, depending on the technology and location. That impressive record for nuclear power is also true, when it comes to deaths per TWh: 0.03 (it is 0.02 with solar and 0.04 with wind).¹⁶

However, as the fleet of nuclear reactors increases and ages over time, the chances of something really bad happening grows. Despite rigorous government regulations, tight operating systems and numerous fail-safe mechanisms, there have already been plenty of accidents - most notably Kyshtym, Windscale/Sellafield, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima. Undoubtedly, in spite of that, in terms of TWh generated, the number of deaths have been miniscule, certainly compared with coal, oil and gas.

But then we have to factor in terrorism and war. Imagine a 9/11-type series of jumbo jets slamming into Sizewell B. The number killed would be small to begin with ... but the winds would carry deadly radiation to who knows where. Millions could die prematurely.

At the moment both Zaporizhzhia and Kursk rightly feature in headline news stories. Ominously, neither the Zaporizhzhia nor Kursk nuclear power plants have protective coverings, making them particularly vulnerable to incoming artillery shells, drones, missiles and bombs. A military strike on either site "could initiate a very serious release of radioactive material, creating a Europe-wide nuclear disaster", we are warned.¹⁷ Believe it.

And, quite conceivably, either a losing Russia or a losing Ukraine could decide, like Samson, to bring down the temple about them. Blow Zaporizhzhia or Kursk sky-high as the troops scuttle. Anything remotely like that could easily take nuclear deaths per TWh from the bottom of the chart straight to the top. Undeterred, comrade Jacobs wants to build more Sizewell Bs, more Zaporizhzhias and more Kursks.

He is clearly besotted with the nuclear power industry, even when it comes to dealing with decommissioning and waste. Eg, he denies that decommissioning is a "hidden cost". No, no, no ... he says, by law this cost is accounted for as part of the agreed kWh price. It amounts to nothing more than "a fraction of a penny", he breezily announces. Hence, it is supposedly the "owner of the plant" who thereby saves up for the eventual decommissioning.

Well, yes, on paper. But what has really happened, at least in the UK, is that the owner - in this case EDF - eventually transfers retired nuclear power plants to the National Decommissioning Authority. And, you guessed it, decommissioning costs have already doubled, to £23.5 billion, and continue to rise ... the extra being born by the state. Rightly a scandal.¹⁸

Nor does waste present any problem for comrade Jacobs. Storing plutonium-239 with its 24,000-

year half-life - easy-peasy. Highly radioactive "fission products" and its 300 years - mere child's play. "We can do this, Jack", says the cocksure comrade. I presume that by 'we' he means himself and the capitalist nuclear industry.

Finally

Finally, there is the question of why: why do "various governments relentlessly pursue nuclear power?" A rhetorical question posed by myself, to which comrade Jacobs gives this wide-eyed answer:

Because, Jack, nuclear energy is the only scalable clean-power source that can deliver energy as we need it, is highly reliable, gives the option for geopolitical energy independence, as you can store uranium for many years, has a tiny footprint, and delivers thousands of highly paid and secure jobs for local communities.

Straight from the playbook of the nuclear industry's 'hoodwinkers and bamboozlers association'.

My own answer, given the litany of failed gold-plated guarantees, the huge costs involved and the evident dangers, is altogether different: "Maintaining nuclear weapon status, or having the option of going for nuclear weapons status, provides the most likely explanation." The testimony of Phil Johnstone and Andy Stirling - both of Sussex University - are cited as expert opinion.¹⁹

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 that supply chain. Peaceful nuclear power is, therefore, I maintain, an oxymoron. Those leftwingers who have thrown in their lot with the nuclear power industry have also thrown in their lot with the military-industrial complex. Sadly, comrade Jacobs being a case in point ●

Notes

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weekly worker

Israel is the
attack-dog of
US imperialism

Not two equals

Despite the reactionary nature of the Iranian dictatorship, there can be no drawing of an equivalence with Israel. Netanyahu's government is doing its utmost to turn the West Bank into another Gaza and drag the whole region into war, says **Yassamine Mather**

There seems to be no end to Israel's aggression in the region: as the US and its allies stand by and continue to support the Zionist state via diplomatic protection and military aid, it perseveres in its attempts to engulf the entire region in new wars.

First it tried to provoke an attack by Iran's Islamic Republic with the assassination of Hamas leader Ismael Haniyeh in Tehran in early August a day after the murder of Hezbollah military leader, Fuad Shukur, in Lebanon. As these acts of terror failed to bring Iran into full confrontation with Israel, it went for a further escalation by what Netanyahu has called "a series of pre-emptive strikes across southern Lebanon to prevent a significant rocket and drone attack by Hezbollah". On August 25 and 26, Israeli jets attacked thousands of rocket launchers belonging to the Lebanese militant group. Hezbollah and its allies confirmed that three of their fighters were killed, but denied the extent of the damage to their arsenal.

Despite the strikes, Hezbollah claimed it had launched 320 rockets and drones at Israel in retaliation for the assassination of its senior commander. Israel's military reported that one Israeli navy soldier was killed in the exchange. The Biden administration keeps telling us it is trying to prevent further escalation after 10 months of hostilities that have heightened concerns of a broader conflict between Lebanon and Israel. However clearly the west's principal ally in the region is very serious about provoking an all-out war with Lebanon and Iran - for good reasons.

Top of the list, it needs to divert attention from the genocide in Gaza, where over 40,000 civilians are known to have lost their lives since October 2023, while the onset of diseases including polio is threatening thousands of lives - not only in Gaza, but in the entire region. All the bravado about a ceasefire is just a cruel illusion designed to divert attention from the reality of Gaza and the latest round of attacks on Jenin, Tulkarm, Nablus, Tubas and other parts of the West Bank.

Predictably, the US-sponsored peace talks in Cairo ended without a breakthrough last weekend. Hamas accused Israel of renegeing on prior agreements and rejected new Israeli conditions, though Israel denies altering its stance since the last negotiations in early July.

As well as destroying short-range rockets, Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that during Sunday's strike on southern Lebanon, the Israeli Defence Forces intercepted all of the drones which Hezbollah had "launched at a strategic target in the centre of the country". He warned: "Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut and Khamenei in Tehran need



Israel's wall

to know that this is an additional step in changing the situation in the north."

Foreign minister Israel Katz said he had told dozens of his counterparts worldwide that Israel did "not seek a full-scale war", but would "do whatever it takes to protect our citizens". Responding to this, Nasrallah stated: "We identified the Gilot base as a primary target for our operation. It houses Unit 8200, responsible for eavesdropping and espionage activities, and is located 110 kilometres from the Lebanese border and only 1,500 metres from Tel Aviv."

Ideological drive

According to Gideon Levy, writing in *Haaretz* on August 25, "It's ideology that drives Netanyahu, not just power." Levy adds: "Netanyahu never believed in agreements with the Palestinians. He is a devout believer in living by the sword forever; he has never retreated from it."

For Israel the main aim remains drawing Iran into a conflict that will initiate US direct intervention in defending the Zionist state. But the question remains, why doesn't Israel attack Iran directly? The cold war between the two countries has gone on for many years, but so far Israel has avoided bombing Iranian military sites or attacking Iran's Revolutionary Guards. One answer is provided by an Israeli general who admitted that on its own Israel has not got the military means for such an attack. Hence the absolute need to drag the US and it allies into any conflict with Iran. Meanwhile, at least for the time being, attacking Lebanon and turning the West Bank into another Gaza remains the best option.

Since October 7 there have been near-daily exchanges of fire across the Israel-Lebanon border. Hezbollah at times claims that its actions are in support of Hamas, but most of the skirmishes have been in direct retaliation for Israeli attacks, while inside Lebanon Hezbollah presents these operations as 'defending the territorial integrity of the country'.

During the same period Lebanon's

health ministry has reported over 560 deaths. Some are no doubt Hezbollah fighters, but, as in all military operations, we must not underestimate the collateral damage. Meanwhile, in Israel the authorities report that 26 civilians and 23 soldiers have been killed, while, according to the UN, nearly 200,000 people have been displaced on both sides of the border between Israel and Lebanon.

In addition to the Israeli "pre-emptive" strikes, we should not forget the recent deployment of US warships to the region. Three weeks ago the US sent an aircraft carrier, warships and a fighter squadron to the Middle East, claiming these were necessary, as the region braces for "Iranian retaliation". And this week we heard from the US secretary of state for defence that the global hegemon was to send more combat aircraft and warships to the region.

There is no doubt that Iran's Islamic Republic is a reactionary, authoritarian state. Renewed persecution of political prisoners and women who refuse to adhere to legislation regarding the wearing of the hijab in public are actions of a tin-pot dictatorship.

But that does not justify siding with the Israeli state! Israel engages repeatedly in acts of terror, including the assassination of opponents in other countries, and, of course, it is engaged in genocide in Gaza. Yet no western government has condemned its actions. On the contrary they all send arms to enable these criminal actions.

We then have the mainstream media repeating *ad infinitum* that the Houthis are pro-Iran rebels, despite having been effectively in power in Yemen since 2015. True, the Houthis and Iran have common enemies, but the Houthis are an independent force with their own aims and ambitions. Meanwhile, Hezbollah - a major component of the Lebanese government and an integral part of Lebanese capitalism - is referred to as a 'pro-Iranian terror group', while the reality is that, far from being the obedient servant of Iran, it acts first and foremost in its own political and

economic interests.

Yet none of this seems to matter for sections of the Iranian left. A recent leaflet by the Communist Party of Iran and Rahe Kargar equating Israeli and Iranian 'terrorism' is just nonsense.¹ Israel is not just a terrorist state: it is the military attack-dog for US imperialism in the region, while Iran makes do with largely ineffective drones and missiles and antiquated tanks, artillery and combat aircraft. These left groups then wonder why sections of Iran's deluded youth support pro-shah propaganda put out by Israeli-financed TV stations. Such propaganda promotes not just the shah's son, but torturers such as Parviz Sabeti, former head of Savak, the shah's notorious security service. This last case enraged our ex-leftists, because Sabeti was involved in the imprisonment and subsequent torture of some of them, before the fall of the shah. But if the 'left' is going to be apologists for imperialism and its regional attack-dog, why should young people believe anything it says about the shah's era?

To me it looks like these groups live in a parallel universe to everyone else I know on the international left. Professor Hamid Dabashi, writing for the website *Middle East Eye*, uses the correct title: "How genocide in Gaza marked the death of Iran's expat opposition". He is also right to include sections of the exiled left in his criticisms.²

Of course, the Iranian left must remain steadfast in fighting for the overthrow of the current regime. But this must never mean being soft on imperialism, not to mention its main political and military ally in the region: the settler-colonial state of Israel.

Nuclear deal

Meanwhile, in Iran itself, the new 'reformist' government has no choice but try to negotiate a revised agreement with the west, aiming to have sanctions lifted, or at least reduced, in return for restrictions on its nuclear programme. Despite the alleviation of some sanctions - the result of the 'secret' negotiations with the Biden administration - the economy is in a terrible state. However, there is uncertainty about the future of the 2015 nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

According to a political source inside Iran, the JCPOA is "not good enough for us any more".³ It suggests that the Iranian government is looking to end the nuclear crisis by going beyond the existing framework. The previous conservative administration under Ebrahim Raisi (2021-24) was unable to revive the nuclear deal during two years of indirect negotiations, instead opting for limited, transactional arrangements with the US.

The JCPOA was the outcome

of two years of intensive face-to-face negotiations between Iran and the US. However, after the Trump administration's unilateral withdrawal in 2018, Tehran has avoided direct talks with Washington. When asked if new president Masoud Pezeshkian's administration is willing to reverse course and engage directly, the high-ranking Iranian source indicated a preference for continuing indirect negotiations with the US. Despite this claim there are many reports of secret direct talks between Iran and the US over the last few months and it is no big secret that Iran's supreme leader has decided that the survival of the regime requires the lifting of some sanctions, even if the price to pay might be a little humiliating.

That is why he permitted the election of a 'reformist' president and supported the approval of his cabinet. For the first time in over two decades, all 19 ministerial nominees presented by an incoming Iranian president were approved by parliament, which is dominated by conservatives. Notably they include foreign minister Abbas Araqchi, a former senior nuclear negotiator, known for his rapport with his US counterparts.

In the week since taking office, Araqchi has outlined his views on the future of nuclear diplomacy and, according to ministry officials, he has engaged in discussions with Arab and European leaders. Shortly after his confirmation, Araqchi spoke with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, whose deputy, Enrique Mora, has facilitated engagement with Iran for years. Mora's attendance at Pezeshkian's July 31 inauguration - despite being the only senior European official present - signals the EU's stance towards proposed nuclear negotiations.

Speaking on state television last week, Araqchi stated that regional and international conditions have significantly changed in recent years, citing the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, as well as the US presidential elections, as complicating factors. He also argued that the JCPOA's sunset clauses have expired, necessitating new negotiations: "This document needs to be reopened, and some parts need to be changed. This is not an easy task."

He was trying to explain that, while the 2021 indirect negotiations with the Biden administration focused on reviving the JCPOA, restoring the accord in its current form is no longer feasible ●

Notes

1. See www.rahekargar.net/browsf.php?cid=3320&id=41.
2. www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/iran-elections-gaza-genocide-expat-opposition-death-marked-how.
3. amwaj.media/article/exclusive-iran-indicates-jcpoa-not-good-enough-for-us-anymore.