

weekly  
**worker**



**Kemi Badenoch fully on board  
the global helter skelter to far  
right national chauvinism**

- Letters and debate
- 21st Palestine march
- Notes on the war
- Revolutionary defeatism

No 1514 November 7 2024

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

**WAS THE  
ECONOMY  
STUPID**





# LETTERS



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

## Trans rights

I enjoyed Mike Macnair's exploration on 'Marxism and trans liberation', though the Online Communist Forum of November 4 would no doubt have benefited from another discussion partner/opponent. Hopefully, Roxy Hall (who had to cancel at short notice) will be able to speak on the issue at a future OCF.

I remain unconvinced by comrade Macnair's assertion that questions of trans liberation should not and cannot "be part of the minimum programme" - ie, the body of "immediate demands that are the minimum conditions on which the party would be prepared to enter government" and that are "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", as the comrade has defined it in his substantial article on the trans question in the *Weekly Worker* of August 29.

Macnair argued both in that article and the recent OCF that most demands relevant to trans people are already covered in the minimum programme (around a fully-funded healthcare system). Plus, he argued that there "is a real danger of overspecificity, 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."

His main argument in the OCF, however, was that trans people can only really become fully liberated with the abolition of the family as an economic unit - and that means trans liberation has to be part of the *maximum programme*. I entirely agree, of course, that trans people can only be really free under communism. The same goes for everybody else, mind, including women, gays and lesbians. And yet we feature in the minimum programme quite a few "specific demands" for those "specific groups" - and quite right too.

Different sections of society experience different levels and aspects of oppression. Women don't just suffer from the general exploitation by the capitalist class, but are being *specifically* and additionally exploited in the family as the main carer for children and the elderly. Transgender people suffer from the general bigotry in society, but *specifically* also from the underfunding of gender clinics, which means they often have to wait for many years before they will even be seen by a healthcare professional. They also suffer *specifically* from the requirement to opt for either 'male' or 'female' in most official documents, which can push them into making choices they might not otherwise make.

Recognising those differences of oppression does not (automatically) make us into intersectionalists or mean that we are ignoring the struggles of other people and putting oppressions in some kind of hierarchy - it merely shows that we are taking those different experiences seriously and that we will take measures to overcome them.

But our current programme mentions transgender people only *once*, in describing their oppression: "Gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people, etc have often been scapegoated or persecuted. They are portrayed as threats to timeless religious values, sexual norms and the nuclear family - the basic economic unit of capitalist society. Bigoted attitudes divide the working class and aid those advocating the authoritarian state. The working class needs to be mobilised in order to defend and advance sexual freedom."

Point 3.16 then goes on to put forward various demands around "sexual freedom", including demands for equal rights for homosexuals - but nothing about how to deal with the real discrimination faced by transgender people.

I hope we can discuss this issue more fully in the *Weekly Worker* and in party meetings, but it seems to me that there is a clear need (and space) to deal with the specific oppression of transgender people. Not just for 'moral' reasons or because so many young people have very strong views on the matter. This is clearly not just a temporary 'fad', but a very real phenomenon in society that communists should take seriously. Featuring this issue clearly in our programme also means we do not leave it to the intersectionalists - but that we try and win over transgender people to the fight for communism.

A short point along the following lines would be a good and necessary addition to our programme, I think: "Abolish the requirement to register gender on public and state documents. Immediate and easy access to fully-funded gender clinics offering advice and medical support, up to and including gender reassignment surgery."

**Carla Roberts**  
London

## Zionist response

From the opposing, unbridgeable side of the gulf that separates us, I ask your permission to comment on Jack Conrad's vitriolic articles on Jews and their history (eg, supplement, *Weekly Worker* October 31).

The ill-intent permeating his approach is perhaps not so self-evident to your readers. The underlying thesis is that the stories told in the *Tanach* (five books of Moses) are evidently historically false. The inevitable mendacious conclusion is that Judaism, which places such importance on the *Tanach*, is fundamentally false and therefore legitimately subject to his, the CPGB's and the world's sarcasm and derision.

Conrad studiously ignores that 2,000-plus years of Jewish lived life and experience is based on the *Tanach*, the *Talmud*, *Mishnah*, *Midrash*, *Kabbalah*, *Zohar*, Maimonides and so many others, with generations of multi-language commentary, disputation and interpretation. All building ways of life were guided - often dictated - by law, custom and community. Once upon a recent time, an important stream of Jewish thought positioned '*Menchishkeit*' with leftwing activity (that was then; this is now).

Each and every Friday evening, across the years, Jews have recited "... in love and favour, have given us the holy Sabbath as an inheritance, a memorial of the creation ... in remembrance of the departure from Egypt." The entire institution of the Passover

service (the most effective Zionist festival ever) is built around the story of the departure from slavery in Egypt. Songs, stories, food, ancient debates, legends, from Afghanistan, Baghdad, Yemen to Morocco, Spain to Siberia.

Conrad and his ilk are also referenced by: "*sheh b'kol dor v'dor omdeem aleinu, l'kaloteinu ...*" (In every generation [they] rise up against us, to exterminate us).

Does Conrad profess, or hope, that facile pointing out that there is no historical evidence for most biblical events whatsoever will cut the ground from under Jews? Does anyone think that Jewish communities don't consider reality? Two millennia sustained by some mystical Orwellian doublethink? Just who, exactly, does Conrad expect to be influenced by such Hyde Park Corner rabble-rousing? The animus and hostility are classic. We recognise it. Is the CPGB membership comfortable with this counter-theology? What audience is he addressing?

By the by, does Conrad know Aramaic, the Mesopotamian languages influencing Hebrew, the music of biblical Hebrew, its jokes, puns, methods of poetical emphasis, euphemisms, alliteration? Here is a quote from the first paragraph of the introduction to Robert Alter's three-volume bible: "There is ... something seriously wrong with all the familiar English translations. The (modern) problem is a shaky sense of English and in the case of the King James version, a shaky sense of Hebrew."

For those who prefer a more authentic telling of our story, please see *The Story of the Jews*, by Sir Simon Schama (volume I. 'Biblical and medieval times', and II, '1492-2000', which are easily available (volume III to be published soon).

**John Davidson**  
email

## No possibility

Jack Conrad's article, 'Searching for solutions' (*Weekly Worker* July 4 2024), roundly rubbishes mooted solutions to the Zionist destruction of what remains of Palestine and its people: one-state, two-state, and federal solutions are dismissed. In their stead, the comrade outlines his "communist alternative".

He provides a detailed and useful history of Zionism and Palestinian resistance, current Israeli and Palestinian politics, and a survey of the British left. After demolishing the positions of the Socialist Workers Party's Alex Callinicos, the Labour left, the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, and various leftist flotsam and jetsam, Conrad moves to laying out his communist stall: "The only realistic, progressive and humane programme must be based on a mutual recognition by both Palestinians and Israeli Jews of each other's *national rights* (my emphasis).

Having already dismissed the prospect of joint action by the Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish working class to overturn Zionism, the comrade asks us to accept the possibility of the two nations mutually recognising each other's national rights. A stretch, especially when one considers that their national rights are counterposed.

Further, this begs the questions: how can a people exercise their national rights without control of a definite territory? And how can two peoples exercise their national

rights when both lay claim to the same small patch of land?

Comrade Conrad's solution appears to be to subsume Palestinian national identity within a wider Arab nationhood. He writes that an Arab Socialist Republic "could offer [a Jewish] Israel federal status" within a wider, federal Socialist Arabia. However, Conrad does not explain where the borders of his mooted Israeli socialist republic will lie, what happens to the Israeli-Jewish settlers and their settlements and, importantly, what happens to the Palestinians.

**Andy Hannah**  
email

## Still with SWP

I am emailing your publication because I was notified that you wrote an article where you questioned why I, Sophie Squire, had stopped writing on Palestine for *Socialist Worker* ('Racists against racism', October 31).

Thank you for the concern, but there is no mystery or intrigue about why I no longer write for the paper regularly. After four years I have decided to pursue a career in teaching. My politics are still firmly aligned with the politics of the paper and, as far as I am aware, there is no "disquiet" at the heart of the editorial board.

I am still in alignment with *Socialist Worker* in its writing on Palestine and against Zionism. I am also with my comrades in their strategy on how to fight against fascism and the far right. I don't particularly want to waste time arguing about what you wrote in your article or had on the cover of your paper - I have better things to do. But I would like to clear up any heresy about why I no longer write regularly and defend myself and the paper.

In solidarity  
**Sophie Squire**  
email

## Hellhole Korea

The recent visit of the foreign secretary David Lammy to the capitalist hellhole that is south

Korea - or the 'Republic of Korea' (ROK) - was a serious provocation against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Lammy's visit demonstrated that the British government is joining hands with the south Korean fascist puppets against People's Korea and conspiring together to overthrow Juche-based socialism. This visit comes not long after the drone intrusion against the DPRK by the ROK (and may have been deliberately timed to coincide with the recent provocative actions), so the UK is basically condoning the actions of the south Korean puppets.

It is wrong for Britain to support south Korea, which is a fascist puppet regime and a colony of US imperialism, where people live in poverty and work the longest hours in the whole world. The ROK is occupied by US troops. We call upon Britain to end its support for south Korea. There should be no British aid for south Korea and no British troops there, nor British naval ships in Korean waters.

As for the so-called 'joint statement' issued by the ROK puppets and the British foreign secretary, it is complete nonsense. There are no DPRK troops in Ukraine - that is simply a lie. British policy on the DPRK is based on lies and untruths, such as the total baloney about the DPRK sending a large number of troops to Ukraine and rubbish about 'human rights violations'.

Although the government in the UK changed hands in the last few months, the new government's policy towards the DPRK is the same as its predecessor, with its hostile policies, and backing both the US imperialists and the scum like the ROK puppets. So the Starmer regime is not only cutting winter fuel payments and reducing living standards, but it is supporting regime change attempts on the Korean peninsula.

Defend People's Korea against British imperialist regime-change attempts!

**Dermot Hudson**  
email

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday November 10 5pm  
**Trump 2.0 - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion**

Use this link to register:  
[communistparty.co.uk/ocf](https://communistparty.co.uk/ocf)

Organised by CPGB: [communistparty.co.uk](https://communistparty.co.uk) and  
Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](https://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk)  
For further information, email Stan Keable at  
[Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk)

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: [youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](https://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)



# PALESTINE

## More than just complicity

With thousands of protestors once again taking to the streets, the escalation of Israeli warmongering now looks to be a certainty, as does British government backing, warns Ian Spencer

On November 2, the 107th anniversary of the Balfour declaration, tens of thousands of demonstrators took part in London's latest mass protest against the genocide in Palestine and beyond. The twenty-first since October 2023.

As widely predicted at the start of the current slaughter, the potential for this to become a wider Middle Eastern war has come to pass, with the attacks on Lebanon, Iran and Yemen promising a regional bloodbath. Israel's *modus operandi* in Gaza is being applied with equal vigour in Lebanon, with attacks on hospitals, vital civilian infrastructure and the widespread killing of civilians, forcing the ethnic cleansing of southern Lebanon up to the Awali River. Just as in Gaza, Israel portrays its invasion as a war against a 'terrorist' group - this time, Hezbollah - even though its vicious onslaught seems to be directed against the entire population. So far, the Israel Defence Forces have killed over 3,000 in Lebanon and driven 1.2 million from their homes. To take just one village as an example, 70% of the ancient settlement of Meiss El Jabal has been destroyed. While the eyes of the world focus on this and the bombing of Iran, the genocide in Gaza is being intensified, with starvation now the principal weapon.

The legislation passed in the Knesset on October 28, effectively banning United Nations Relief and Works Agency (Unrwa) from operating in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, constitutes a deliberate policy of inducing famine among Palestinian refugees. It is a direct attack on even the pretence of an international rules-based order and a direct violation of the International Court of Justice injunction to ensure the delivery of aid to the civilian population of Gaza.

The usual muted response of the USA is typical. A State department representative said Washington was "deeply concerned", because it could have "implications under US law". The oft-heard assertion that the USA and UK are 'complicit' in genocide fails to stress that the imperialist countries are actually waging a war on the people of the Middle East, using the IDF as a proxy - just as in Ukraine war is waged on Russia using the Ukrainian people as a proxy.

Most of those on last Saturday's demonstration seemed to understand this, although some on the left, such as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, have yet to catch on. Neither war could be prosecuted without the direct participation of the USA and its allies, who supply the funding, logistical and intelligence support and the weapons, to the glee of the arms manufacturers.

The US presidential election has, of course, been won by Donald Trump, whose Republican Party is also likely to control both houses of Congress. Trump, has made his position clear: Israel should be allowed to 'finish the job'. It was an election decided, in part, on 'the economy', in what is now a country fully enmeshed in war with tens of thousands of jobs linked to the arms industry.

As Saturday's demonstration assembled in Whitehall, by a bizarre coincidence, there were a lot of Royal Navy personnel there to take part in a rehearsal for Remembrance Sunday. It was a stark reminder of Britain's involvement in support for Israel, whether directly or under the



Officers and ratings

guise of protecting shipping lanes around Yemen. The ever-present discipline and restraint of the anti-war demonstrators meant that there was not the slightest animosity shown towards the naval officers and ratings, many of whom will have colleagues currently serving on Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships in the Gulf and Mediterranean. How many of the sailors will be deployed in the drive towards World War III remains to be seen.

One of the features of the Palestine solidarity demonstrations over the last year is the number of marchers carrying what look like the bodies of children, wrapped in bloodied shrouds - symbolic of the 17,000-plus children killed by Israel. The killing of children has been a feature of the genocide to such an extent that UN human rights expert Chris Sidoti recently pointed out that Israel's killing and wounding of children in Gaza is the "greatest of any conflict in recorded warfare". This was a theme taken up by distinguished children's author Michael Rosen, who spoke at the demonstration's rally at the US embassy, and included his poem, 'Don't mention the children', which he wrote in response to an Israeli ban on naming killed or injured Palestinian children, when it was bombing Gaza in 2014.

By contrast, *The Observer* was happy to print an article by Howard Jacobson suggesting that focussing on the killing of children amounted to an anti-Semitic reference to the ancient 'blood libel' used to justify the murder of Jews in medieval England. The same 'liberal' paper refused to publish a letter by Michael Rosen who used irony to challenge the absurdity of Jacobson's article. He subsequently published it on X:

Howard Jacobson writes, "I don't accuse the BBC and other news outlets of wilfully stirring racism-memory of the child-killing Jew of the Middle Ages, and yet, he suggests, this is indeed what these news outlets are doing by showing those who are, in his words, the 'innocent victims of war'. Rich in suggestion as Jacobson's article is, it's short on suggestions as to what he thinks may be a way of solving this problem. Fortunately, the Israeli authorities have done all they can to help: they keep the world's press photographers out of Gaza, but more work is needed. Surely, it should be to ban all images of dead and maimed Palestinian children, for only then can we western Jews be safe."<sup>1</sup>

The censorship of *The Observer* is not an isolated incident. Retired Israeli academic Haim Bresheeth was arrested by the Metropolitan Police for the alleged support of a

proscribed organisation, after he said that "Israel cannot win against Hamas". Bresheeth, who grew up in Israel, and is a founder of the Jewish Network for Palestine, was arrested during a demonstration outside the residence of Israeli ambassador Tzipi Hotovely in north London, under the Terrorism Act of 2000. He was released without charge after spending a night in custody, but is still under investigation.<sup>2</sup> In October Asa Winstanley's home was raided and equipment seized, again using the same sweeping powers under the 'anti-terror' legislation. Journalists Richard Medhurst and Sarah Wilkinson have also been targeted. If anyone had any illusions about a Labour government being less repressive than the Tories, their naivety now looks absurd.

Beyond that, Israel has done all it can to target journalists, medical personal and infrastructure. Clearly its leadership feels that this is not nearly enough. Benjamin Netanyahu has sacked Yoav Gallant and replaced him with Israel Katz, his long-time ally and one of the architects behind Israel's push to get the international community to defund the Unrwa. In August, he called for the eviction of Palestinians from the occupied West Bank and his appointment was marked by a promise of the "destruction of Hamas in Gaza, the defeat of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the containment of Iranian aggression".<sup>3</sup> The likelihood of a 'forever war' seems certain.

With well over 43,374 dead in Gaza and 102,261 wounded, seven out of 10 UN-run schools have been hit. More than 95% of them were being used as shelters for displaced Palestinians. Most of the hospitals have been damaged, many rendered unusable in the month-long intensified siege of northern Gaza, which has entailed the deliberate choking off of aid in food, water and medicines. The Kamal Adwan Hospital has been repeatedly attacked and at least 1,300 people have been killed. While British foreign secretary David Lammy, undoubtedly drawing on his legal expertise, provides an apologia for genocide by suggesting that using it in the context of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine "undermines the seriousness of the term", which he would rather see reserved for millions losing their lives, such as in the holocaust. This does not give much hope that the Labour government will do anything other than retain its customary subservience to an increasingly rightwing and belligerent USA.

Even before the election of Trump, the US had increased its military presence in the Middle East. The outgoing defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, had increased the readiness levels of US forces and troop numbers are estimated to be around 43,000, including more than a dozen warships and additional F-22 fighter jets.<sup>4</sup> It seems unlikely that Trump will be less aggressive towards Iran or the Palestinians, but it is certain that that, whatever the US does, the UK will support it ●

### Notes

1. x.com/MichaelRosenYes/status/1847930109740662841.
2. www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-police-arrest-israeli-academic-haim-bresheeth-speech-pro-palestine-demonstration.
3. www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/6/who-is-israel-katz-israels-new-defence-minister.
4. apnews.com/article/israel-hezbollah-us-military-ships-aircraft-3ef96cbd87238de559e84e28573f611.

## ACTION

### Red fest

**Friday November 8 to Sunday November 10:** Political festival, Queen Margaret Union, 22 University Gardens, Glasgow G12. Over 20 sessions. Tickets £15 (£10). Organised by Socialist Workers Party: red.scot.

### How to beat your landlord

**Saturday November 9, 2pm:** Free community training, St Wilfrid's Enterprise Centre, Royce Road, Manchester M15. Mould and damp? Disrepair? Deposit stolen? Facing eviction? Find out how to fight back. Organised by Acorn: www.acorntheunion.org.uk.

### Socialism 2024

**Saturday November 9 to Sunday November 10:** Political festival, Logan Hall, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1. Over 30 sessions. Tickets from £11.50 to £36. Organised by Socialist Party in England and Wales: www.socialistparty.org.uk/socialism.

### What made us human?

**Tuesday November 12, 6.30pm:** Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'Sea shells, women's blood and an Andean bioclimatology of water'. Speaker: Denise Arnold. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/3386153668344710.

### Why NHS privatisation isn't the answer

**Wednesday November 13, 6.30pm:** Rally, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1 and online. With hospitals crumbling, millions on waiting lists, services being outsourced and staff overworked and underpaid - how can the NHS be saved? Registration free. Organised by Keep Our NHS Public: www.facebook.com/events/869077148625903.

### We need social housing, not luxury flats

**Thursday November 14, 6.30pm:** Protest outside City Chambers, George Square, Glasgow G2. Demand the council serves the people of Glasgow rather than private developers. Organised by Living Rent: www.livingrent.org/glasgow\_npf4\_november\_action.

### How to stop the drive to war

**Thursday November 14, 7pm:** Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. From Ukraine to the Middle East and the South China Sea, why is there a drive to war? Speakers include Adnan Hussein MP and Chris Nineham (Stop the War). Organised by Greater Manchester Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/how-to-stop-the-drive-to-war.

### Sports fans' loyalty to their team

**Thursday November 14, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: oxfordccs@aol.com.

### Revolution festival

**Friday November 15 to Sunday November 17:** Political festival, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1. Over 30 sessions. Tickets from £15 to £40. Organised by Revolutionary Communist Party: revolutionfestival.co.uk.

### Summit against racism and the far right

**Saturday November 16, 11am to 5pm:** Conference, Congress Centre, 28 Great Russell Street, London WC1. Discuss how to build a mass movement to stop the far right. Registration £11.55 (£6.13). Organised by Stand Up To Racism: standuptoracism.org.uk.

### Stop arming Israel - boycott Barclays Bank

**Saturday November 16:** Nationwide day of action. Demand the British government stops arming Israel. Demand Barclays stops bankrolling Israel's attacks on Palestinians. Join your local action. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events/boycott-barclays-day-of-action-2.

### March for global climate justice

**Saturday November 16, 12 noon:** Demonstration. Assemble Great Russell Street, London WC1. Demand the UK government ends reliance on fossil fuels and its complicity in Israel's genocide. Organised by Climate Justice Coalition: climatejustice.uk/cop29/march-for-global-climate-justice.

### Stop the drive to war!

**Sunday November 17, 12 noon to 5pm:** Anti-war convention, The Atrium, 124 Cheshire Street, London E2. Campaigners, activists and trade unionists discuss the growing threat of war and how to strengthen the resistance. Tickets £15 (£10). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/anti-war-convention-stop-the-drive-to-war.

### Engels as educator: making Marx accessible

**Sunday, November 17, 7pm:** Online lecture. Professor Marj Mayo examines Engels' contribution to political education, making Marx's writings accessible and relevant for wider audiences. Registration free. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/477.

### Communist culture club

**Thursday November 21, 7pm:** Online discussion. Ian Spencer introduces 'William Hogarth and John Gay's *Beggar's opera*'. Registration free. Organised by Why Marx?: www.facebook.com/whymarxism.

### 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**

# Was the economy stupid

What effect will the new president's policies have on the US economy? Will real wages rise? What about profits? **Michael Roberts** investigates

The US stock market is booming, the dollar is riding high in currency markets, the economy is rolling along at about 2.5% real GDP growth, and unemployment is no higher than 4.1%. It appears that the US economy is achieving what is called a 'soft landing' - ie, no recession - as it comes out of the pandemic slump of 2020.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, there appears to be no landing at all. Some call it the 'Benjamin Button economy': the US economy is only getting younger and better.

So why did the candidate of the incumbent Democrat administration, Kamala Harris, end up losing to the Republican president of 2017-21, Donald Trump? How could that be the case, if the US economy was going so well? It seems that a sufficient proportion of the electorate was not so convinced of a prosperous and better time for them. In a *Wall Street Journal* poll before the election, 62% of respondents rated the economy as "not so good" or "poor", which explains the lack of any political dividend for either outgoing president Joe Biden or Harris.

I would argue that the reason for this is twofold. First, the US real gross domestic product may be growing and financial asset prices booming, but it is a different story for the average American household, hardly any of whom own any financial assets to speculate with. Instead, while rich investors boost their wealth, under the previous Trump and Biden administrations Americans have experienced a horrendous pandemic, followed by the biggest slump in living standards since the 1930s - driven by a very sharp rise in prices of consumer goods and services.

Average wage rises failed to keep pace until the last six months or so. And officially prices are still some 20%-plus higher than before the pandemic, but with many other items that are not covered by the official inflation index (insurance, mortgage rates, etc) rocketing. So after tax and inflation is accounted for, average incomes are pretty much the same as when Biden came into office.

No wonder a recent survey found that 56% of Americans thought the US was in a recession and 72% thought inflation was rising. The world may be great for stock market investors, the 'Magnificent Seven' hi-tech social media companies and the billionaires, but it ain't so for many Americans.

## Vibecession

This disconnection between the optimistic boomer views of mainstream economists and the 'subjective' feelings of most Americans has been called a 'vibecession' - American consumers' sentiment is way down from when Biden came into office.

Americans are well aware of costs that the official indexes and mainstream economists ignore. Mortgage rates have reached their highest level in 20 years and home prices have risen to record levels. Motor and health insurance premiums have rocketed. Indeed, inequality of incomes and wealth in the US - among the highest in the world - is only getting worse. The top 1% of Americans take 21% of all personal incomes - more than double the share of the bottom 50%! And the top 1% of Americans own 35%



**Will America be able to reindustrialise ... or has that bird already flown to Asia?**

of all personal wealth, while 10% own 71%; yet the bottom 50% own just 1%!

Indeed, when you look more closely at the much heralded real GDP figures, you can see why there is little benefit going to most Americans. The headline GDP rate is driven by healthcare services, which really measure the rising cost of health insurance, not better healthcare, and that cost has rocketed in the last three years. And then there are rising inventories, which means stocks of goods unsold - in other words, output without sale. Not to mention increased government spending, mainly for arms manufacturing - hardly a productive contribution. If we look at economic activity in the US manufacturing sector, based on the so-called purchasing managers survey, the index shows that US manufacturing had been contracting for four consecutive months leading up to the November 5 election.

The administration and the mainstream proclaim the low US unemployment rate. But much of the net increase in jobs has been in part-time employment or government services, both federal and state. Full-time employment in important productive sectors that pay better and offer a career has been lagging. If a worker has to take on a second job to maintain his or her standard of living, he or she might not feel so bullish about the economy. Indeed, second jobs have increased significantly.

And the labour market is starting to turn for the worse. The monthly net increase in jobs has been a downward trend, with the latest October figure just +12,000 (affected partly by hurricanes and the Boeing strike). Both job offers and job quits rates have dropped to levels typically seen in recessions. Companies are hesitant to hire full-time workers, and employees are reluctant to quit due to job security concerns and an increasing dearth of available opportunities.

Mainstream economists make much of the undoubted better

performance of the US economy, compared to Europe and Japan - and compared to the rest of the top G7 capitalist economies as a whole. But an average real GDP growth rate of 2.5% is hardly such a success, when compared to the 1960s - or even the 1990s or before the great recession of 2008, or before the pandemic slump of 2020.

## Long depression

The major economies remain in what I have called a long depression: namely where after each slump or contraction (2008-09 and 2020) there follows a lower trajectory of real GDP growth - ie, the previous trend is not restored. The trend growth rate before the global financial crash (GFC) and the great recession has not returned, and the growth trajectory dropped even further after the pandemic slump of 2020. Canada is still 9% below the pre-GFC trend; the euro zone is 15% below; the UK 17% below and even the US is still 9% below.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, the US labour force (not employment) will have grown by 5.2 million people by 2033, thanks mainly to net immigration, and the economy is projected to grow by \$7 trillion more over the next decade than it would have without the new influx of migrants.

So it is a great irony that the second reason why the Harris campaign did not go way ahead of Trump is the question of immigration. It seems that many Americans regard curbing immigration as a key political issue - ie, they blame low real income growth and poorly paid jobs on 'too many immigrants' and yet the opposite is the case. Indeed, if immigration growth slacks off or if the new administration introduces severe curbs or even bans on immigration, US economic growth and living standards will suffer (see below).

The only way the US economy could sustain even 2.5% a year in

real GDP growth in the rest of this decade would be by achieving a very sharp increase in the productivity of the labour force. But, over the decades, US productivity growth has slowed.

In the 1990s, average growth was 2% a year and even faster at 2.6% a year during the 'dot.com' credit-fuelled 2000s. But in the long depression years of the 2010s the average rate slipped to its lowest at 1.4% a year. Since the great recession of 2008 right up to 2023, productivity has been rising at just 1.7% a year. If the size of the employed workforce were to stop rising because immigration had been curbed, then real GDP growth would slip back under 2% a year.

The mainstream hope that the huge subsidies pumped into the big hi-tech companies by the government will raise investment in productivity-boosting projects. In particular, the massive spending on artificial intelligence will eventually deliver a sustained step-change rise in productivity growth. But that prospect remains uncertain and dubious - at least given the pace of the infusion of these new technologies across the US economy.

So far, productivity growth has been mainly in the environmentally damaging fossil fuel industry, with little sign of infusion across other sectors. Since 2010, oil and gas production in the US has almost doubled and yet employment in the upstream sector has declined. So the productivity gains in the sector have been achieved by falling employment.

There is a serious risk that a huge investment bubble is building up, funded by increased debt and government subsidies - which could come crashing down if returns on capital for the US corporate sector from AI and hi-tech do not materialise. The reality is that, apart from the profits boom of the so-called 'magnificent seven' of hi-tech social media giants, the average

profitability of the productive sectors of US capitalism is at an all-time low. Yes, the mass of profits is very high for the magnificent seven, as are profit margins, but total profit growth of the US non-financial corporate sector has slowed almost to a stop.

And, remember, it is now well established that profits lead investment and then employment in a capitalist economy.<sup>3</sup> Where profits lead, investment and employment follow with a lag. If investment growth falls, then the expected productivity growth will not materialise. Moreover the overall profit data is biased in two ways.

First, profits are heavily concentrated with the big mega companies, while the small and medium-size companies are struggling with the burden of high interest rates on their borrowing, and squeezed costs on raw materials and labour. Around 42% of US small-cap companies are unprofitable - the most since the 2020 pandemic, when 53% of small caps were losing money.

Second, much of the rise in profits is fictitious (to use Marx's term for profits made by buying and selling financial assets that *supposedly* represent real assets and earnings of companies, but do not). Using the method of Jos Watterton and Murray Smith, two Canadian Marxist economists, I estimate that fictitious profits are now around half the total profits made in the financial sector. If that were to disappear in a financial crash, it would seriously damage corporate America.

## Debt

And that brings us to the issue of rising debt, in both the US corporate and public sector. If there were a bursting of the bubble over AI, many US companies would be faced with a debt crisis. Already, more have defaulted on their debt in 2024 than in any start to the year since the global financial crisis, as inflationary pressures and high interest rates continue to weigh on the riskiest corporate borrowers, according to the S&P Global Ratings research company.

And do not forget the 'zombies': ie, companies that are already failing to cover their debt servicing costs from profits and so cannot invest or expand, but just carry on like the living dead. They have multiplied and survive so far by borrowing more - so are vulnerable to high borrowing rates.

If corporate defaults rise, then this will put renewed pressure on the creditors, namely the banks. There has already been a banking crisis (last March) that led to several small banks going under and the rest being bailed out by over \$100 billion of emergency funding by government regulators. I previously highlighted the hidden danger of credit held by so-called 'shadow banks' - non-banking institutions that have lent large amounts for speculative financial investments.<sup>5</sup>

And it is not just the corporate sector that is coming under debt servicing pressure. Throughout the campaign for the US presidency over the last few months, there was one issue that both Kamala Harris and Donald Trump ignored: the level of the public debt. But this debt matters.

The US government has spent \$659 billion so far this year paying off the interest on its debt, as



the Federal Reserve's rate hikes dramatically raised the cost of borrowing. Public-sector debt - currently estimated at \$35 trillion, or around 100% of GDP - has only one way to go: and that is up. The debt load is set to soar higher - potentially reaching \$50 trillion within the next 10 years,<sup>6</sup> according to a projection from the US Congressional Budget Office (CBO).<sup>7</sup>

The CBO reports that federal debt held by the public (ie, 'net debt') averaged 48.3% of GDP for the last half century. But it predicts that by 2025 net debt will be larger than annual economic output for the first time since the US military build-up in World War II and will rise to 122.4% by 2034.

But does this rising public debt matter? The suggestion that the US government will eventually need to stop running budget deficits and curb rising debt has been strongly rejected by exponents of 'Modern Monetary Theory'. MMT supporters argue that governments can and should run permanent budget deficits until full employment is reached. And there is no need to finance these annual deficits by issuing more government bonds, because the government controls the unit of account, the dollar, which everybody must use. So the Federal Reserve can just 'print' dollars to fund the deficits, as the treasury requires. Full employment and growth will then follow.

I have previously discussed in detail the flaws in the MMT argument,<sup>8</sup> but the key concern here is that government spending, however financed, may not achieve the necessary investment and employment increases. That is because the government does not take the decision-making on investment and jobs out of the hands of the capitalist sector. The bulk of investment and employment remains under the control of capitalist firms, not the state. And, as I have argued above, that means investment depends on the expected profitability of capital.

Let me repeat the words of Michael Pettis, a firm Keynesian economist:

... the bottom line is this: if the government can spend additional funds in ways that make GDP grow faster than debt, politicians don't have to worry about runaway inflation or the piling up of debt. But if this money isn't used productively, the opposite is true ... creating or borrowing money does not increase a country's wealth unless doing so results directly or indirectly in an increase in productive investment ... *If US companies are reluctant to invest not because the cost of capital is high, but rather because expected profitability is low, they are unlikely to respond ... by investing more.*

Moreover, the US government is borrowing mostly to finance current consumption, not to invest. So just getting the Federal Reserve to 'print' the money required to cover planned government spending will only produce a sharp depreciation of the dollar and a rise in inflation.

Rising debt adds to the demand by bond buyers for higher interest rates to insure against default. For the US, that means each one percentage point increase in the debt-to-GDP ratio increases longer-run real interest rates by one to six basis points. The more the debt grows, the more the government has to shell out in interest to service that debt - and the less money the US government has to spend on other priorities like social security and crucial parts of the social safety net. Interest costs have nearly doubled over the past

three years, from \$345 billion in 2020 to \$659 billion in 2023. Interest is now the fourth-largest government programme, behind only social security, medicare and defence. Relative to the economy, net interest costs grew from 1.6% of GDP in 2020 to 2.5% in 2023.

In its latest baseline, the CBO projected that interest would cost more than \$10 trillion over the next decade and exceed the defence budget by 2027. Since then, interest rates have risen far more than the CBO projected. If they remain about 1% above previous projections, then interest on public debt would cost more than \$13 trillion over the next decade, exceed the defence budget as early as next year and become the second-largest government programme by 2026.

America's economic might does give it substantial leeway. The dollar's role as the international reserve currency means demand for US debt is ever-present, and AI-driven productivity growth could indeed help lessen its debt problems. But the size of the public-sector debt cannot be ignored. The new administration will soon be applying higher taxes and cuts in government spending. If it does not, bond 'vigilantes' will cut back on purchases and force the new president into applying severe fiscal austerity anyway. As the IMF chief economist, Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, said just before this election, "Something will have to give."

Bidenomics will no doubt fade away with its namesake.

## Victory

In one sense, who won mattered little to big finance and big business. Both candidates were dedicated to the capitalist system and making it work better for the owners of capital.

Larry Fink of BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, had said he was "tired of hearing this is the biggest election in your lifetime". The reality, says Fink, is "over time it doesn't matter". And it is true that the underlying endogenous forces of capitalist production, investment and profit are much more powerful than any particular policy adopted and implemented by a government. Nevertheless, pro-capitalist politicians can differ on what is best for capitalism at any one time. And there were some differences between Trump and Harris on what to do over the next four years.

The main planks of what Trump calls "Maganomics" include more aggressive tariffs on imports from around the world, especially from China, and a draconian crackdown on immigration. His campaign rhetoric also pushed for greater political influence over monetary policy and the Fed on interest rate decisions and in the manipulation of the dollar.

Trump claims that he will "deliver low taxes, low regulations, low energy costs, low interest rates and low inflation, so that everyone can afford groceries, a car and a beautiful home". His proposed tax cuts range from income via overtime pay, tips and pension benefits to massive across-the-board cuts for individuals and corporations. This would undoubtedly reduce taxes for the very rich (yet again), but increase it for nearly everybody else.

Trump claims that these tax cuts for the very rich and the big corporations would boost investment and growth, based on the discredited 'trickle-down' theory: ie, if incomes and wealth for the rich rise, then they will spend more and so the benefits will 'trickle down' to the rest of us.

But the evidence is to the contrary. The last 50 years have seen a dramatic decline in taxes on the rich across the advanced democracies. And several

studies show that this has had little or no effect on economic growth - and much more effect on increasing inequality. Two economists from Kings College London, using a newly constructed indicator of taxes to identify all instances of major tax reductions on the rich in 18 countries between 1965 and 2015, find that such tax cuts lead to higher income inequality in both the short and medium term, but do not have any significant effect on economic growth or unemployment.<sup>9</sup>

Per capita GDP and unemployment rates were nearly identical after five years in countries that slashed taxes on the rich and in those that did not, the study found. But the analysis discovered one major change: the incomes of the rich grew much faster in countries where tax rates were lowered. Surprise!

As for Trump's last period of office, when he introduced sharp cuts in corporate and personal income tax, Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman of the University of California at Berkeley found that for the first time in a century, the 400 richest American families had lower effective tax rates than people in the bottom 50% of income earners.

Bond investors and Wall Street are worried that these tax cuts, while very welcome from their point of view, could only increase the huge government budget deficit and public sector debt - something that is anathema to the financial sector. Trump's answer was that he would 'pay for' the tax cuts by dramatically increasing the tariffs on imports. He planned to impose a 10% levy on *all* US imports and a 60% tax on goods coming from China. Indeed, Trump talked of imposing tariffs sufficiently high to allow him to end income tax altogether!

But the Penn Wharton Budget Model research group has estimated that Trump's plans would raise US budget deficits by \$5.8 trillion over the next decade. Even the conservative Tax Foundation think tank estimated that his new plan to exempt overtime work from federal levies would cost the US a further \$227 billion in lost revenue over the next decade.

Again, empirical analysis of these policies indicate significant damage to US economic performance. A recent study suggests that Trump's policies are "sharply regressive tax policy changes, shifting tax burdens away from the well-off and towards lower-income members of society".<sup>10</sup>

The paper, by Kim Clausing and Mary Lovely, puts the cost of existing levies plus Trump's tariff plans for his second term at 1.8% of GDP. It warns that this estimate "does not consider further damage from America's trading partners retaliating and other side effects, such as lost competitiveness". This calculation "implies that the costs from Trump's proposed new tariffs will be nearly five times those caused by the Trump tariff shocks through late 2019, generating additional costs to consumers from this channel alone of about \$500 billion per year", the paper said. The average hit to a middle-income household would be \$1,700 a year. The poorest 50% of households, who tend to spend a bigger proportion of their earnings, would see their disposable income dented by an average of 3.5%.

Trump's tariff measures would result in levies on imports supercharged to levels last seen during the 1930s following the passing of the landmark protectionist Smoot Hawley Tariff Act. Trump claims the trade barriers would not only raise revenues, but lead to the restoration of US manufacturing. When import tariffs are used to protect a burgeoning and fledgling manufacturing sector, as they were in

the US back in the late 19th and early 20th century, they may have helped. But now in the 21st century, US manufacturing is in relative decline - a trend that would not be reversed by protectionist policies (that horse has bolted to Asia).

Instead, the Washington-based Peterson Institute for International Economics think tank calculates that 20% across-the-board tariffs, combined with a 60% tariff on China, would trigger a rise of up to \$2,600 a year in what the average household spends on goods, as inflation rises accordingly. PIIIE senior fellows Obstfeld and Kimberly Clausing think that the maximum amount of additional revenue the administration can raise - by applying a 50% tariff on everything - would be \$780 billion.

According to Ernie Tedeschi of the Yale Budget Lab,

If we wanted to completely replace the [revenue raised from] income tax with a tariff, we would need at least a two-thirds tariff. And then you have to remember that people are going to start substituting away from imports and then there's going to be retaliation and so on ... It's impossible to make the math work. You probably can't raise [tariffs] high enough.<sup>11</sup>

## Immigration

The other main plank of Maganomics is to cut back drastically on immigration. Trump has accused migrants of "poisoning the blood of our country". Despite this grotesque racism, many Americans are convinced that their living standards and life are being affected by 'too many immigrants'. According to Gallup, 2024 is the first year in nearly two decades that a majority of the public wants less immigration to the US. In the past year alone, the desire to reduce the amount of immigration has jumped by 10 points for Democrats and 15 points for Republicans.

Trump actually calls for the *mass deportation* of millions of immigrants. A recent report by the American Immigration Council finds that, should the government deport a population of roughly 13 million people who as of 2022 lacked permanent legal status and faced the possibility of removal, the cost would be huge - around \$305 billion.

And this does not take into account the long-term costs of a sustained mass deportation operation or the incalculable additional costs necessary to acquire the institutional capacity to remove over 13 million people in a short period of time. If spread out over years, the cost would average out to \$88 billion annually, for a total of \$968 billion over the course of more than a decade, given the long-term costs of establishing and maintaining detention facilities, temporary camps and immigration courts. Moreover, about 5.1 million US-citizen children live with an undocumented family member. Separating family members would lead to tremendous emotional stress and could also cause economic hardship for many of these mixed-status families who might lose their breadwinners.

But the overall economic damage would also be significant. As I have argued, net immigration has helped the US economy to grow at a faster rate than other G7 economies. Losing these workers through mass deportation would reduce US GDP by 4.2% to 6.8%. It would also result in significant reduction in tax revenues. Removing immigrant labour would disrupt all sectors, from homes to businesses to basic infrastructure. As industries suffer,

hundreds of thousands of US-born workers could lose their jobs.

## Austerity

Trump's Maganomics claims it aims to help the average US-born American, but in reality, of course, his policies will only further enrich the very wealthy at the expense of the rest, and also jeopardise economic growth and hike inflation. He is heavily backed by individual multi-billionaires like Elon Musk, who own about 4% of US personal wealth, and contributed one-third of the campaign money raised by Trump (a billionaire himself). The irony is that 74% of Americans would support an annual 2% wealth tax on personal assets over \$50 million; 65% support raising the corporate income tax rate and 61% support raising top income tax rates - the exact opposite of Trump's policies.<sup>12</sup>

As for Kamala Harris, she had no intention of introducing a wealth tax, or raising corporate taxes or those on the top income earners. On the contrary, Biden maintained the tax cuts that Trump introduced in his 2016-20 term that will last to 2025, and Harris would not have changed that. She also accedes to the anti-immigration sentiment and said she would support a new bill to continue the construction of more border walls with Mexico, costing billions - a policy that, when proposed by Trump in his previous successful campaign, was opposed by the Democrats.

When it comes to climate change, Trump has made it clear that he will relax regulations and allow further fossil fuel exploration and production - after all, he and Tesla boss Elon Musk are agreed that global warming is probably not man-made and anyway is not a serious risk to livelihoods and lives. Tell that to the hurricane victims in Florida. Harris was not much better, by the way. Whereas she was opposed to the extremely environmentally damaging method of extracting oil and gas by fracking back in 2019, now she backs new fracking leases to ensure 'energy security' after the energy-led price explosion following the Covid pandemic.

As for public services, with the budget deficit set to rise and public debt reaching well over 100% of GDP, both candidates said nothing, but it can only mean that fiscal austerity is on its way, big time. Tax revenues will not be increased - on the contrary. 'Defence' and arms spending to pay for the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have reached record highs and will continue to rise, so what will have to give is public spending on education, transport and social care, etc ●

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

## Notes

1. See [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/06/19/a-soft-landing-or-curates-egg](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/06/19/a-soft-landing-or-curates-egg).
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12. See [thehill.com/hilltv/what-americas-thinking/428747-new-poll-americans-overwhelmingly-support-taxing-the-wealth-of](https://thehill.com/hilltv/what-americas-thinking/428747-new-poll-americans-overwhelmingly-support-taxing-the-wealth-of).



## TORIES

# A modern chameleon

Kemi Badenoch is fully on board the global helter skelter to the far right and 'anti-woke' national chauvinism. She is, argues Paul Demarty, the perfect match for Donald Trump

It is rather disturbing to think, for those of us pushing middle age (or perhaps watching it recede into the blurry distance), that somebody born the day David Cameron became Conservative Party leader was able to vote in this year's general election.

Back then, Tory members had a fairly straight choice in front of them - between David Davis, of the ultra-Thatcherite right, and Cameron - a touchy-feely moderniser, whose slick presentation clearly aped that of Tony Blair in his pomp, and who promised to discard the mean-spirited suburban psychosis of his predecessors as leader of the opposition, William Hague, Iain Duncan Smith and Michael Howard.

In 2006, *The Guardian* published a series of short interviews with the bright young things who were suddenly happy to associate themselves with Cameron's new-model Tories. There was a Hoxtonite who played in a no-hoper psychedelic indie rock band. There was a British-Asian medical student, who - amusingly in retrospect - cited the introduction of tuition fees as his reason for abandoning his family's traditional Labour vote.

Under current circumstances, however, one's eyes turn to a 26-year-old black woman, raised in Nigeria, who we are told was a "systems analyst for a bank" (whatever that is). She was abuzz with the changing nature of her chosen party: "I may not fit the image of a stereotypical Conservative," she told the paper, "but we really don't have a one-size-fits-all stereotype. For instance, although the media portrays the party as homophobic, since joining I have met more openly gay people - from councillors to MPs - than ever before."

Sure, there was some difficult history for Africans like herself: the Tories' "branding Nelson Mandela and the ANC as terrorists, the party's hard line on immigration and policing, and, of course, Enoch Powell's Rivers of Blood speech". But she opposed Labour's habit of seeing a police action as the only solution to political conflict, as exemplified in Gordon Brown's anger that Nick Griffin had not been convicted of racial hatred. "It's easier to deal with things when they are out in the open, so I would rather know who members of the BNP are, for example, than sit next to one at work unaware that he'd been banned from expressing his real views."<sup>1</sup>

The name of this woman was Kemi Adegoke. She later married another Tory activist by the name of Hamish Badenoch; and on November 2, with his surname, she was announced as the new Conservative Party leader.

### Sensible option

The gloopy Cameroon of the 2006 interview presents quite a striking contrast to the steely culture warrior who has evidently endeared herself to the Tory mass membership - always wildly to the right of the parliamentary party, although perhaps, under the influence of people like her and her opponent, Robert Jenrick, the MPs are slowly catching up. Badenoch has repeatedly provoked controversy for her interventions on the standard slate of anti-woke bugbears, from gender identification to critical race theory, and strongly backed Tony Sewell's government-commissioned report on race relations, which more or less found that there was nothing to be worried about after all.

Yet that is not the whole story,



What's happening over the other side of the pond will further encourage her

really. Her anti-woke interventions, while undeniably robust, have never had the swivel-eyed, spittle-flecked character increasingly typical of the genre. Though her opposition to various trans rights initiatives may seem to conflict with her 26-year-old self's delight at suddenly having so many gay friends, she is canny enough to couch it in terms of gender transition being a form of conversion therapy for gays, as do many on the leftist feminist wing of the anti-trans-rights coalition - the original 'trans-exclusionary radical feminists' or 'Terfs', those who actually identified meaningfully with feminism.

She opposes blaming colonialism for the poor state of most of Africa, but not on the basis that it was 'good actually' (as do the usual run of Tory revisionists), but on the basis that these societies were radically unfree anyway and colonialism merely reshuffled different factions of the elite. That is nonsense, but nonsense denuded of the pathetic, hysterical grievance-mongering to which we have become accustomed.

A few weeks ago, indeed until the moment that supporters of the official 'moderate' candidate, James Cleverly, somehow conspired to tactically vote him out of the running altogether, the idea of Badenoch being the sensible candidate would have seemed risible. But since then, as Jenrick ever more aggressively puffed up his hard-right credentials, Badenoch has discreetly eased her foot off the accelerator. (Indeed, during the summer riots, when Jenrick was going in two-footed on "Two Tier Kier", she kept an unusually low profile, to her colleagues' disgruntlement.) Though many Tory 'centrists' abstained in the vote, and leading figures like Jeremy Hunt and Cleverly have already ruled themselves out of the running for front-bench positions, she ended up as the lesser evil for many such people. Nigel Farage is already courting frustrated Jenrick voters, on the basis that they will now not be rid of the European Court of Human Rights.

Likewise, her acceptance speech was hardly a matter of fire and brimstone. She went through the usual roll-call of thank-yous - to the administrators of the contest, to her defeated rivals, to the ordinary Tory members "for hosting us in your communities, in your village halls, in your pubs and in your homes". Then, down to business:

Our first responsibility as his majesty's loyal opposition is to hold this Labour government to account. Our second is no less important. It is to prepare over the course of the next few years for government, to ensure that by the time of the next election we have not just a clear set of Conservative pledges that appeal to the British people, but a clear plan for how to implement them, a clear plan to change this country by changing the way that government works. The prime minister is discovering all too late the perils of not having such a plan.

Finally, a gesture to the challenges ahead, which frankly could have been plagiarised straight from any speech made by Cameron in the days when he was the apple of her eye:

Our party is critical to the success of our country, but to be heard we have to be honest - honest about the fact that we made mistakes, honest about the fact that we let standards slip ... The time has come to tell the truth, to stand up for our principles, to plan for our future, to reset our politics and our thinking, and to give our party, and our country, the new start that they deserve ... it is time to renew.

Note that, if you think about it for five seconds, this is gibberish. It is time to "stand up for our principles", but also to "reset our politics and our thinking" - well, which is it? "We made mistakes": which mistakes, and how are they to be corrected? (Not Partygate, which she claimed

was "overblown" the next day.) Yet this is a kind of speech where such inconsistency and vagueness are features rather than bugs - a 'new leader speech' from the same template as all the others. Though thought of as some kind of maverick, Badenoch so far is sticking to the script.

### Operator

Her distinctiveness as a politician may ultimately be a matter not of her being out on an ideological limb, but something like the opposite. My working theory is that she is, in fact, like the other Tories of her generation a political opportunist; but among the shower of clownish idiots that staffed the front benches in the Boris Johnson-Rishi Sunak era, she is marked out by being good at it. She will turn up the heat on the culture war stuff at one moment, and walk it back the next, when it advances her cause. In clumsier hands, such manoeuvres seem shifty and cynical, as in fact they are. Our prevailing bourgeois political culture, however, is remarkable for its stupidity and short attention span, and so a truly canny operator can get away with it.

None of this is to predict a reversion to hug-a-hoodie Cameronism, now the leadership is in the bag. If I am right, Badenoch is an expert at blowing in the wind, and, especially with Donald Trump being president elect, the wind is decidedly blowing her to the right. Where Sir Keir promised, through gritted teeth, to "stand shoulder to shoulder" with Trump, she will go the whole way.

If the Labour government had managed to get its feet under the table in good order, then perhaps those 'moderate' Tory voices plaintively pointing out that the party lost as many votes to the Liberal Democrats as to Reform might provide some countervailing pressure.

However, with Labour already battling a new corruption scandal

every week and failing consistently to get ahead of the media cycle, there is more to be gained by going in for the kill; and we certainly know she has *that* in her locker. The spectacularly apolitical governing practice of Sir Kier's Labour - at one moment drenched in patriotic gloom, at another reciting every cliché of professional-class, liberal identitarianism - is especially vulnerable to the attacks of an even more voraciously chauvinist opponent - who is nevertheless a black woman, and the first such to lead any major political party in this country, put there on the votes of Enoch Powell-worshipping suburban reactionaries.

We expect a series of Labour scandals to be amplified or confected by the yellow press, followed by some vicious Badenoch performances in PMQs, and disorderly retreat by an already directionless government (as cruelly noted by Badenoch in her acceptance speech, the only remotely barbed phrase in the whole thing). It is the form taken, in this country, with its media and its constitutional particularities, of the slow, endless ratchet to the right.

That is not to say she will have an easy time of it. She takes leadership of a battered, demoralised Conservative Party, its parliamentary strength weaker than it has ever been in its entire history. The Labour payroll vote is larger on its own than the Tory parliamentary party. The latter remains rancorous and divided. As someone with a talent for angular public statements, who they say could start a fight in an empty room, she may find the management of all these gigantic wounded egos wearisome.

The refusal of the likes of Hunt and Cleverly to serve under her is the most striking instance of the more general problem of staffing an adequate front bench at all with the routed stragglers of July 4, though she has at least managed to bring in former leadership contenders Priti Patel and Mel Stride. (The much larger party that held power between 2019 and 2024 was itself notably riddled with accident-prone lightweight.) Missteps will be met by hostile briefings; anonymous barbs will multiply in the writings of lobby reporters.

Yet the drift of contemporary history is towards large-scale militarisation, mass migration induced by further wars and climate disasters, and the backlash against such migration. Preparation, sometimes open and sometimes discreet, for great-power war entails ideological campaigns against weaknesses on the home front, against traitors (like us ... ) and 'degeneracy' of various kinds. Badenoch has proven she can sell this stuff even to people who, had things been slightly different, would probably think she should be 'sent back to her own country'. Her promise to return the Tories to power at the first time of asking, in spite of their near-comical weakness at the present time, should not be thought a vain one.

Like all political chameleons, she shows us the colour of our times, and it is not a pretty sight ●

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### Notes

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## MIDDLE EAST

# Threat to nuclear sites increases

Though Trump is only president elect he is already changing the politics of the Middle East. Things have become even more dangerous, says Yassamine Mather

**P**redictions regarding the future of the Iran-Israel conflict are becoming surreal. One minute we heard that Iran was going to attack Israel the day after the US elections and the next minute a “reliable” source told journalists that Israel was going to launch a preemptive attack. Others contemplate that the United States might also participate in this attack. There are now claims that Iran will not attack if there is a ceasefire in Gaza.

We are bombarded with all this as ‘news’, coming from contradictory but “reliable” sources. Undoubtedly, it is an integral part of the psychological warfare between the two sides, being fought through the media.

Having said that, it does appear as if Ali Khamenei, Iran’s supreme leader, has taken a more concrete stance, compared to the days following the Israeli attack. In his first speech following Israel’s initial attack on October 27, Khamenei did not comment on whether there would be a response. Instead, he seemed to delegate responsibility for the next steps to other officials. Now it looks like he has changed his mind.

One reason could be that the extent of the damage caused by the attack has become clearer, though Iranian officials have not publicly acknowledged this. Another reason could be concerns about Hezbollah’s weakness and reports that the Shia group’s main concern is its future in Lebanese politics. There are reports that Hezbollah is considering accepting a ceasefire and that remaining a member of the ‘axis of resistance’ is no longer a priority for the organisation’s current political leadership.

In a public speech held on the eve of the 45th anniversary of the hostage-taking at the American embassy in Tehran, Khamenei said: “The enemies, both the Zionist regime and the United States of America, will receive a crushing response regarding what they are doing to the Iranian nation and the resistance front ... all necessary actions, whether in terms of military, armaments or political measures, are underway.” Regarding a potential response by Iran to Israel, he said: “The issue is not merely about revenge. It’s a matter of a logical action, a confrontation aligned with religion, ethics, Sharia and international laws.”

Hossein Salami, the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), also issued a warning to Israel and the US in a message published on November 4, stating that they would receive a “crushing response” from the “Resistance Front” and Iran.

*The Wall Street Journal*, citing officials from Iran and Arab countries, reported that Iran plans a response to Israel’s recent strikes involving “stronger” weapons. According to the report, Iran informed Arab diplomats that its military will “participate” in future operations in response to the loss of four soldiers and a civilian due to Israeli attacks. An unnamed Iranian official stated that parts of this response might be launched from Iraq, likely targeting Israeli military infrastructure, and that it will be “more intense than previous attacks”.

This week we also had news that the Biden administration has sent several B-52 strategic bombers to the Middle East, a day after the Pentagon announced they were being sent as a “warning” to Iran, *The Central*



Could Israel do it alone?

Command of the United States of America (Centcom) also confirmed the arrival of these bombers in a message on November 3. There is no information about the exact number and location of these bombers.

### Open options

In addition, we have had reports that Israel is keeping its options open, regarding a possible attack on Iran’s nuclear sites. According to last week’s *Economist*,

Iran has long operated four batteries of the Russian-made S-300 air-defence system. In April, after another Iranian missile barrage, Israel neutralised one by destroying its target-engagement radar. Israeli sources suggest that the three remaining systems were taken out on October 26. Satellite images seen by *The Economist* and analysed by Chris Biggers, an imagery expert who used to work for America’s National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, show evidence of a destroyed radar at Eslamshahr to the southwest of Tehran. Israel also hit a variant of the long-range Iranian-made ‘Ghadir’ radar at Ilam on the country’s western border, says Mr Biggers.<sup>1</sup>

There is consensus that an attack on Iran’s nuclear sites, deeply buried in bunkers, requires US assistance, however, Israelis claim the damage inflicted on Iran’s air defences in late October improves their chances. Both Democrats and Republicans seem committed to supporting Israel in any attack against Iran. The Biden administration decided to send B-52 bombers and also dispatched ‘Terminal High Altitude Area Defense’ missiles to Israel. Donald Trump has already suggested that Israel should go after Iran’s nuclear facilities: “That’s the thing you want to hit, right?” (With Trump’s victory, we can expect Israel to get *carte blanche* for new air raids on Iran.)

Inside Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu is facing more challenges. On November 3, an Israeli court eased a gagging order on a case involving leaked classified information, reportedly connected to one of the prime minister’s media advisors. Critics claim the leaks were intended to politically shield Netanyahu, as ceasefire negotiations with Gaza faltered.

Netanyahu, who has denied any wrongdoing, downplayed the incident and publicly supported lifting the gag order. He insisted the advisor involved “never participated in security discussions, was not exposed to or received classified information, and did not take part in secret visits”.

The court permitted the disclosure of the central suspect’s identity: Eli Feldstein, whom Israeli media identified as one of Netanyahu’s media advisors. Reports indicate Feldstein may have leaked information to two European media outlets, although he may not have been formally employed or security-cleared. Feldstein, who joined Netanyahu’s advisory team shortly after the October 7 2023 attacks, had previously advised far-right national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir.

Three other suspects remain unnamed in the investigation, which reportedly concerns leaks to outlets including the London-based *Jewish Chronicle* and Germany’s *Bild*. The *Chronicle* article, later discredited and withdrawn, suggested Hamas planned to evacuate hostages through Egypt, while *Bild* claimed Hamas prolonged the talks as psychological warfare against Israel. Many Israeli media outlets and observers expressed doubts over the articles, which seemed to bolster Netanyahu’s position in negotiations and lessen his liability for any collapse.

The articles emerged as Netanyahu was advocating ongoing Israeli control over the Philadelphia corridor along the Gaza-Egypt border - a demand Hamas rejected,

accusing Netanyahu of undermining talks mediated by the US, Qatar and Egypt. The leaks and media reports provided a counter-narrative amid mounting domestic criticism, particularly from families of hostages who saw Netanyahu as responsible for the failed negotiations. The public outcry peaked in early September, marked by widespread protests and calls for a general strike after Hamas killed six hostages during an Israeli operation.

### Psychological

A court document confirmed an ongoing investigation by the police, military and the Shin Bet intelligence agency, describing the case as potentially harmful to “sensitive information and sources” and detrimental to Israel’s objectives in the Gaza conflict. The leak led to scandal within the *Jewish Chronicle*, with several prominent columnists resigning over the discredited article. The newspaper retracted the articles and distanced itself from the freelance journalist responsible.

Netanyahu cited the *Bild* article in discussions with his cabinet, asserting that it revealed Hamas’s psychological tactics to pressure Israel. However, he faced criticism suggesting the leaks were politically motivated to stall hostage negotiations.

Netanyahu, who is currently on trial in three separate corruption cases involving alleged favours to media moguls for favourable coverage, has dismissed the leak controversy. His office claimed that the disclosed document supported efforts to retrieve hostages and did not disrupt negotiations. In contrast, critics argue that the case could represent a significant breach of national security and raises suspicions that Netanyahu’s administration may have acted against reaching a hostage agreement. Yoav Limor, a columnist in the pro-Netanyahu *Israel Hayom* newspaper, called it “one of the gravest affairs Israel has ever known”, suggesting it may

reveal actions by Netanyahu’s office counter to Israel’s war objectives.

In the last two weeks, Israeli security services have also reported the arrest of seven individuals in occupied East Jerusalem, accused of planning attacks supposedly under Iranian orders. According to Shin Bet and the police, the suspects aimed to assassinate a senior Israeli scientist and a city mayor. They were also reportedly instructed to bomb a police car and throw a grenade at a home, with a promised payment of 200,000 shekels (around \$53,000).

Investigators claim a 23-year-old man led the group, allegedly recruited by Iranian operatives and responsible for enlisting six others for the mission. Local media reported that he confessed to engaging in “terrorist activities” for purely financial reasons. Two young Israeli women, who appeared in front of Israeli TV cameras as ‘spies’, also seemed to be motivated by money. They are all Jewish immigrants from Azerbaijan living in the Haifa area. The group is suspected of conducting approximately 600 espionage missions, including sharing intelligence on military locations and energy infrastructure. Last week, four Israeli soldiers lost their lives in a drone strike launched by Hezbollah, targeting an army base near Binyamina in northern Israel - security services report that this base was among the locations the group had previously monitored. While it is not uncommon for Iran to try recruiting local operatives, the involvement of Israeli Jews in such activities is to say the least very rare.

In a bit of political grandstanding, culture and sports minister, Miki Zohar, a Likud member, has called for Israel to impose the death penalty on those convicted of treason during times of war. Israel’s penal code already includes capital punishment, of course, but only for exceedingly rare cases, treason being one of them. The kidnapped Nazi Adolf Eichmann was one of only two people executed by the Israeli state in over 75 years.

Then on November 5 Netanyahu dismissed defence minister Yoav Gallant, citing a “fracturing of trust” due to “significant gaps on how to conduct the war” and adding that “these gaps were accompanied by statements and actions [by Gallant] that went against government and cabinet decisions”. Israel Katz, the current foreign minister, will step in as the new defence minister, while Gideon Sa’ar, a minister without portfolio, will assume the role of foreign minister.

The dismissal was praised by Ben-Gvir, who commented: “... with Gallant still deeply trapped in his conceptions, it is impossible to achieve a complete victory.” Gallant responded by claiming his dismissal was the result of a dispute over three things: the issue of ultra-Orthodox military service, the abandonment of hostages in Gaza, and the need for an official inquiry into Hamas’s October 7 attack.<sup>2</sup>

Yair Golan, who heads Israel’s new centre-left party, the Democrats, took to X to call for a general strike and urged Israelis to demonstrate. By the early hours of November 6 Israeli Knesset politicians were clashing with the police, amid anti-Netanyahu protests ●

### Notes

1. [www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2024/10/31/israel-is-keeping-open-the-nuclear-option](https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2024/10/31/israel-is-keeping-open-the-nuclear-option).
2. [edition.cnn.com/2024/11/05/middleeast/netanyahu-yoav-gallant-intl-latam/index.html](https://edition.cnn.com/2024/11/05/middleeast/netanyahu-yoav-gallant-intl-latam/index.html).



## UKRAINE

# Notes on the war

With the freezing cold of winter fast approaching, Ukraine is increasingly dependent on nuclear power. Then there is the Storm Shadow 'red line', threats of nuclear war and Donald Trump. Jack Conrad comments on recent happenings and developments

This coming winter is going to be a real trial for Ukraine and its civilian population in what is the third year of the war. Russia has been steadily degrading the energy infrastructure. Power stations, electricity grid sub-stations and storage facilities - all have been hit by drones and missiles. In a country where winter temperatures regularly stay below zero - and in the east and north-east they can go down to as much as -20°C - demands on the "fragile" power grid will be substantial.<sup>1</sup>

Already some 70% of the population experiences an "unreliable electricity supply".<sup>2</sup> Even during the summer months shops and restaurants were regularly using diesel generators. So the expectation is that this winter will see a severe energy shortage - something that will surely be exacerbated if Russia continues to take out power stations, etc. Everything, of course, tells us that it will continue to do just that.

From a summertime 12 GW peak, this winter demand is expected to rise to 18.5 GW. Therefore, given the relentless drone and missile attacks, despite 1.7 GW being imported from the European Union, the expectation is of a 6 GW shortfall. That means prolonged power cuts, especially in front-line cities like Kharkiv ... and for the infirm, the elderly and the sick, killer conditions.

Not that we should expect a collapse in civilian morale and people clamouring for surrender terms. Ukrainian nationalism has deep roots, which certainly cannot be easily overcome by Vladimir Putin and the FSB regime in Moscow. Nonetheless, energy supply remains a Ukrainian weak point and as such that leaves it ever more dependent on nuclear power.

Nuclear power plants currently provide 70% of Ukraine's energy requirements, one of the highest levels in the world - even higher than France's 65%. Fears of triggering a nuclear meltdown have meant that so far those NPPs have largely been untouched - though not their "substations and electricity switch yards" which feed power into the grid.<sup>3</sup>

Playing with fire is always a risky business, playing with nuclear rods and waste is even more so. Ukrainian forces have recklessly been taking pot shots at the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia NPP in south-eastern Ukraine - not the other way round, as crazily suggested by large parts of the western media. Zaporizhzhia is Europe's largest NPP with six reactors and has, because of the war, been under 'cold shutdown'. As such it produces no electricity - nonetheless it does require outside power to keep nuclear material cool and prevent a disastrous accident. That alone should be reason to be extraordinarily concerned. According to Rafael Mariano Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, given the attacks and grossly inadequate staffing levels, the prospect of a nuclear accident is "dangerously close" - this in a country which witnessed the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.<sup>4</sup>

True, Zaporizhzhia is unlikely to explode: after all it is non-operational. However, shelling or a drone or missile strike on its nuclear storage facilities could still see significant



Maidan coup in 2014 triggered civil war in Ukraine

amounts of deadly radiation pluming into the atmosphere. Depending on the prevailing winds, this could affect millions in neighbouring Turkey, Belarus, Poland, Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria.

The dial is constantly being upped. Poland's foreign minister, Radosław Sikorski, talks about having a "duty" to intercept Russian drones and missiles in order to protect Ukraine's "nuclear facilities."<sup>5</sup> Kyiv has certainly been pushing its sponsors to become more involved in the war, including providing air defence cover over western Ukraine from batteries located on Nato territory.

There are, despite all this, some left and leftist voices who positively advocate nuclear power: eg, George Monbiot.<sup>6</sup> That despite the whole technology being inherently dangerous - not least given the potential of turning NPPs into weapons of war (like blowing up the Kakhovka hydro electric dam on the Dnieper river in June 2023, except with vastly more perilous consequences). Certainly when it comes to Russia, there must be the temptation, especially before Donald Trump is sworn in, of knocking out 70% of Ukraine power supplies simply by taking out its four remaining operational NPPs. Tit for tat, Ukraine could easily do the same with Russia's nearby nuclear power plants: eg, Kursk's NPP.

We have, therefore, been absolutely right to alarm bell this possibility of turning NPPs into weapons of mass destruction, and we have also been absolutely right to alarm bell the possibility of a Russia-Nato nuclear war in the event of Ukraine's use of Storm Shadows on targets within the pre-2014 territory of the Russian Federation.<sup>7</sup>

The immediate issue here might have faded somewhat with the US presidential race entering the final straight and now with Trump's clear victory. Nonetheless, because it could all too easily resurface - despite Trump's 24 hour peace talk pledge - it is more than worthwhile revisiting.

Britain, France and Italy - the joint manufacturers of Storm Shadow - appear to have been given permission to give Volodymyr Zelensky the go-ahead for their use by Joe Biden, but none, at least as far as we know, have dared cross that

particularly dangerous red line.

After all, not only do we now have president elect Donald Trump. Vladimir Putin has warned that, if this line is crossed, Nato would be "at war with Russia".<sup>8</sup> Dmitry Medvedev, former president and prime minister, has also talked of war and ominously threatened to reduce Kyiv to a "giant melted spot".<sup>9</sup> Sabre-rattling, perhaps - but as we have repeatedly said, well, till the moment when it is not.

Ukraine, it should be stressed, could not *effectively* deploy such cruise missiles without Nato technical and military back-up - crucially US cartographic data, M-code signals and satellites. Storm Shadows use three navigation systems during midcourse flight. According to the website of MBDA - the UK, French, Italian weapons system consortium - that means inertial and satellite navigation, as well as Terrain Reference Navigation.<sup>10</sup> This technology scans the terrain below and compares it with a preloaded reference image tied to exact coordinates. In the final phase, a thermal imaging seeker activates to locate and guide the missile to the exact target based on pre-stored data.

Yet the fact of the matter is that without *active* US help, Storm Shadow would lack accuracy and have to rely solely on civilian L1 C/A global positioning system signals, making it vulnerable to Russian electronic warfare systems that "could easily disrupt it".<sup>11</sup> Problematic, to put it mildly, not only because such missiles are expensive - they cost around £2 million apiece - but also because their stock is limited. Ukraine simply cannot afford to waste such a potent weapon.

Though they can hit with great accuracy and penetrate hardened or buried targets, Storm Shadows should not be considered a war *winner* for Ukraine. Yes, at the top of Zelensky's 'victory plan' is the west giving the green light to such cruise missile attacks on the Russian Federation. Yes, the liberal media chimes in with a resounding call for the west to "give Zelensky free rein, now North Korea has joined the war".<sup>12</sup> In reality, though, Storm Shadows will make only a marginal difference. They will not, cannot turn the tide of what is a war of attrition

that will ultimately be decided by GDP, arms production capabilities, manpower resources ... and political willpower.

Nonetheless, Russia's warnings should not be lightly dismissed. While the 'western community' disputes Russia's sovereignty over Crimea, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporozhziya and Kherson, it accepts Russia's sovereignty over the rest of its territory. Therefore, Russia has a right to treat attacks on its sovereign territory differently from attacks on territory over which its sovereignty is disputed. Under circumstances where a Nato weapon navigates through sovereign Russian airspace, using guidance signals beamed by US military satellites, to strike a target in sovereign Russian territory, this could indeed be deemed an act of war against Russia by the US-Nato, according to international law. US-Nato would be co-belligerents.

## Complacent left

Amazingly, given the death toll in the Russo-Ukrainian war and its potential to "phase into World War III" (Donald Trump), the left has been remarkably - criminally - complacent. Perhaps none more so than Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st century - an "eco-socialist, feminist, anti-racist and anti-imperialist organisation" with definite Cliffite antecedents.<sup>13</sup>

Though the comrades have recently agreed a pretty positive resolution on Ukraine,<sup>14</sup> when I last searched its website using the word, 'Ukraine', only one statement and two articles on the war came up! An RS21 steering group statement, 'On the invasion of Ukraine' (February 25 2022), 'Understanding the contradictions of Ukraine' (Sam O'Brien, October 17 2023) and 'From Ukraine to Gaza: imperialism, resistance and solidarity' (Pete Cannell, February 28 2024). That's it, that's all!

The basic thrust of this single statement and two articles is that the world is divided between imperialist powers and rival blocs: the US merely being the strongest. RS21 thereby considers China imperialist and Russia too ... but what about Iran, India, North Korea and Venezuela? We are not told.

RS21 innocently announces that "we don't live in a unipolar world".

Hence, in support of its multipolar thesis, we find the indisputable claim that "China projects its economic power on a global scale", while Russia, though it has a much smaller economy, "uses its military strength to project power well beyond its borders".<sup>15</sup>

There can be no doubt that historically tsarist Russia was a colonial power and built a vast prison house of nations. Beginning as the autocratic feudal principality of Muscovy, there was - especially with the decline of the Mongol empire - huge expansion to the east and the south. Moreover, tsarism dismembered Poland, took over the Baltics and established its rule over Finland too.

Naturally, Lenin roundly condemned Russian colonialism and saw tsarism as both socially and politically anachronistic, but also increasingly as a servant of big capital. In his *Imperialism*, though Lenin included Russia amongst the great imperialist powers, he did so almost wholly because of its colonial possessions. In terms of the number of subject peoples, it ranked behind Britain and France, but ahead of Germany, the US and Japan (1914 figures).<sup>16</sup> However, Russia's large-scale industry and banks were mostly foreign-owned - or dependent - and the tsarist state was massively in hock (mainly to the French financial oligarchy). Overall the country was dominated by peasant agriculture and characterised by extreme economic backwardness. Exactly why Leon Trotsky wrote about Russia's development giving it a "semi-colonial" character.<sup>17</sup> In other words, Russia was a semi-colonial colonising power.

I shall not set out my views on the nature of the 1917-91 Soviet state here, except in terms of a few salient negatives: eg, post-1928 and the first five-year plan ideas about a workers' state, degenerate or otherwise, are simply not tenable. Workers were atomised. They did not, could not, rule in any meaningful sense. Nor does the notion of the Soviet Union being "bureaucratic state capitalism" convince: the rouble was not money; there was an absence of wage labour; there were products, but not commodities; the law of value did not operate; and production was not driven by profit.

What of post-1991 Russia? The idea that the Russian Federation is an imperialist aggressor is a standard trope that effortlessly trips off the lips of just about every mainstream bourgeois politician. Of course, nowadays the words, 'imperial', 'imperialist' and 'imperialistic', carry entirely negative connotations. Long gone are the glory days of direct European colonialism and the white man's burden. Hence when it comes to the leading capitalist powers (eg, the G7), they proudly boast of being democracies, and imperialism is used either in reference to what is admitted as a slightly guilty past or, more likely, wielded as an ideological weapon against current enemies and rivals.

Inevitably there is a current on the 'left' which apes and echoes the dominant ideology and therefore either openly or sneakily sides with their 'own government', when it comes to foreign policy. So here in Britain there are the routine *economistic* complaints by



papers such as *Solidarity* about Sir Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves presiding over the full panoply of Thatcherite anti-trade union laws, cancelling winter fuel payments for millions of pensioners, cutting disability benefits and boosting so-called defence spending by £2.9 billion. Yet the same 'left', putting guns over butter, demands more arms deliveries for Ukraine and tougher sanctions on Russia. As if domestic and foreign policy were not intimately connected ... foreign policy being the continuation of domestic policy.

Yes, there exists a distinct social-imperialist camp. Not, as we have repeatedly explained, Sir Keir, Rachel Reeves, Angela Rayner and the Parliamentary Labour Party. There is nothing remotely social(ist) about them. They are just plain, everyday, career bourgeois politicians and, as such, just as committed to the Atlantic alliance as the Rishi Sunak government before them. No, on the far right of the far left we have the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign - along with a rogues' gallery of affiliates, supporters and outriders, such as the Labour Representation Committee, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Anticapitalist Resistance, John McDonnell, Nadia Whittome, Gilbert Achcar ... and until a short while ago RS21.

For the lot of them it is an open-and-shut case: Ukraine is fighting a "just war" of national defence and Russia is an imperialist country conducting an "unjust war" of aggression. Science though is noticeably lacking. Imperialism is simply equated with territorial expansion and foreign wars.

## Imperialism

RS21's steering group declared back in February 2022 that "Russian imperialism is not a 'lesser evil' in this conflict". It went on to list the "series of expansionist successes" scored by Putin's Russia: reasserting its post-cold war geopolitical role through its military intervention in Syria; annexing Crimea; setting up the People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk; suppressing the popular rebellion in Kazakhstan; and propping up the Lukashenko regime in Belarus.<sup>18</sup>

If one wants to define imperialism as nothing more than intervening in another country and expanding territory, so be it. Athens and its Delian League, the Roman republic and Tudor England were imperialist. That is no problem - imperialism existed well before capitalism took command over the state. But Marxism has done us the great service of locating *modern* imperialism in the context of a capitalism dominated by finance, giant monopolies and a system of global domination and exploitation with a definite, but never fixed, pecking order. Hence in the 17th century England successfully challenged the Dutch for global hegemony, Britain saw off the French challenge in the 19th century and the German in the 20th century, but finally succumbed to the US in the 1940s.

True, the more sophisticated tell us that monopolies are the *essence* of imperialism and Russia, irrefutably, has its share of monopolies: eg, Gazprom, Rosneft, Lukoil and Sberbank. That, however, would make countries such as India, Brazil, South Africa and even Ukraine imperialist too. After all, each has its own batch of home-grown monopolies (ie, oligopolies, to use standard bourgeois economic jargon).

Without in any way treating Lenin's *Imperialism* as a bible - it contains some clearly mistaken arguments - it is worth citing in this context. For Lenin imperialism

is not only about monopoly and finance capital: it is the scale, proportion and dominance of overseas interest payments, dividends, rent and such. Hence Lenin emphasises *parasitism* and the fact that in Britain the "income of the rentiers is five times greater than the income obtained from the foreign trade". This, he declares, is "the *essence* of imperialism and imperialist parasitism".<sup>19</sup>

America, it should be added, pulls off exactly the same trick - and then one. Possessing uniquely powerful armed forces and with the dollar serving as the world's reserve currency, the US government can run a \$1.83 trillion deficit through recourse to the simple device of what used to be called the printing press.<sup>20</sup> Other countries thereby pay for Uncle Sam's profligacy.

However, what Ellen Meiksins Wood calls the "new imperialism" no longer involves territorial expansion and colonial possessions.<sup>21</sup> They do not belong in the American century, as the British and French found to their cost with the 1956 Suez crisis. Undoubtedly there are dotted here and there a few surviving genuine colonies; mostly, however, they are tax havens, which, especially in the case of Britain, serve as a means for the City of London to skim off profits from high-level state and business corruption, criminal operations such as the drugs trade and perfectly legal tax avoidance dodges.

No, the essence of the new imperialism is unequal exchange, the export of capital, and a global pecking order which sees the US exploiting other, more or less independent, states through a system of capital, which is now "structured in a complex relation of domination and subordination".<sup>22</sup>

What Russia's so-called oligarchs typically exported - 'so-called' because they do not rule - was money, not capital, ie, self-expanding value. Their wealth - well, till they were sanctioned - generally took the form of swollen offshore bank accounts, top-end London, Paris and New York properties, English football clubs and luxury yachts.

China is another matter. It is no match for the US and its allies. Nonetheless, it is a full-spectrum rival and can perhaps be classified as sub-imperialist, pre-imperialist, even fully imperialist, because it not only exports commodities, but capital. In 2022 Chinese outbound direct investments amounted to \$2.75 trillion in 47,000 enterprises, which span 190 countries. This puts the People's Republic amongst the "world's top three".<sup>23</sup> Clearly the drivers here are internal laws and dynamics. Post-Mao, wage labour has become ubiquitous, including in the state sector. China now counts second only to America in terms of its number of billionaires.<sup>24</sup> Though the party-state dominates politically, capital accumulation imposes an economic logic. The result is, however, incredibly complex and needs proper - ie, a thorough-going scientific - investigation ... say something like Evgeny Preobrazhensky's *New economics* (1926). Trite labels, lazy assumptions and prostituted apologetics are worse than useless.

Obviously, Russia does not parasitically exploit the world, or even its near abroad, in any meaningful way that can seriously be described as imperialist. Despite its 150 million population it has a GDP that ranks far behind Japan, Germany, the UK and France. No, it is in the third league, down with countries like Brazil and Mexico.<sup>25</sup> Even taking into account oil and gas, geographic size and nuclear weapons, Russia is most decidedly not a serious rival to the US.

By contrast, though it maintains no colonial bureaucracy, the US empire of the dollar, bases, alliances, institutions and treaties - the G7, World Bank and IMF, Nato, the Five Eyes and Aukus - robs and exploits the entire world with a callous ruthlessness unequalled in human history. US banks and corporations suck in wealth from other countries like a never quenched vampiric monster. Britain is the junior partner, which benefits through the City and plays the role of yapdog, when it comes to wars such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Ukraine.

So Ukraine must not be seen in isolation. Behind it there stands the unmatched might of the dominant US-led imperialist bloc. The US violently pulled Ukraine out of the Russian orbit with the 2014 Maidan coup and then step by step set it up as a pawn in the great game to dominate Halford Mackinder's Eurasian 'world island'. America would then, if it were successful, have the ability to reboot its domination of the entire globe - a scenario that both Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping will surely resist, using whatever means they have at their disposal.

Sympathising with ordinary Ukrainians who have been killed, injured, lost loved ones, fled abroad, etc is perfectly natural. War is unimaginably cruel. But to wish for Ukraine's victory, to support its war aims, not least imposing Banderite rule over the Russian-speaking majority in Donbas and Crimea, to demand that Nato 'Arm, arm, arm Ukraine' and call 'Putin, Putin, Putin, out, out, out' is to act in the direct interests of US imperialism. In Russia it might well be the case that principled communists would say that they 'prefer to see a Russian defeat than its victory'. But, to state the obvious, we are not in Russia.

## RS21 approaches

RS21's Pete Cannell tells us that there are "two main approaches to Ukraine on the left". One argues for "self-determination for Ukraine and effectively sides with western imperialism as a necessary evil for stopping an out-of-control Putin". In other words the social-imperialist camp, which once, of course, included RS21 - that despite its evasive talk about a "dual war": ie, Ukraine's war for self-determination and a US-Nato "proxy war". The other approach "sees Russia, however regrettably, as responding to western (US and Nato) provocation".<sup>26</sup> This, I take it, describes both the pro-Kremlin and the social-pacifist left.

Those socialists and communists who support the Kremlin, or who see something anti-imperialist in its war with Ukraine, might have landed themselves in a dreadful hole - after all the Putin-FSB regime is far-right, anti-working class and deeply reactionary. But at least the pro-Kremlin, the Z left does not support their own ruling class. These Stalinite and Trotskyite comrades - and I shall call them comrades - usually take their cue from this or that Lenin text and neatly divide the world into oppressing and oppressed nations. As Russia cannot be seriously categorised as imperialist - and it can't - they consider themselves duty-bound to offer Putin 'military' support. Actually, this has nothing to do with raising an international brigade or sending money to buy arms. No, of course, military support is political support: ie, articles, leaflets and postings on the ephemera that is social media, calling for 'Russian victory'.

The social-pacifist left is doubtless worse, because it serves to foster the illusion that there can be a peaceful capitalism, as long as governments act reasonably and abide by internationally agreed rules

and standards. Eg, Stop the War Coalition, the *Morning Star* and the Corbynite swamp. In fact, war and capitalism are inseparable. Peace is only a moment between war, and war is merely the continuation of the same policy previously carried out peacefully through diplomacy, tariffs and sanctions.

However, the old RS21 position constitutes the *most dangerous* form of opportunism - ie, centrism - because it provides seemingly 'left' excuses for blurring principles and finding an accommodation with social-imperialism and thereby capitalism.

From the beginning - that is, February 2022 - and well before that, it has been crystal-clear that the US and Nato had been pushing, prodding and preparing Ukraine for conflict with Russia. As for a "dual war" that had been going on since the 2014 Maidan coup. Russian-speaking, Russian-backed separatists in the east fought the Nato-backed central government in Kyiv and Banderite fascist irregulars. What changed in February 2022 was that the dual war became a triple war. Given that conclusion - which hardly needs proving - we have to decide which war is *dominant*. Is it the war fought by Donbas speaking-Russians for self-determination, the Russo-Ukrainian war, or is it the US/Nato proxy war? The answer is pretty obvious. As in the case of 'plucky little Belgium' and 'brave little Serbia' in World War I, we must recognise that calls to stand alongside 'heroic Ukraine' serve as an excuse for siding with our 'own' imperialism.

For us, though, the main enemy is our own ruling class and that is why we emphasise the perspective of pursuing the class struggle at home - not only on the economic, the trade-union front, but, crucially, in the realm of high politics. Hence our call to abolish the monarchy, the House of Lords, MI5, the police and the standing army. Instead, we envisage a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a reunited Ireland, proportional representation, a popular militia, open borders, dealing with the climate crisis by employing radical control measures and constituting the working class as the ruling class - Europe being our main salient. See my *Europe: meeting the challenge of continental unity* (2002), *Remaking Europe* (2004), Mike Macnair's *Revolutionary strategy* (2008) and the CPGB's *Draft programme* (2023).

Meanwhile, it is certainly the case that the US-Nato proxy war in Ukraine cannot be separated from other wars and conflicts, not least Israel's. The idea that the US, Germany, UK, France, etc are supporting a "just war" in Ukraine and an "unjust war" in Gaza, Lebanon and the wider Middle East is a stupid, hopeless, opportunist muddle. States which are committed to anti-trade union laws, austerity, restrictions on civil rights and the continuation of class exploitation at home pursue those very same *class interests* by other, violent, means abroad. If a war is supported by *our* capitalist state, then it follows that such a war is a criminal war. Those who urge on any such war in any way betray the working class and the cause of international socialism.

While it is right to congratulate comrades Steven R, Alfie H, Andreas C, Harry H, Danny B and Callum F for their 'Main enemy' motion, which shifted RS21 in the direction of a principled position, more needs to be done.

There has to be an accounting for how RS21 began in the social-imperialist camp, when it came to the outbreak of the Russo-Ukraine

war. Who proposed affiliation to the USC? Was there a left opposition? What position did the "brilliant and invaluable comrades" who still identify strongly with "the IS tradition" take? What about the "non-Cliffites"? Was there a vote on USC affiliation at an All Member Assembly? Did the steering group take the decision? Why did it take so long before there was a change of line? Was there a right opposition at the September 15 2024 AMA? Who were its spokespersons? Was there a vote? What was the margin? What were the arguments? Is the left opening up a comprehensive struggle against all the opportunist tendencies in RS21? If not, why not?

Writing in the *Weekly Worker*, Archie Woodrow *boasts* of RS21 being a "creative, forward-looking fusion".<sup>27</sup> Is that a fusion with social-imperialists, social-pacifists and centrists? Chumminess with rank opportunists is certainly nothing to boast about. Instead there should be open polemics conducted in full view of the entire left in order to clarify the depth and significance of differences. We should not have to guess, rely on rumour or read between the lines to understand what is going on. Everything must be concrete, clear and open. Polemics must necessarily therefore be sharp, angry if need be: indeed to write without "anger" about what is "harmful" is to "write boringly".<sup>28</sup>

Naturally philistines will moan about bickering, squabbles, washing dirty linen, crushing dissent, etc, etc. Let them. Without full clarity, drawing the sharpest lines of demarcation and overcoming even incipient manifestations of opportunism nothing serious can be achieved ●

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## POLEMIC

# Wars and slogans

Accepting, or adapting to, left-syndicalist excuses not to openly engage with our ideas is not the road to principled unity, argues Mike Macnair

**W**e continue the discussion on the Provisional Central Committee's statement on the danger of the Ukraine war escalating into World War III, and comrade Carla Roberts' criticisms of this statement and the alternative proposed by several comrades. It is now 'my turn' to respond, because comrade Roberts' article, 'Different times, different slogans', deployed some arguments from my book *Revolutionary strategy* against comrade Jack Conrad's article and the PCC statement.<sup>1</sup> What follows is merely my views, not the common views of the PCC.

It is clear that Donald Trump has won the US presidential election - as we thought very possible in our discussions at our October 27 aggregate. This throws up in the air the question of US policy towards the war in Ukraine. And the impending election has already taken off the immediate agenda the *immediate* threat of escalation towards World War III through the use of European medium-range missiles to attack 1991-2014 Russian territory. By doing so, it has removed the immediacy of the PCC statement. Our purpose in that statement was, as comrade Conrad has put it, to "ring the alarm bell" about the dangers of the war in Ukraine, addressing a left which has been radically focussed on the much easier task of opposing British support for Israel's ethnic cleansing operations in Gaza, the West Bank, and now in southern Lebanon.

This response to comrade Roberts is thus addressed to issues of general principle raised by the discussion, rather than to a range of secondary issues which are (I agree with comrade Roberts here) potentially merely side-tracks.<sup>2</sup> They are three: the militia question; 'revolutionary defeatism', its meaning, and slogans; and the purpose of the PCC statement and its relationship to the problems of 'partyism' and left unity.

## Militia question

Comrade Roberts' article, and the proposed alternative statement she and other comrades put forward, muddle the difference between the demand for a *popular militia* and the idea of *workers' defence guards/workers' militia*. Thus in her article, she refers early on to whether communists "should openly argue for the establishment of workers' defence units (popular militias) to replace the standing army"; later in the argument, to "popular militia". In the alternative statement, the confusion extends further:

10. We support the democratic republican principle of the replacement of the standing army by democratic and accountable workers' defence units (or a popular militia/citizen army), as part of our strategy of splitting the army and transforming the working class into the ruling class. Towards this goal, communists fight for freedom of political speech within the army, the right of soldiers to organise in trade unions and political parties and other democratic demands.

The demand for a *popular militia*, or universal military training and



General Lavr Kornilov's troops lay down their arms to Bolshevik-led regiments and Red Guards

the universal arming of the people, as an alternative to the standing army, was a common element of the programmes of the left, beginning with the 1848 *Demands of the Communist Party in Germany* and down to 1914 (including the 1900 manifesto of the Labour Party).<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Engels argued in 1893 in *Can Europe disarm?* for universal military training in schools as the means of implementing this idea.<sup>4</sup>

The point of this demand is to pose an alternative to the existing regime of mercenary army and mercenary/conservative (small c) party-loyalist police force. Universal military training and the universal arming of the people immediately reduces the practicality of the use of the armed forces against the working class internally, and in imperialist adventures abroad. Strategically, it is the beginning of the return of the public power to the people, that is, a state which begins to wither away.

The demand for political and trade union rights in the existing armed forces would be a step towards the popular militia, because it is a step away from the idea of the soldiers as mercenaries and as the robot servants of their officers (and behind them, the monarchy to which they swear loyalty).

The workers' militia, in contrast, is, as Lenin put it in May 1917, a *step towards* a people's militia.<sup>5</sup> A *step towards* because workers' militia or workers' defence guards under capitalist rule are inevitably *ad hoc* volunteer groups, roughly organised, with limited training and limited arms. Even under US conditions, they could at most stand off police or 'Pinkerton men' long enough to force the state to bring in heavy weapons units (and more hopefully, to allow fraternisation and political appeals to persuade the soldiers to refuse to fire). The demand for workers' defence guards is posed by police, 'security firm', far-right, etc, attacks on workers' organisations and actions. It is not immediately posed by the UK participating in conducting a US

proxy war on Russia which threatens to slide into great-power war.

This confusion between popular militia and workers' militia bears on why introducing the militia demand into the statement would be diversionary today.

The people's militia demand disappeared from the political arsenal of the left from around 1918. Paradoxically as it may seem, this disappearance was the result of the failure of *workers' militia*. The effect of the land decree of the new Council of People's Commissars in October 1917 was to set in motion the dissolution of the Russian army, as conscript soldiers deserted to return to their villages to seize land. But in February 1918, when peace negotiations broke down, the Red Guards proved wholly unable to resist the victorious German eastern front field army. The Russians were forced to accept German terms at Brest-Litovsk. Trotsky, replaced as commissar for foreign affairs, was appointed commissar for war, and began the building of the Soviet Red Army as a *regular* army, much of whose officer corps was drawn from the old tsarist army (with supervision by political commissars and by the Cheka).

This turn in the Russian revolution was reflected in the replacement of the popular militia demand by ambiguous formulations on the military question in the 1919 programme of the Russian Communist Party, and in an 'algebraic formulation' ("arming the proletariat, disarming the bourgeois counter-revolutionary organisations") in the platform proposed for 'workers' governments' by the Fourth Congress of Comintern in 1922.<sup>6</sup>

The abandonment of the popular militia slogan was a mistake. In the first place, the defeat of an improvised *workers' militia* by a regular army that had already decisively defeated the Russian regular army is not evidence against

a permanent organised and trained *popular militia* as a defence and policing policy. Just for example, autumn 1914 showed that the British regular forces were insufficient and the existing 'Territorial Force' were extensively deployed.

Secondly, abandoning the popular militia slogan struck at the heart of the minimum programme as a democratic programme. Substituting the idea of *workers' defence guards* was to fall into the illusions of revolutionary syndicalism; the 'algebraic formulation', on the other hand, was substantially politically empty. Hence CPGB includes in our *Draft programme*, has campaigned and continues to campaign, when it is appropriate, for the popular militia slogan, universal military training and universal arming of the people: the Swiss model extended.

Nonetheless, the abandonment of the popular militia slogan was a decision of the Russian Communist Party and of Comintern in the time of Lenin and Trotsky. And the result is that those Trotskyist groups that have not collapsed, way of 'transitional method', into economism and pacifism, cling to Comintern formulations and to the syndicalist version of the *workers' militia* as an alternative.

The purpose of the PCC statement was (we will return to this) to draw political lines on the left round the fundamentals of communist policy in a war, reactionary on both sides, to which our own state is a party (if largely an indirect party, apart from whatever British military techs, trainers, etc, may be operating in Ukraine). In this context we have *common* ground with those Trotskyists prepared to take broadly dual-defeatist positions, irrespective of their positions on the popular militia question. Introducing the popular militia slogan into a statement would therefore be diversionary.

It makes matters worse that comrade Roberts' article, and the proposed alternative statement, blur

the lines between CPGB's *popular militia* slogan and the Trotskyists' mistaken view that only the slogan of a *workers' militia* is principled.

At this point I think it is worthwhile to make a small autocritique of the PCC statement, which *also* includes a few elements which I think, on second thoughts, are diversionary. They are *not* the issues comrade Roberts originally proposed to delete - paragraphs 1-10 on the immediate danger of escalation into World War III, and paragraph 19 on the political responsibility of the 'arm, arm, arm Ukraine' enthusiasts for tax rises and social expenditure cuts. These points were fundamental.

However, first: it was important to make the point that the game in which Biden sought to make Britain, France, etc, take responsibility for first use of Storm Shadow and so on medium-range missiles against 1991-2014 Russian territory was about *escalation towards full Nato involvement*, not about these weapons really being war-winners. However, it was unnecessary to *exclude* the possibility that they could have decisive military effect.

The second and third sentences of point 4 says: "Yes, they will make a marginal difference, but they will not - cannot - turn the tide of the war. Russia has already moved most important command posts, airforce bases and major storage facilities inside Russia, beyond their 155-mile range." This military speculation is unnecessary to the point and hence diversionary.

Second: it was equally important to make the point that the "defence" of nuclear installations was being proposed as a ground of Nato full entry into the war (points 5-6). This was, again, important evidence of the escalation drive and of nuclear brinkmanship. But the final sentence of point 6 is "Clearly nuclear power is inherently dangerous." In my opinion true, but again diversionary - like the introduction of the militia question, it raises an issue debated on the left and reduces the sharp focus on *the war issue*.

## Tramlines

It is easy for polemics to become "tramlined" (as cars used to get stuck in tram tracks on roads, and can still get stuck in road surface irregularities) and go off in a non-useful direction. In the present case this has, I think, happened. The way it has happened is that comrade Roberts' original letter included the statement that:

The concept of 'revolutionary defeatism' and the slogan, 'The main enemy is at home', are crucially important in this context. The PCC says these ideas are implicit in the text and the request to make them explicit is a sign of "fetishism with words". ... I really cannot see why we should abandon 'The main enemy is at home'. It is succinct, understandable, recognisable, it speaks to our political history and our political practice, and it sums up what we fight for - in stark contrast to much of the left.

Comrade Conrad's reply made the point that the PCC statement *concluded with* the formulation,



# 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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Clear lines of demarcation must be drawn. This is the necessary condition for developing the political consciousness of the advanced section of the working class and then taking the struggle of the broad masses from the narrow routine of trade unionism and economics to the level of high politics and thereby the perspective of turning what is a war between reactionary capitalist powers into a civil war - a revolution - for democracy, socialism and communism.

That is, a version of the Bolshevik slogan of 1914-1916, to "turn the imperialist war into a civil war", which Lenin characterised as "the only correct proletarian slogan". ("The main enemy is at home" was Karl Liebknecht's.)

However, comrade Conrad went on to make at considerable length the point made by Hal Draper and by Lars T Lih, that after the February 1917 revolution the Bolsheviks dropped talk of 'revolutionary defeatism' and the slogan 'turn the imperialist war into a civil war'. The point comrade Conrad was making was *not* that we were in conditions like those after February 1917 in Russia, but simply that particular forms of words must not be fetishised.

Comrade Roberts, in her article, takes this to be an argument that the situation in Britain is analogous to that in Russia after February 1917. She goes on to use a passage from my book *Revolutionary strategy* to argue that the Bolsheviks, in spite of dropping the slogan, continued to carry on an anti-war agitation. (Lenin's May 1917 article on the local elections, cited above, is an example: the Bolsheviks sought electoral blocs "only with the internationalists ... in keeping with the decisions of our conferences (the Petrograd and the All-Russia conferences) and with the basic policy of the proletarian party aimed against petty-bourgeois defencism ...").

True, but utterly irrelevant, for the reason given above: the PCC statement actually uses the slogan of the Bolsheviks in 1914-17: to turn the reactionary war into a civil war.

Comrade Roberts' article, and the alternative statement, both argue for forms of 'direct action' against the war. In comrade Roberts' article: "A mass Communist Party would surely organise and run demonstrations, strikes, boycotts of weapons shipments and other actions to disrupt the war effort. Without any illusion that these tactics by themselves will succeed - they must always be linked with a strategy for taking power."

## Alternative

And in the alternative statement, "While we welcome strikes, boycotts and other actions against the war, we always need to explain that by themselves they cannot succeed. Such actions need to be linked with a strategy of overthrowing the international capitalist state system and for the working class to become the hegemon of society."

Comrade Roberts' article makes significant use of my discussion of 'revolutionary defeatism' in *Revolutionary strategy*. But she has clearly missed my use there of Lenin's argument *against* the approach she argues for (*Revolutionary strategy*, p71):

In November 1914 Lenin wrote: "Refusal to serve with the forces, anti-war strikes, etc, are sheer nonsense, the miserable and cowardly dream of an unarmed struggle against the armed bourgeoisie, vain yearning for the destruction of capitalism without a desperate civil war or a series of wars. *It is the duty of every socialist to conduct propaganda of the class struggle, in the army as well; work directed towards turning a war of the nations into civil war is the only socialist activity in the era of an imperialist armed conflict of the bourgeoisie of all nations.*"

In July 1915, in arguing, against Trotsky, for "practical actions leading toward such defeat", Lenin comments as an aside: "For the 'penetrating reader': This does not at all mean to 'blow up bridges', organise unsuccessful military strikes, and, in general, to help the government to defeat the revolutionaries."<sup>10</sup>

The issue is, in fact, the same as the issue of conflating the slogan of the *popular* militia with the slogan of the *workers'* militia. In promoting 'direct action' against the war, comrade Roberts and the supporters of the alternative resolution are adapting to the left-syndicalism of the Trotskyists.

Why are such proposals "in general, to help the government to defeat the revolutionaries"? The answer is the usual problem with left-syndicalism - the need to fight for a political majority. Direct-actionist initiatives result in the vanguard (meaning in this context advanced mass sections of the class, not party cadres) isolating itself from the masses and exposing itself to repression. The result would be disasters like January 1919 in Berlin or March 1921 in Saxony.

## Purpose

Comrade Roberts thought that the purpose of the statement was the immediate construction of unity. In fact, it was an attempt to draw political lines, and to get a *political* response from other groups and the sects of one member called 'independents'. In that respect it has largely failed.

Lying behind this purpose and this failure is that unity is practically only possible if the far left breaks with its current common method of operation. That is, each individual organisation seeks to 'Go to the masses' by dropping awkward issues for the sake of diplomatic unity with forces to their right round economic, or more generally fashionable, issues. This can be called "united front policy" (following Georgi Dimitrov's 'united front' concept from the 1935 Seventh Congress of Comintern, in which disagreements are suppressed for the sake of unity). Or it can be called "transitional method".

The small minority that doesn't follow this method clings to mere dogmatic 'orthodox' rigid lists of slogans, which must all be included on every leaflet: thus small western Maoist groups, and thus the Spartacists and sub-Spartacist groups (International Bolshevik Tendency, and so on), who were infected with it through the Spartacists' dive into the radical left of the youth circa 1970, leading to infection with the party conceptions of the US Maoist 'New Communist Movement'. Associated with both approaches is the radical separation of what can be discussed internally and what can be published.

The commitment to unity being necessarily on the basis of *privately constructed* diplomatic agreements and the radical separation of internal debate and external publication, have the result that far left groups cannot unite *among themselves*, or even explain publicly what separates Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century from Counterfire, or from Anticapitalist Resistance, or from Socialist Alternative, or ... and so on to the 57th variety. The result is that as far as the broad workers' vanguard (the long-time activists of the trade union and labour movement and so on) is concerned, the far left necessarily appears as the Judean People's Front versus the People's Front of Judea in *Monty Python's life of Brian*.

This method extends, on the right, to include Collective; on the left, to include *Prometheus*. It would be perfectly possible in principle to have a united *Trotskyist* party, rejecting CPGB's commitment to maximum/minimum programme (for example) if comrades would break with the method of separation of internal and external debate and of diplomatic agreements as the only road to unity. In reality, however, at the moment it

is only CPGB that is willing to break with the method.

This is why we try to get responses from the rest of the left, and why we don't succeed. It is the real ground of the unwillingness of comrades to engage *politically* with the CPGB's arguments. The point was transparent in RS21's refusal to discuss with us at all, at the time of their split from SWP.

At this point we return to 'not fit for purpose'. True in a sense. That is, that we on the PCC did not expect that *CPGB comrades* would respond to antagonistic comment on social media by *accepting* their interlocutors' excuses for not engaging *politically* with the PCC statement - that is, by open agreement or disagreement.

"Too long" was, in reality, code for: "not a diplomatic agreement". Other aspects of the objections are (as I hope I have shown above) really that the statement was not left-syndicalist. It would be more productive to hear these directly from non-CPGB comrades than refracted through CPGB comrades' adaptation to hostile objections on social media. But that would be no doubt be making an unacceptable concession to CPGB's insistence on public debate ●

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## Notes

1. 'Establishing a principled left' *Weekly Worker* October 3 ([weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1509/establishing-a-principled-left](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1509/establishing-a-principled-left)); 'Danger of World War III: the communist response' October 24 ([weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1512/danger-of-world-war-iii-the-communist-response](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1512/danger-of-world-war-iii-the-communist-response)). See also comrade Roberts' letter of October 10 ([weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1510/letters](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1510/letters)); Jack Conrad's response, 'Wrong and right war politics', October 17 ([weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1511/wrong-and-right-war-politics](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1511/wrong-and-right-war-politics)), comrade Roberts' article, 'Different times, different slogans', October 24 ([weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1512/carla](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1512/carla)), to which this article responds; and 'Debating our culture' October 31 ([weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1513/debating-our-culture](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1513/debating-our-culture)).
2. For a single example: comrade Roberts says that "The war in Ukraine is not yet quite as unpopular as the British government's support for Israel's campaign of genocide against the Palestinians." But in reality, Ukraine-defencism is dominant in the labour movement and involves a significant section of the far left; and polls show continuing strong supports for arms to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia: eg, [www.statista.com/statistics/1371642/gb-public-opinion-on-measures-to-support-ukraine](http://www.statista.com/statistics/1371642/gb-public-opinion-on-measures-to-support-ukraine).
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8. [www.marxists.org/archive/liebknecht-k/works/1915/05/main-enemy-home.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/liebknecht-k/works/1915/05/main-enemy-home.htm). See also JP Joubert, 'Revolutionary defeatism' (1988): [www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol11/no3/revdeft.html](http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol11/no3/revdeft.html).
9. VI Lenin 'The position and tasks of the Socialist International' *CW* Vol 21, Moscow 1977, p35.
10. VI Lenin 'The defeat of one's own government in the imperialist war' *CW* Vol 21, Moscow 1977, p275.

## Fighting fund

# Not a one-off!

Readers may remember that last week I reported that no less than £2,855 had been received by the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund, with one day still to go in October. Well, that last day of the month saw just one donation (£10 from comrade MD), but that was enough to see our final total for October exceed our £2,250 target by £605! Well done, everybody!

But now we have to make sure that wasn't just a one-off and build on last month's success. And the good news is that after the first six days of November we already have £487 in the kitty.

The two donations that stand out are the fantastic £100 bank transfers from comrades JC and AC. Brilliant! (JC's was "in memory of Tom May", our longstanding comrade who died last month). Other bank transfers/standing orders came from MM (£31), CG (£30), RG and NR (£25 each), DL and BK (£20), BG, MT and AM (£15), RM (£13), MM (£11), AN, CP, DI and YM (£10 each), and DC

and JS, who both contributed £6.

Then there was MH's £10 PayPal donation and the fiver handed to one of our comrades at last Saturday's Palestine demonstration in London.

So, as I say, we already have £487, with exactly one fifth of the month gone - in other words, at the moment we're looking at beating that £2,250 target by a couple of hundred quid in November too. But we don't take anything for granted here at *Weekly Worker* team HQ. We know we have to consistently break through that target just to meet our running costs, and the cash received varies hugely from day to day.

So please help us out if you can - go to the web address below to see the different ways you can do so ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

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# weekly worker

## We need a survival plan

# Human wave of solidarity

As anger erupts against the complacent authorities, writes Eddie Ford, Spain's devastating floods give us yet another terrifying glimpse of what the future holds

Over a year's worth of rain fell within hours on October 29 in eastern Spain. The resulting floods claimed over 200 lives, with many bodies still unrecovered or unidentified, with the death toll likely to rise, as the emergency services continue to pick their way through the rubble. Some of those missing could have been swept down rivers and out to sea and many people are still without power, water and gas.

Four days earlier, an official from the state meteorological agency warned that there was a possibility of a high-impact storm - something that was initially ridiculed, with the report accused of "alarmism" on the X platform by climate change denialists and largely ignored by the authorities. On November 3, hundreds of people heckled Spain's king and queen, as well as the prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, and the governor of Valencia, Carlos Mazón, when they attempted to visit one of the municipalities hardest hit - throwing mud and shouting "murderers".

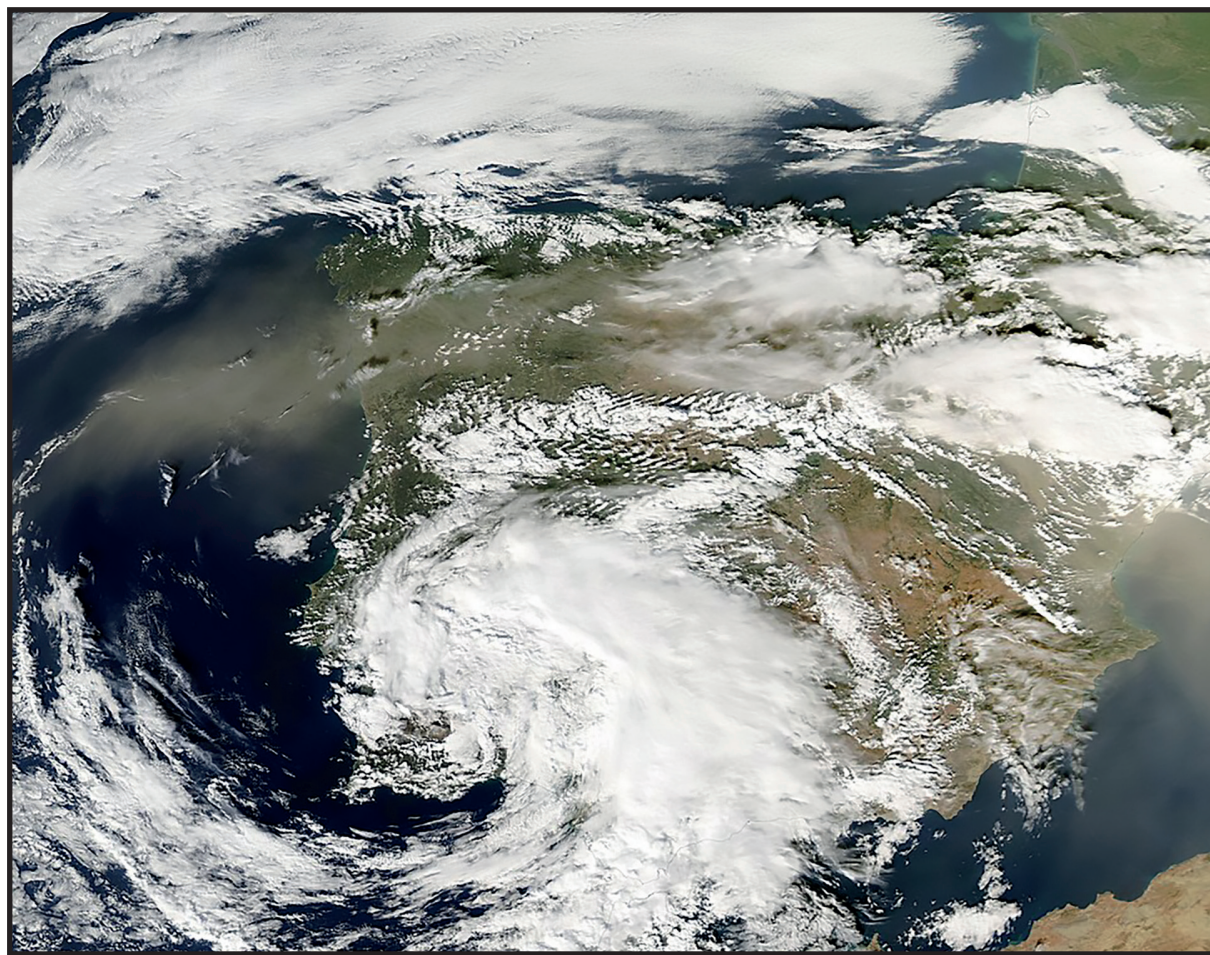
Calls rang out for the resignation of Sánchez and Mazón, the former having to be swiftly evacuated by bodyguards. Someone shouted at Felipe, "You've abandoned us", demanding to know why residents had been left on their own to grapple with the aftermath of the deadly floods, and adding, "You're four days too late". They also confronted the monarch on why the civil protection service, which is overseen by the regional government, had sent alert warnings many hours after it had been warned of rapidly deteriorating conditions.

Given the criminally negligent lack of response from the state two days after the rains first hammered down, the catastrophic images led to a show of solidarity - a human wave of volunteers - as thousands walked miles from the less-affected areas, carrying shovels, pick axes, wheelbarrows, and food supplies. On the following day, thousands more turned up at Valencia's City of Arts and Sciences, which had been hastily converted into the nerve centre of the clean-up operation. Residents collected food from a streetside table set up by donors, some saying that they would have had nothing if not for the volunteers.

## Petrol can

Of course, Valencia has a long history of disastrous floods from the 14th century up to recent times. It is situated near a riverbed on an alluvial plain, meaning that when heavy rains coincide with a convective storm, during which the sea level tends to rise, the flood risk is doubled.

Then there was the 1957 flood, caused by a three-day cold drop (*gota fría*) that caused the banks of the Túria river to overflow and devastated Valencia city, causing at least 81 fatalities. This forced the Franco regime to launch a plan to reroute the Túria to the south



The rain in Spain ...

of the city centre - a measure that successfully protected the city centre, but did nothing to protect the towns to the south. In September 2019 floods killed six people in Vega Baja del Segura, leading the local government to establish 'Valencian Emergencies' - only for it to be closed down in 2023, on the grounds that it was a "superfluous expense".

Yet the 2024 floods are on a totally different scale, with many calling it one of the deadliest 'natural' disasters in Spanish history, when in reality it was nothing of the sort - rather, it was an *unnatural disaster*. Europe's deadliest flash floods in at least half a century surely shows two things: the fact that the human-caused climate crisis is starting to pick up in ferocity and regularity; and the deadly nature of the fossil fuel industry that is killing so many.<sup>1</sup> The catastrophic downpours were driven in part by higher temperatures in the Mediterranean - a largely enclosed sea whose warmth is a store of energy that can only be released via evaporation, creating the conditions for intense storms. In this way, the Mediterranean basin acts as a "petrol can" by feeding water vapour into the atmosphere - a process undeniably exacerbated by global warming. In fact climatologist Stefano Materia has described the Mediterranean as a "timebomb".

Another vitally important factor is the intense *urbanisation* of the coastal area, as impervious surfaces like roads and buildings impede water from penetrating into the ground. Inevitably, water gathers and flash

flooding results. Plus the fact that rising sea levels will further increase the drainage time to days or even weeks, which can only bring trouble.

## Images

Of course, the images from Valencia and other regions of Spain are both shocking and familiar. Vehicles were swept away, as roads turned to rivers last month in Italy and before that in France; a month earlier in central Europe 24 died in floods in Poland, Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia; there were freakish downpours in England; commuters were swept off train platforms or trapped in carriages as the waters rose up to their necks during the metro line flooding disaster in China ... and on and on it goes. But, with extreme-weather catastrophes becoming so commonplace, they risk becoming *normalised* - that in turn can induce dangerous complacency or passivity when exactly the opposite is needed.

Of course, as with the Valencia region, there have always been floods and local factors (atmospheric, geographic, economic and political) that contribute to the destructive impact. But it is the *global physics* of a fossil-fuel-drenched world that is loading the dice towards environmental disaster. The science is quite straightforward: the warmer the atmosphere gets, the more moisture it can hold and logically that means longer droughts and more intense downpours.

As mentioned in previous *Weekly Worker* articles, the scientists at the World Weather Attribution service

have painstakingly compiled a record of how much more intense and likely storms, droughts, floods and fires have become, as a result of human-caused climate disruption - whether the late-summer flooding in Africa that killed more than 2,000 people and displaced millions, the floods in the south of Brazil that took more than 169 lives, or the devastating Helene and Milton hurricanes that killed at least 360 people in America and caused more than \$100 billion worth of damage.

It is the poor and elderly who are the most vulnerable, of course. Many of the bodies filling the mobile morgues in Spain are those of elderly people unable to escape from their homes and delivery drivers caught in the torrents that deluged the streets. And all of this is happening with 'just' 1.3°C of global warming, so what might happen with temperatures of 3.1°C or more is quite frankly terrifying.

Beginning to run out of vocabulary, UN secretary-general António Guterres has declared "code red for humanity" and the organisation's executive climate secretary, Simon Stiell, warned "we have two years to save the world". Then only last week the head of the UN environment programme, Inger Andersen, said "it's climate crunch time for real". Yet, crazily, the agenda for Cop29 in Baku next week is being set by those who want to *expand fossil fuel production* ... as does the 'drill, baby drill,' president elect in the US. Trump, will also, in probability, once again, withdraw America from international climate agreements.

Azerbaijan is the third climate conference host in a row, after the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, that plans to increase oil and gas production, while next year's host, Brazil, also intends to boost output. This rampant corruption underlines why the Climate Justice Coalition's march in central London on November 12 should be supported. The organisers say the climate crisis and genocide in Gaza are "inextricably linked." They demand an end to both.<sup>2</sup>

## People not cars

Meanwhile, an action plan is needed that everyone knows how to implement, having received the appropriate training and education. In that sense, we need a military-style approach. After all, death tolls will always be high when a heat record is broken or a region experiences hurricane-scale forces of rain, as in Spain - we should hardly be taken by surprise every time.

Of course, the emergency and civil protection services should get the resources they need. But, far more urgently still, governments have to be made to stop building in the same old way. Nowadays, almost everywhere in Europe where most people live, rivers are canalised, and all surfaces are sealed with concrete and asphalt to make a city *comfortable for cars* - not people. Instead, rivers need space again, so that they have somewhere else to go rather than into people's homes!

In other words, we need to practice *survival* in a climate-changed world, some of which is outlined in the CPGB's *Draft programme* ('3.3. environmental crisis').<sup>3</sup> Like rapidly transitioning away from coal, oil, gas and nuclear power towards wind, tidal, solar, geothermal and other renewables, along with restoring natural floodplains, marshes and rewilding large swathes of the countryside. Fens and heath land should be re-established and we should strive to reintroduce the full array of native flora and fauna - returning to nature the grouse moors, deer-stalking estates and upland sheep runs.

As for towns and cities, we say they should be full of trees, roof gardens, planted walls, allotments, wild parks and small-scale cooperative farms. Concrete jungles, urban sprawl, and using rivers and seas as common sewers - all this is an obscenity that must end, as should huge farms and intensive meat and dairy production that result in substantial damage to the biosphere ●

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## Notes

1. theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/02/spain-apocalyptic-floods-climate-crisis-worse-big-oil-cop29.
2. climatejustice.uk/cop29/march-for-global-climate-justice.
3. communistparty.co.uk/draft-programme/3-immediate-demands.