

weekly **worker**



XX, XY and XXY biology and the politics of communists building transgender class solidarity

- Letters and debate
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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DEAL OR NO DEAL?



LETTERS



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

Palestine slogans

Criticising the CPGB's long-established position on Israel-Palestine, Andy Hannah says that we appear "to subsume Palestinian national identity within a wider Arab nationhood" (Letters, November 7). He also asks me to "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".

No, we do not "subsume Palestinian national identity within a wider Arab nationhood". We recognise Egyptian, Syrian, Palestinian, etc identities, but we also recognise the wider Arab nation based on a common territory, language, economy and mass consciousness.

This matters strategically. Alone the Palestinians cannot possibly free themselves from Zionist ethnic cleansing and oppression. But in a wider, working class-led movement for national unity they have a chance. A pan-Arab socialist republic would be well advised to offer the Israeli-Jewish working class some sort of federal arrangement. That could, conceivably, split Israeli society along class lines and result in a rapprochement between the Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian populations.

What lines on a map, if any, people in the future will draw is entirely up to them. We might suggest that an Israeli socialist republic would include areas where there is a clear Hebrew majority. But that is up to the future to decide. What matters is the principle of voluntary unity.

In terms of immediate demands, we would certainly say that Israel should cease seeding the West Bank

with colonists and withdraw from all occupied territories: ie, Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan Heights.

No less to the point, comrade Hannah is one of the signatories of the 'Danger of World War III: the communist response' statement (*Weekly Worker* October 24). Leave aside the nonsense claim that: "With the intensification and spread of Israel's war on Gaza and Lebanon, backed by US-led imperialism and fully supported by the British and other capitalist governments, there is the distinct risk of (a nuclear) World War III." That and the suggestion that Iran wants to "join the top ranks of the imperialist club".

Does he agree that the slogans, 'Down with the war' and 'The main enemy is at home', are the right ones to use, "especially in the Middle East"?

Jack Conrad
London

Direct actionist

Comrade Mike Macnair, in his critique of Carla Roberts' article, 'Different times, different slogans' (October 24), states: "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" ('Wars and slogans', November 7). That is, by implication, a bad thing. He goes on: "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."

I would suggest that any activity to oppose the war will expose us to repression. We have already seen security services harassing journalists who expose the Israeli genocide and arresting demonstrators for allegedly 'promoting terrorism'. To be clear, I am completely in favour of workers taking action to stop the war in the

Middle East and Ukraine, whether by blocking arms shipments, as is currently happening in Greece, or any other means to disrupt the logistics and supply chain of Israel or its imperialist backers. Moreover, any serious communist organisation should provide leadership and actively promote such actions.

It is in struggle that the proletariat will become a class for itself, and a Communist Party should do more than simply welcome it, once it has started.

Ian Spencer
email

Purgatory?

I am a member of the Revolutionary Communist Party writing to you in a spirit of curiosity. I recently read an old(ish) article in the *Weekly Worker* titled 'Same old, same old' by Mike Macnair (April 4). I was particularly struck by one quote from it: "The general principle that party members should self-educate (and, as the section goes on, organise education) is sound. But the specification here is not to education, which develops the participant's ability to think critically and decide between alternative views, but to training in the ideas of the great men of 1844-1940 as a dogma."

I found that this quote summed up one of my reservations about the RCP: namely that there seems to be an unspoken rule that reading ought solely (or almost solely) to be based on the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. Whenever I have even vaguely brought up the idea of introducing different thinkers to the discussion, I am always hit with the answers, 'Best stick to revolutionary thinkers', 'They are bourgeois academics', etc, etc.

I also found what Macnair said to be true about personality cult and only discussing a part of Lenin's works/opinions. There is never any discussion in the RCP about, say, the 10th congress of the Bolshevik Party, for example, and the ban on party factions.

But above all the general gut feeling I have got, after being a member now for a solid few years, is that I hear the same slogans and talking points over and over again. The amount of times I have heard 'We are the real communists, based on the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky' has now grown to the point where I think my ears are in an infinite playback loop, doomed to the same ringing tones.

I say this as someone who does a lot of organisational and administrative work for the RCP, and has a great deal of respect for many members, I just feel like it is the same discussions over and over again. Maybe I am in purgatory. Who knows?!

Cnafon Williams
email

Trans liberation

After comrade Mike Macnair's November 3 Online Communist Forum talk on trans rights and comrade Carla Roberts' letter last week (November 7), I'm quite happy to see more debate on the field of trans liberation. Yet with Macnair's talk I had several problems with the core thesis and the way he argued his point. I'm not going to go into detail - I'll save that for a longer essay I've been working on for the past few months and hope to finish for Pride next year.

Nonetheless, to briefly discuss his point, the core thrust that trans liberation can only come through the maximum programme is true in the abstract. In the same way that the Palestinian genocide can only

be ended through communism or that only through communism can we end sexism. All true, but there are concrete steps that can be taken during the road to communism.

As my last letter outlined in brief (despite the deeply disappointing title it was given - 'My trauma', September 5), there are several clear arenas where communists can step up and agitate regarding trans liberation. This will include making it easier to access the needed medical aid, as opposed to the current insane wait times, be it in Australia or the UK. It took me four years to get on oestrogen, and while part of that was waiting to reach the age of majority, part of it was also a nearly four-month-long waiting process of psych appointments and blood tests.

A simple demand to improve the system is to remove the flat-out reactionary and demeaning process needed to get on hormone replacement therapy by removing the incredibly high psychological barriers. Alongside this, fight to expand access to doctors providing these services. In Melbourne, Australia's second biggest city, there are roughly six clinics providing the necessary medical services to transition. None of these are covered by welfare and, considering the insane rent prices of Melbourne (which I am rapidly discovering), trans people - many of whom are increasingly poor, or aren't solidly employed are often forced to the outskirts of the city and find it hard to pay for the medications they need.

This isn't even covering the psychological costs and pressure that most trans people go through, including the incredibly small size of the scene, meaning that nearly everybody will know everybody else - the general preference for 'trans for trans' (T4T) relationships making building platonic or comradely connections hard. I could go on and on.

This is combined with the 'sect formula', meaning that, whenever communists do try and intervene, the comrades sent in to do so are often either out-of-touch cis people, who fundamentally don't get the

struggle and alienate many of the trans people they work with, or are trans comrades, but deal with the fundamental failing of the sect form, when it comes to minorities. The need for forced diversity sublimates the education of these comrades.

The CPGB does have a chance to break from this paradigm, and I strongly hope it does. But, to be blunt, its current method of discussing to most trans people very pie-in-the-sky philosophical ideas, whilst fascinating to some (myself included), merely reinforces the worst stereotypes that trans liberals push onto communists.

If comrade Roberts' suggestions are implemented - and I must urge in the strongest possible terms that they are - it will be a qualitative step forward for the CPGB. However, this must also be met with genuine engagement with trans workers and organisers to understand where most trans people are at. Furthermore, it will mean having clear, concrete proposals that the CPGB can point to as part of their programme.

This is not to say give in to the liberal bullshit of trans rights, because that's a tailist dead end, which will only weaken the communist movement, but fight for trans liberation in every way possible.

Brunhilda Olding
Australia

Kevin Bean

I became close to Kevin Bean, who died on October 12, after working with him, campaigning outside Labour Party conferences. His courage and confidence in nonchalantly facing down harassment by Labour goons was awesome.

I like to think our personal relationship contributed to his decision to throw in his lot with the CPGB. Having someone of his calibre, knowledge and experience join our ranks was, for me, a welcome confirmation that we are on the right path. We were proud to be able to elect Kevin to our Provisional Central Committee and he will be sorely missed.

Stan Keable
London

Fighting fund

Back on track

We're just a bit behind the going rate for this month's fighting fund at the moment. Thanks to the £505 that came our way over the last week, we now have £992 in the kitty towards our November £2,250 target. But, as I write, there are only two days to go before we reach the halfway stage for this month, so another £130 by then would see us back on track.

By coincidence £130 was actually the most generous donation received since last week - it came from Australian comrade MS, who paid that as his annual subscription via PayPal, even though he doesn't want the print version sent to him, as he reads us online! Well done, comrade. Other PayPal contributions came from regular donors RL and PM, who both came up with their usual £50, while JV paid us £7 and KA chipped in with a fiver.

Then there were a number of handy bank transfers/standing orders. Thanks in particular go to PB for her usual brilliant £70, while RL and LC both came up with their excellent £50 contributions. Then there was £30 each from DV and NH, £25 from GD and £15 from BO, while no fewer than four

comrades transferred a handy £10 - thank you, IS, SM, PM and CC. Finally there was DS, who clearly has little cash to spare - but that didn't stop him transferring £3 to the *Weekly Worker*.

So, all in all, things aren't so bad. As I keep saying, we rely on our readers and supporters to raise the money we need to keep going - not least when you think about the huge increase in printing and postage prices we now have. But all those supporters know the value of this paper in terms of the principled politics we put forward - not least our consistent campaigning for what the working class is lacking the most: a principled, genuinely democratic-centralist, Marxist party.

If you want to help us out too, then please send us a cheque or use PayPal or your bank account to do your bit. Click on the link below to see the details if you're not sure ●

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

Online Communist Forum



Sunday November 17 5pm
Justin Welby and the disestablishment of the C of E - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

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

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

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

LEFT

Whimpering out of existence

The beginning of the end of all those efforts to rally what was the Corbyn movement seems to be in sight. **Carla Roberts** reports on the factions and the confusion

On Saturday November 9, Collective held its second national gathering - again, by invitation only and in semi-secrecy. Around 50 people met in Birmingham: representatives of the groups listed on Collective's website,¹ plus a few independent candidates like Fiona Lali of the revamped Trotskyist sect, Revolutionary Communist Party. And, although the meeting lasted over four hours, it took "almost no decisions", we hear, with some participants describing the event as "very amateurish".

A large chunk of the meeting seems to have been taken up by a speech from professor Nick Maynard - a surgeon who has recently returned from Palestine. No doubt this was interesting, but pretty peripheral to the task of building "a party of the left". A short message from key organiser Karie Murphy (formerly right-hand woman of Jeremy Corbyn, when he was leader of the Labour Party) to Collective's WhatsApp Group explained afterwards:

We agreed a date of January 18 in London for the follow-up meeting - we will set objectives in advance. We had a profound and very moving contribution from Prof Nick Maynard, a surgeon who has a long history of working in and supporting Palestine. Discussions have already started on a Collective event to support his work and publicise the harrowing testimonies that he has collected. Solidarity.

This non-committal pace very much suits Jeremy Corbyn, who did not make it to Birmingham and joined for one hour via a video call. He is dead set against Collective turning into a 'real' party any time soon and instead favours, in effect, an electoral alliance in time for the May 2025 local elections. He is joined in this outlook by African National Congress veteran Andrew Feinstein and former North of Tyne mayor Jamie Driscoll.

They are the key people in the 'localist' faction of Collective, with all three having launched various local 'assemblies'. We have previously reported those weird and wonderful initiatives: Corbyn has launched a monthly 'people's forum' in his constituency (which is basically his MP surgery, run by his employees); Feinstein is organising a 'local hub' in his constituency of Holborn and St Pancras, which might or might not move towards a membership organisation of some sort; while Jamie Driscoll has gone one better and has just launched his own local 'party', called 'Majority UK'.²

Although none of those three attended the Birmingham gathering, it appears that they have 'won' for the time being - as against those who wanted to launch a 'proper' Collective party immediately: ie, with a formal membership structure, conferences, branches, etc. That 'partyist faction' is led by former Labour councillor Pamela Fitzpatrick, former Unite general secretary Len McCluskey and his partner, Murphy, and, until very recently, journalist Justin Schlosberg (Companies House still lists him and Fitzpatrick as directors of 'Justice Collective PLC').

Schlosberg, however, resigned on November 5, a few days before the Birmingham meeting - with an untypically public broadside against



Spoilsport: no interest in a party

Collective. 'Washing your dirty linen in public' is just not the done thing on the left (and not just the Labour left): instead, we usually have backroom deals, secret negotiations and, at best, leaks to the bourgeois press. Schlosberg explains in his angry blog post:

I've stepped away from Collective not because I no longer support what it is trying to do, or because I no longer believe a new party is possible. I stepped away because I don't believe that endless talking shops behind closed doors is the way to build unity and establish a new party - especially in the face of a neo-austerity regime in the UK, an ongoing genocide in Palestine and Lebanon, and a US and UK establishment growing every more war-hungry by the day. The time, in Jeremy's words, for "listening to and sharing a variety of views about the future of the left" is surely over. Now is the time to act ... Call a national conference and launch a membership drive. Hold online elections for an interim leadership team, charged with developing proposals for party structures, rules and policies.³

He seems to have been under no illusion that the November 9 gathering in Birmingham could have made any decision towards establishing Collective as a party. This had clearly been decided elsewhere, away from the 'children'. The Collective website now features Fitzpatrick and Murphy as the 'directors' of the private company.

The partyist faction had spent the last few months trying to convince the very reluctant Corbyn to jump on board the party boat. But its methods have been a touch on the unsophisticated side, to put it mildly. For example, it was they who leaked excited reports about the imminent launch of the Collective party to *The Guardian* after the first gathering on September 15 in London.⁴ Pamela Fitzpatrick declared at the tiny conference of Transform on October 19 that "the talks within Collective were aimed at setting up a new party early next year (which wouldn't necessarily be called Collective)".⁵

This faction seems to have cohered around a document entitled 'Campaign plan: call for a new left movement and party',⁶ which was apparently written by Murphy and which outlines their view on how such a party could be formed. Via petition, basically. It reads like it was written by an intern in an advertising agency, focussing as it does on the 'messaging', 'timelines'

and 'targets' - like getting "100,000 signatories in 45 days".

The authors also tried to appeal to Corbyn's 'style' and made sure there are zero policies in it - but plenty of waffle: "Help create a credible, accountable alternative for the left. Sign this petition to demand real representation, real action and a real future for progressive politics in the UK. Together, let's build a movement and a party that serves the many - not the few."

The draft petition featured in the document starts, somewhat ludicrously, with: "We - the many individuals, communities and organisations that make up the UK's labour and progressive movement - demand the immediate formation of a mass political party of the left to genuinely represent the interests of the working class and the many." We demand it? Who exactly are we demanding it from? The state? The king? Corbyn? What nonsense.

This document and the general railroading tactic of the 'partyists' have - unsurprisingly - not convinced Corbyn. Quite the opposite: We understand he has been getting increasingly annoyed with efforts to force his hand. We presume he has vetoed the campaign plan, which might be the reason why it was not even put to the 50 participants in Birmingham. (There are, of course, no minutes or agreed reports of any of these developments, so we have to admit that we are guessing.)

But Corbyn's November 1 letter to *The Guardian* surely is a hell of a clue. Following Labour's budget, the letter 'warns' Keir Starmer: "You are wrong to believe that progressive voters have nowhere else to go. Our movement is growing every day - and you ignore the demand for a real alternative at your peril." The interesting thing about it is who else was asked to sign: apart from Corbyn, there are Driscoll and Feinstein - plus Green MPs Carla Denyer and Sian Berry, and Plaid Cymru MPs Ben Lake, Ann Davies, Liz Saville Roberts and Llinos Medi. This clearly shows that Corbyn has no interest at all in building a new party in any real sense of the word. He is going for an 'electoral alliance' at best ●

Notes

1. we-are-collective.org.
2. See 'Hidden divisions in Collective' *Weekly Worker* September 26: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1508/hidden-divisions-in-collective.
3. jschlosberg.substack.com/p/why-the-corbyn-left-is-sliding-into.
4. www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/sep/15/jeremy-corbyn-addresses-meeting-new-leftwing-party-collective.
5. Email from Transform, October 23.
6. docs.google.com/document/d/1FXCrD3OH4FVKSI-NkOPo7xGYjNkv16-UbopDbXwnil.

ACTION

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, 11.30am 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

March 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.

What made us human?

Tuesday November 19, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviston Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'Human evolution: some recent discoveries and their implications'. Speaker: Chris Stringer. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/497510229881694.

No to the Telford arms fair!

Wednesday November 20, 11am: Protest outside Telford International Centre, International Way, Telford TF3. This arms fair focuses on military equipment for front-line infantry soldiers. It promotes arms companies complicit in the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, such as Elbit Systems. Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: caat.org.uk/events/stopsdsc2024.

Stop the social cleansing of Southwark

Wednesday November 20, 6pm: Protest outside council meeting, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1. Reject Southwark council's response to the housing crisis - build council homes, not luxury flats. Organised by Southwark Housing and Planning Emergency (Shape): x.com/UpTheElephant/status/1856033034081894660.

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.

Blockchain radicals: the work of Joshua Dávila

Thursday November 21, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1. Organised by Oxford Communist Corresponding Society: oxfordccs@aol.com.

Stop all arms sales to Israel

Saturday November 23, 11.30am: National demonstration. Assemble McLennan Arch, Glasgow Green G1. Pressure the Scottish government to implement divestment and end financial support to companies supplying the Israeli war machine. Organised by Stop the War Scotland: x.com/GlasgowStopWar.

Marxism, imperialism and national liberation

Saturday November 23, 6pm: Onsite and online lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker Ofer Cassif is a member of the Israeli Knesset for Hadash and a lifelong member of the Communist Party of Israel. Registration free. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/489.

The conditions of the working class

Sunday November 24, 2pm: Radical readings, Maxwell Hall, University of Salford, 43 Crescent, Salford M5. Readings capturing the history of working class struggles that shaped our world. Performers include Maxine Peake and Julie Hesmondhalgh. Tickets £16.96. Organised by Working Class Movement Library: wcmli.org.uk/event/radical-readings-the-conditions-of-the-working-class.

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

A strangely familiar failure

How could the Democrats lose to that man - again? The inquest begins, but do not expect any bold thinking from the decadent consultant class, writes **Paul Demarty**

After a political disaster as stunning as that of the Kamala Harris campaign's defeat to Donald Trump, there is inevitably a search for blame.

The simpler the picture, the better - ideally, like a tyrannical boss, we are on the hunt for 'one throat to choke'. Yet elections are complicated things. Especially when a country of 300 million is faced with a choice between two real candidates for one position of supreme authority; more especially still when that choice is mediated by the kind of baffling, baroque procedures mandated by the US constitution. Contrary to the popular aphorism, failure too has many fathers.

Indeed, it is arguable - and people have argued - that this is not quite so bad a failure as it looks. By historic standards, this is in fact a close election in terms of the popular vote. Trump's clean sweep of the swing states has a dramatic look to it, but in many of them the margins were again very fine, as they had been in 2020, when he was defeated by Joe Biden. There are the global trends to mention too. The post-pandemic era has been exceptionally unkind to incumbent governments all over the world. Taking into account the bizarre circumstances of Harris's emergence as the candidate, her defeat might merely be thought a respectable effort in the face of invincible headwinds.

Yet it cannot be so, because her defeat was to *him* - that man, with the vulgar tan, the Joycean digressions, the cartoonish collection of vices. A man who next January will be inaugurated for president the second time, four years and two weeks after he made a two-bit coup attempt. For Democrats, the failure to exclude such a person from meaningful contention for the presidency is a blot on the American copybook - never mind the failure to defeat him on two occasions out of three. (On this point, if no other, we have to say that we agree.)

Glamour

How can this have happened? There is the first option, that nothing could have been done. This was put very starkly - and in a way so idiotic that it is somewhat telling - by Joy-Ann Reid, an anchor at the uber-liberal MSNBC network: "This really was a flawlessly run campaign," she told her distraught and dwindling audience. "[Rapper] Queen Latifah never endorses anyone. She came out and endorsed her. She had every prominent celebrity voice. She had the [Taylor] Swifties, she had the Bey-hive [Beyonce Knowles fans]. You could not have run a better campaign in that short period of time."

Here we really do feel that history is repeating itself exactly. The celebrity glitz failed to rub off on Hillary Clinton eight years ago, and she had real stars stumping for her - not some washed-up 90s comedian like Latifah and *pro forma* statements of support from Swift and Charli XCX. Even in this, the most utterly diversionary aspect of American politics, Harris underperformed, but no matter: however stupid American voters may be, they are not so stupid as to take their voting orders from Taylor Swift. The failure of red-carpet endorsements to swing elections is now so longstanding that it deserves its own Eras Tour.

Reid's talk about *how* such a



Massively financed campaign

flawless campaign failed brings us to our second set of explanations - the identitarian ones. "Anyone who has experienced or been in the United States for any period of time," she said, "cannot have believed it would be easy to elect a woman president, let alone a woman of colour." (In fairness, she was speaking in the midst of election night, and did not have the benefit of the following statistics.) Here, things are more of a mixed bag. There really is a gender gap in American politics, which has notably widened since 2012. More men lean Republican, compared to women. Pre-election polling suggested that it might be on the verge of dramatically widening again, though that did not happen in the event, if exit poll analysis is to be believed. In any case, it is an interesting phenomenon, deserving of further study.

On the race question, things are far more complicated for the identitarians. A significant uptick in the black vote for Trump does not seem to have occurred, though it did increase a little. Far more interesting is the Latino vote, which was more or less split down the middle this time. If Trump's racism is directed anywhere, it is against the people of Central and South America - "they're sending rapists" and all that. Yet this is exactly the ethnic-minority demographic where he did best (except perhaps Native Americans, who may have swung to him dramatically). The 'white rage' account of Trumpism cannot be easily discarded: after all, it is a certainty that he took close to all of the votes of conscious white racists. Yet it is clearly no longer the whole picture, if indeed it ever was.

Indeed, the identitarians are directly opposed by *anti-identitarian* explanations. The problem, for these people - largely on the right of the Democrats - is that the party has become beholden to various ultra-woke constituencies. As a result, they claim, it is associated with

unpopular policies like open borders and defunding the police, and can only communicate to voters in the form of impenetrable intersectional jargon. If you want Latinos to vote for Trump, the argument goes, just insist on calling them 'Latinx'.

As a criticism, this might have had some purchase four years ago - the year of Nancy Pelosi taking the knee in her Covid mask and kente cloth (a year, remember, when a Democrat won the presidential election in any case). As a description of the Harris campaign, however, it is highly questionable. With a few trivial exceptions, Harris steered clear of the whole territory. She declined to make much of her ethnic background or gender, or to distance herself from Biden's adoption of Trump's border policy. Far from proposing defunding the police, she ran as a *cop*, against the felon Trump, playing on her origins as a prosecutor. Next!

We come to, at last, the explanation largely favoured by the left, or at least its less identitarian sections: as the headline to Michael Roberts had it in this paper last week, it 'Was the economy, stupid'. Here, at least, we meet what voters actually reported as being their overriding concern. As Roberts noted, headline economic figures may have looked good, but ordinary Americans did not feel the benefit. Real wages have at best stagnated over Biden's term. Inflation is now under control, but prices remain high.

This is, in principle, a survivable obstacle. Many have mentioned Barack Obama's 2012 campaign - having endured a torrid time towards the end of his first term, he nevertheless went after opponent Mitt Romney with bared teeth, painting him as a parasitic downsizer with personal responsibility for deindustrialisation wherever he got the chance. The picture stuck, not least because it was accurate. As Bhaskara Sunkara wrote in his *Guardian* post-mortem last week, "more than policy, Americans

craved a villain". If Trump could not serve, why not Elon Musk, or any of the other kleptocrats who now felt emboldened to back him? Harris might have run on such economic populism, but she dramatically retreated from it early in her campaign, and settled into a Clintonesque role as the candidate of *real* businessmen, not a faker like Trump.

She did not endorse some of the stupider punditry that accused Americans of being foolish for not believing headline GDP figures rather than their lying checking-account balances. But she did not have anything like the simplicity of Trump's 'solution' to the problem: tariffs, mass deportations, running the government with good "business acumen". And so she lost.

Weakness

We meet the limits of this outlook - which you could call social-Democratic, with a capital D - when we ask *why* she did not endorse such punditry. Harris has no beliefs, after all; so these beliefs are as good as any other. She is not above adopting radical rhetoric, like Nancy Pelosi draping a kente cloth over her neck; she showed that in her 2020 primary campaign. Some blame her brother in law, Tony West, whom she placed in charge of economic policy, and who is a bigwig at Uber. Again though - why *him*?

It seems that here we have to rehearse the sequence of events that landed her in the hot seat. Back in 2020, when Bernie Sanders was again riding high (and Harris herself was being humiliated) in the primary contest, there came a moment when the Democratic establishment - led by Obama - decided to close ranks. They did so, despite Obama's own misgivings, around Biden, who was visibly declining even then. Since it was the year of George Floyd's murder and the mass protests that occasioned, the choice of the whitest man in American politics was tough

for many to take. Harris was chosen as VP partly because she was black and a woman, and partly because her disastrous primary outing made her unthreatening to the prickly, paranoid Biden. Biden, for his part, had made it known that he would be a one-term president if he won in 2020.

He did win; and he began to believe his own bullshit, especially after the 2022 midterms turned out better than expected. Once he decided to run again, the Democratic machine ensured there would be no serious primary, which meant a rude awakening when it turned out that Biden was simply incapable of campaigning early in the summer. Biden hung on, but Pelosi - who, whatever her faults, has something of the ruthlessness of the machine politics of former times in her - finally managed to offload him, when it became clear that a *true* landslide Trump victory was all but inevitable. She now claims that she expected a truncated open selection to follow, but failed to get one, and blames Biden for immediately endorsing Harris.

When Harris emerged as the candidate, she was actually in a very *weak* position. The honeymoon period never took her meaningfully into the lead. She was known to be a lightweight, essentially a figure of fun, and more or less invisible during her whole tenure as vice-president. She had no real base of support at the grassroots - even the entirely Twitter-based 'K-Hive' of obnoxious superfans had largely dissolved. So she had to borrow others. The only thing she had in her locker was effectively infinite money (Harris-Walz out-raised Trump-Vance by a factor of two). So she ran the money campaign, which means you don't scare the money, and you do what the money wants. She could not have done anything else (except perhaps not *wasting* quite so much of it on pointless celebrity cameos).

This is not a matter of individual choice *per se*. The real story here is the malfunctioning of the Democratic Party as an instrument of the American state. Its hyper-professionalisation has stunted the growth of regional party elites, and therefore poisoned the talent pool of potential leaders, leaving them reliant entirely on an aloof and increasingly decadent consultant class in the DC area. A Democratic revival is surely possible in the coming years - even likely, given how obviously *fake* Trump's populism is. (The US president is, after all, the ultimate 'one throat to choke'.) For it to last, however, it would require a Trump-level event; and, given the overall drift of US policy towards great-power conflict, the result would probably be a more radical version of military Keynesianism than either Biden or Trump were capable of.

The left cannot address this situation by way of riding the populist tiger. Sunkara's suggestion in *The Guardian* that one simply needs a villain to make it work suggests he is, alas, engaging in the same kind of toytown Gramscianism that inconsequential leftists have always employed to give themselves the illusion of power.

For us the job is the same as it was before - *supplanting* the Democrats with an independent working class party ●

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MIDDLE EAST

Uncertain times

Donald Trump's appointments give us a clue about what to expect, but nothing more. Meanwhile Arab countries are asserting their independence out of fear of their own people, says **Yassamine Mather**

Only a few days after Donald Trump's election, media headlines were telling us that the US justice department had filed charges over an alleged Iranian plot to kill the US president-elect. Far from being 'breaking news', this is an old story.

US court records were unsealed on November 8, revealing that Farhad Shakeri, an alleged Iranian agent, was involved in a plot to kill Trump in cooperation with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The reports claim he was tasked with surveillance of Trump and ultimately his assassination. Prosecutors say IRGC officials directed Shakeri to delay the plot if it could not be executed before the election, anticipating Trump's loss. Shakeri, currently believed to be in Iran, was allegedly coordinating this with two US residents in a broader scheme to target US-based individuals opposed to the Iranian regime. Shakeri, who had previously lived in the US, was deported in 2008, but apparently, from Tehran, he managed to use criminal contacts to further the IRGC's objectives.

This - following last week's Israeli claims that Iran was deploying networks of spies in the Zionist state - could be used for justifying another military attack on the country and, of course, Trump's election means such threats should be taken more seriously.

Targeting

On November 10, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed his strong alignment with Trump on the perceived threat, emphasising "shared views on the risks presented by Iran's Islamic Republic". Netanyahu also admitted for the first time that Israel, under his directive, was responsible for operations targeting Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, despite opposition from defence officials. He mentioned having had three recent calls with Trump to reinforce US-Israel relations, describing these discussions as constructive and important. However, it is not easy to know what Trump thinks and how he will proceed. Some remind us he is unpredictable.

The comments of a BBC reporter in Israel are of some interest:

The area across from the US consulate in Jerusalem humorously named "Déjà Boo" (a play on *déjà vu* and the idea of re-experiencing something) has become symbolic, as Israelis await a potential second term for Donald Trump as president. Outside the American diplomatic complex, there is a sense of anticipation for what many perceive as a familiar and favourable period, should Trump return to office. During his previous term, Donald Trump garnered significant popularity in Israel by withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal - a move Israel strongly supported. Trump also brokered several landmark normalisation agreements between Israel and Arab nations and formally recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital, breaking with long-standing US policy and international consensus.¹

Michael Oren, a former Israeli ambassador to the US, described



MBS: no longer totally servile

Trump's first term as "ideal" from Israel's perspective. However, he noted that, while Israel hopes for a continuation of this approach, it must remain realistic about Trump's views and policies. For instance, Trump has historically avoided protracted wars, encouraging Israel to end the Gaza conflict quickly, and has not been a strong advocate of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, opposing moves by some Israeli leaders to annex parts of it.

Such a stance might put Trump at odds with the far-right factions in Netanyahu's coalition government, who have threatened to bring down the government if policies contrary to their interests are pursued. During the recent Gaza conflict, Netanyahu often balanced American expectations with demands from his coalition partners, generally siding with the latter - an approach that led to occasional tensions with Joe Biden.

Speaking before Trump's victory, Oren suggests that Netanyahu should adopt a different approach in this second term. If Trump were to instruct Netanyahu to conclude the Gaza conflict within a week, Oren and others have implied, Netanyahu would need to comply.

In terms of Trump's recent appointments, supporters of 'regime change from above' in Iran were disappointed when it was announced that Nikki Haley and Mike Pompeo would not hold posts in the new administration. However, none of the current appointees can be considered good news for Iran. If Marco Rubio's nomination is confirmed, he is expected to approach China with suspicion, if not outright antagonism. He holds a hostile stance toward Iran and Russia, is unenthusiastic about Venezuela, and views Cuba with a mix of regret and bitterness, reflecting the experiences of his parents who left the country. His concern for Gaza and Ukraine, however, appears limited. This will be balanced by Elise Stefanik, who is a staunch supporter of the Zionist state and has also been critical of the UN for the organisation's "lack of sufficient backing for Israel in its war against Hamas". Last year

she gained prominence for leading congressional hearings about the handling by university presidents of anti-Zionist protests on college campuses.

Trump's nominee as ambassador to Jerusalem, Mike Huckabee, is also a hawkish figure. A prominent leader in the pro-Israel evangelical Christian movement, he also advocated the forcible displacement of Palestinians during Israel's war on Gaza. In October 2023 he said: "If the so-called Palestinians are so loved by the Muslim nations of the world, why won't any of those nations at least offer to give temporary refuge to their brothers and sisters in Gaza?" In June 2024 he said: "There's no valid reason to have a ceasefire with Hamas."

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, Trump plans to significantly expand sanctions to severely limit Iran's oil revenue, which the US Energy Information Administration estimated as worth \$144 billion between 2021 and 2023, with \$34 billion so far in 2024.

However, questions remain about how this strategy - aimed at supporting Israel and curtailing Iran's daily exports of 1.7 million barrels of oil - might influence Russia's vital oil sales. Some argue such a policy will benefit Russia. According to Matt Gertken, chief strategist of geopolitical and US political strategy at BCA Research, "If the global market suffers an even more significant shortage or bottleneck, then the fact that the Russian supply can still access that market means that it's quite good for Russia because they gain pricing power."

Iranian reaction

Government officials and advisors of supreme leader Ali Khamenei claim they had expected a Trump victory, adding that US-Iran relations during the Biden/Harris administration were just as bad as the Trump era. However, everyone in Iran expects new sanctions and the rate of the dollar shot up in the first hours of November 6.

That said, some within the Iranian regime believe Russia may

intervene on behalf of the Islamic Republic and, given Trump's desire to associate himself with "historic events", he might even consider entering discussions about a nuclear deal with Iran.

Meanwhile, cyber wars between Iran and Israel continue. A hacker group, reportedly linked to Iran, has exposed sensitive information on prominent Israeli figures, including a nuclear scientist and a former high-ranking defence official. Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reports that the group claims to have accessed over 50 gigabytes of data - releasing personal photos, documents and other details, supposedly obtained by breaching the accounts of multiple senior Israeli officials. These leaks, which allegedly include images from the Soreq Nuclear Research Centre in Israel, reveal system screenshots of a particle accelerator, as well as personal details of scientists and officials.

The leaked materials include a passport photo of a former major general, who once directed Israel's cyber operations, as well as private data on an active Israeli ambassador and a former US military attaché. The hacker group, known as Handala, has previously claimed responsibility for leaking data from another Israeli nuclear research centre and has threatened to release additional documents.

While Israel's National Cyber Directorate and the Shin Bet security service have not commented, some US sources corroborate reports of the hack. The breach is described by *Haaretz* as a "psychological victory" for Iran, particularly in light of recent arrests of Israeli citizens allegedly working for Iranian intelligence. While any link between these arrests and the leak remains unclear, targeting a scientist - albeit one involved in civilian nuclear research - marks a symbolic success for Iran.

Given the ongoing tension between Israel and Iran, particularly over nuclear developments, the hack raises questions about its potential as a pretext for escalating the conflict. Some speculate it might serve as grounds for Israel to seek US support for retaliatory action against Iran's

nuclear infrastructure, possibly through a cyberattack.

On the regional scene, when it comes to a proposed war against Iran, it looks like the fear of internal opposition in Arab countries, as well as the Islamic Republic's diplomatic missions to neighbouring countries, has led to a completely new era.

This week Arab leaders gathered for an emergency summit in Saudi Arabia to discuss the wars in Gaza and Lebanon. They urged an immediate end to Israeli military actions against Hamas and Hezbollah. The Riyadh summit is anticipated to be influenced by the recent re-election of Donald Trump as a staunch supporter of Israel and is expected to adopt a tougher stance against Iran. However, the gathering had some surprises.

Arab world

In his opening address, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, well aware of strong anti-US, anti-Israeli sentiments in his own country and the rest of the Arab world, signalled that he does not want to be seen as a US or Israeli puppet. He called for a ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon and urged the global community to halt Israeli attacks on Palestinian and Lebanese people, and uphold "international peace and security". His comments demanding that Israel respect Iran's sovereignty and refrain from further attacks surprised many. Only a few years ago, there was an expectation that he would sign the Abraham Accords, normalising relations with Israel. After 13 months of Israeli genocide, the accords are truly dead and buried. Iran's Islamic Republic and its Axis of Resistance is gaining unprecedented popularity on the Arab street and bin Salman hopes his new stance could boost his regional public image and solidify Saudi Arabia's role in Middle Eastern power dynamics. So in the last few months, rather than remaining silent due to pressures from western allies, Saudi Arabia has explicitly opposed Israel, aligning more with Iran on this issue.

Meanwhile, Najib Mikati, Lebanon's prime minister, called on the 'international community' to support his government instead of factions within the country. In a veiled reference to Iran, he also asked other nations to refrain from intervening in Lebanon's internal affairs.

Keyvan Hosseini, writing on BBC Persian's website, is probably correct when he states;

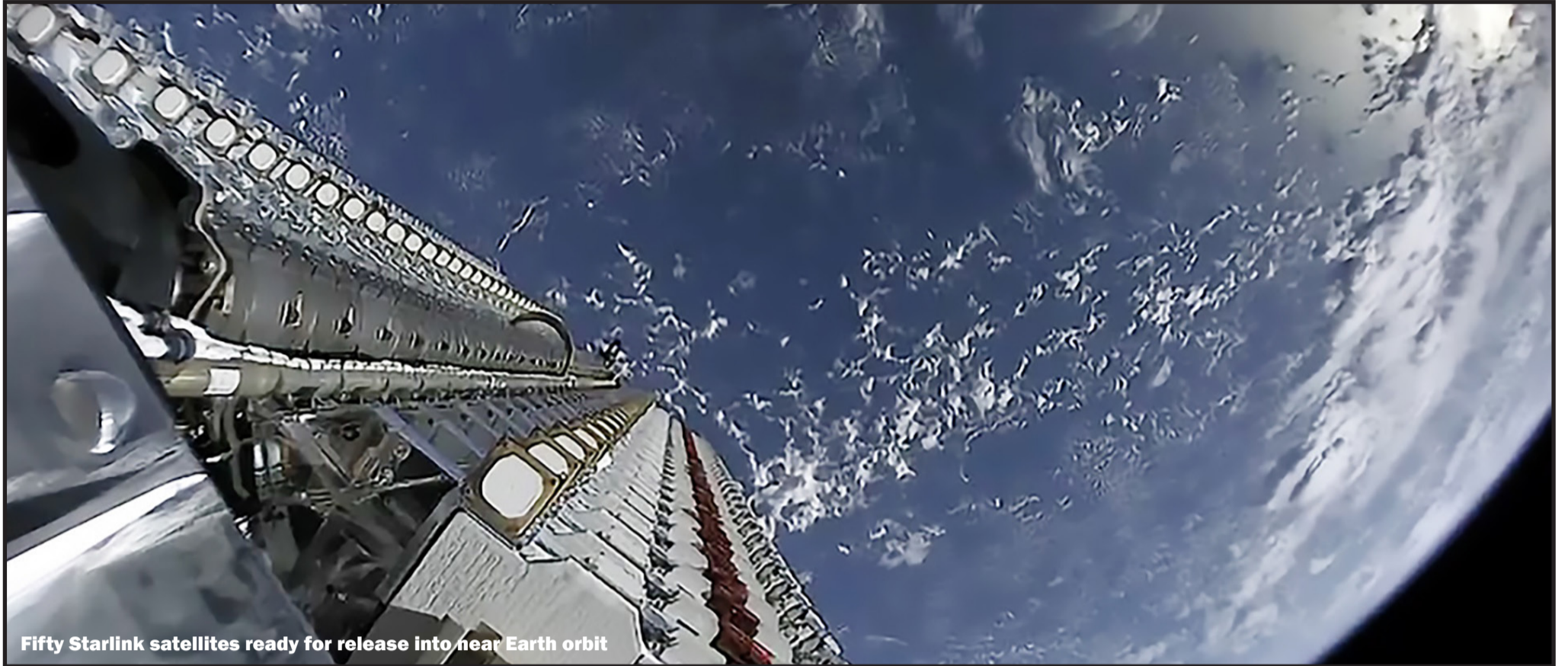
In a period of unprecedented anger towards Israel among Muslim communities worldwide, the 'neutrality' of leaders in countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the UAE regarding the Iran-Israel conflict may prove costly, potentially damaging their legitimacy and popularity.

By addressing the 'international community' and appealing to global order rhetoric, bin Salman appears to be targeting western audiences. This approach is part of a broader campaign to reshape Saudi Arabia's global image and redefine its international standing - an effort he has been actively pursuing for several years ●

Notes

1. www.bbc.com/persian/articles/ce8d6kv53yno.

UKRAINE



Fifty Starlink satellites ready for release into near Earth orbit

Notes on the war

Donald Trump has not been slow in coming forward with his peace plan. Not surprisingly, Volodymyr Zelensky is far from keen, nor are European liberals. However, warns **Jack Conrad**, there is still the distinct danger of escalation and phasing into World War III

Humiliatingly for Volodymyr Zelensky, the US president-elect has already come out with his peace plan - that without even going to the bother of consulting him. When he did telephone Zelensky from Mar-a-Lago, Trump pointedly told him that the call was made possible because of Elon Musk's Starlink. He was also curtly informed that Musk himself was in on the call.¹ The subtext could not be clearer: Ukraine's military heavily relies on Starlink for communications with frontline troops and what can be given can be taken away.

Basically Trump's peace plan has been long touted by the likes of vice-president-elect JD Vance: freeze the existing conflict between Russia and Ukraine and establish a thousand-kilometre buffer zone between the warring countries. One suggestion is that the buffer zone will be patrolled by European and British peacekeepers: and it will be European and British governments who are expected to foot the bill, not the United States.

Negotiations would then follow. Trump, if he is reported accurately, would insist that Ukraine cede Crimea to Russia. Republican strategist Bryan Lanza says the Trump administration would bluntly tell Zelensky to accept a "realistic vision for peace ... When Zelensky says we will only stop this fighting, there will only be peace, once Crimea is returned, we've got news for president Zelensky: Crimea is gone."² That is Trumpian *Realpolitik*.

After all, not only has Crimea been part of Russia since 1783: it became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic solely because of a whim under Nikita Khrushchev in February 1954. True, this might have had something to do with bolstering the number of Russian speakers in Ukraine after the annexation of Volhynia and Galicia to the west.³ But the rearrangement had little more than symbolic importance in those days. Things changed,

however, with the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and especially the 2014 Maidan coup.

One does not need to trust the March 2014 referendum organised by the Moscow authorities: 97% for integration with the Russian Federation on a 83% voter turnout. Even if the vote had been free and fair - which it palpably was not - a thumping majority ought to have been expected, not least because of anti-Russian rampaging fascist gangs and baying far-right mobs in Ukraine.

Trump, we are told, would be relaxed with Crimea staying under Russian control (the port of Sevastopol was leased under the terms of the May 1997 partition agreement till 2042). This would, of course, allow Russia access to the Mediterranean. So Trump appears more than willing to see a revised Minsk agreement and a strategically bolstered Russian Federation.

The Trump peace deal was apparently worked out in detail by retired lieutenant general Keith Kellogg and former CIA official Fred Fleitz - both served as chief of staff in Trump's National Security Council during his 2017-21 administration. As outlined in a Reuters interview, the treatment Ukraine should expect is going to be brusque and brutal. "We tell the Ukrainians," says Kellogg, "You've got to come to the table, and if you don't come to the table, support from the United States will dry up."⁴

Besides Crimea, the peace deal could well see Ukraine compelled to concede either the whole or parts of the Donbas. That or giving the two oblasts autonomous status within Ukraine. Trump is well aware that the majority of the population in Donetsk and Luhansk would be more than happy remaining Russian citizens. Zaporizhzhia and Kherson could be likewise conceded, divided or, conceivably, traded off in exchange for the Kursk enclave.

There is talk too of Trump blocking the accession of Ukraine

and Georgia to Nato - another strategic concession. However, Trump comes not only bearing an olive branch: he has a big stick. If the Putin-FSB regime rejects his peace deal that would see the threat of "increased American support for Ukraine"⁵ Perhaps this would mean embracing Zelensky's victory plan *in its entirety* ... beginning with a green light for the use of British-French-Italian-made Storm Shadow cruise missiles against Russian Federation territory and ending with its three secret clauses. In other words, Trump is seeking some kind of accommodation with Russia, but, failing that, there is the 'phasing into World War III'.

Pushback

As is well known, Zelensky and his regime have pushed back against any deal that recognises Russia's post-2014 gains. The official line in Kyiv is still regaining every inch of post-1991 territory ... that and Nato-EU membership.

Regardless of the bravado on display from Kyiv politicians, top brass and oligarchs, the fact remains that without US support Ukrainian resistance would quickly degrade from the symmetrical push and counterpush of trench warfare to the hit-and-run tactics of asymmetrical guerrilla warfare. There is, yes, the possibility of the European countries stepping in to save Ukraine. Boris Johnson has been talking to GB News about Britain "having to send ground troops" ... and if Ukraine goes down, next it will be Baltics, next Georgia, next Taiwan.⁶

There are good reasons, however, to be sceptical. So far the US has supplied the great bulk of military hardware. Even combined, the European powers trail far behind: €21 billion, compared to €43.9 billion.⁷ Leave aside the severe budgetary restraints holding back governments in Berlin, Paris, London and Brussels, Trump would hardly take kindly to the Europeans stymieing his Ukraine peace plan.

A grossly unequal treaty could easily see Zelensky ousted by an Azov, or some such other far-right putsch. They would charge him with selling out, being a Jewish traitor, not being properly Ukrainian. But without powerful outside backers any such post-Zelensky regime could not do anything serious. Ukraine lacks, after all, an independent arms industry.

What of the Putin-FSB regime? Its condition for peace negotiations has been a withdrawal of Ukrainian troops from the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts - all officially incorporated into the Russian Federation. That and a recognition of the annexation of Crimea and Ukraine abandoning Nato membership plans. The Kremlin has been demanding the lifting of western sanctions too. And, according to Nina Khrushcheva - great granddaughter of Nikita and an authority on Russian politics - "Putin feels he is starting out with Trump from a position of strength."⁸

With talk of a Russian winter offensive in Zaporizhzhia and the war going in Russia's favour in Donbas, at least for the moment, Putin might be tempted to gamble on Trump not only leaving Ukraine in the unenviable position of 1938 Czechoslovakia, but demanding the lot ... that is, the reunification of Great and Little Russia.

That would be massive overreach. After all, not only do we have the possibility of Trump junking the Kellogg-Fleitz peace plan and opting instead for Zelensky's victory plan. There are those from Trump's first administration who are full-blown warmongers. Mike Pompeo - former secretary of state - has called for tougher sanctions, lifting all restrictions on the use of American weapons in Ukraine and creating a "lend-lease" programme worth \$500 billion to allow Ukraine to purchase US manufactured weapons.⁹

However, Trump has made it clear, he will not be tapping

Pompeo to be part of his second administration.¹⁰ There is also Donald Trump Jr, who says that there is no place in his father's second administration for "war hawks".¹¹ Trump Jr has, it should be noted, taken an increasingly prominent role in Republican politics and there is the distinct possibility of him becoming the First Son.

Nonetheless, as things stand today, American strategists must, on balance, be more than satisfied with their Russo-Ukraine proxy war. Far from Ukraine hitting the surrender button with Russia's 'special military operation' back in February 2022, it survived - in no small part due to the sale of \$47 million worth of Javelin anti-tank missiles supplied to Ukraine during the first Trump administration. Moreover, due to substantial western military, technical and financial aid, Russia has since then got bogged down in what is a 21st century version of the 1914-18 western front. A quagmire that has so far claimed between 113,000 and 160,000 Russian lives.¹²

The idea, common on the idiot left - including the pro-Kremlin Z left - that the Russian invasion is succeeding; that Ukraine is doing terribly badly; that the Kursk incursion was a dreadful blunder, a brilliant Putin trap that Zelensky fell headlong into; that the US has met its limits in Ukraine - all such nonsense testifies to a profound political myopia brought about by wishful thinking. No-one - no-one who is serious, that is - expected Ukraine to defeat Russia and send it packing back to the 1991 borders. That was never on the cards. Continued Ukrainian resistance is a US-EU victory in itself.

With that in mind, leaving European countries to bear the main burden of backing Ukraine, in the event of Putin-FSB overreach, while Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop, etc sell lots and lots of very expensive armaments - well, that would make perfect sense from a Trumpian point of view. All the

more so if China becomes ever more closely entangled with Putin's bid to create a Greater Russia.

Three kingdoms

Back in the third century CE the Chinese imperial chancellor, Zhuge Liang, orchestrated a conflict between the Han state in the north and the Chu state in the south, allowing the Shu state in the west to rise to dominance.¹³ It became known as the 'Three kingdoms' strategy. The US pursued just such a course in World War I and World War II. It stayed aloof from the struggle to begin with, profited hugely from the fire sale of assets, granted loans and sold arms ... and then came in late to tip the military balance.

Such grand manoeuvres are doubtless being contemplated in Mar-a-Largo. It is not that Donald Trump is a master strategist. He is, so we are told, far from being widely read. Michael Wolff claimed in his *Fire and fury* (2018) that "Trump doesn't like to read at all". Nor does he "process information in any conventional sense". In some ways, he is "postliterate - total television".¹⁴ But that does not make him a fool and he will certainly recruit a capable combination of MAGA ideologues, business moguls, political insiders and military men, as he did with his last administration. Who he listens to is entirely another matter though. He is mercurial, to put it mildly.

Incidentally, the notion that Marxism considers the role of individuals an irrelevance, that the means of production and the relations of production act as iron determinates, is a travesty. People make history and they do so using the ideas they have in their heads. Quirks, fads, drives and talents matter. Trump has a short attention span, but is a born showman with a sixth sense for the public square. Above all, though, Donald is Donald.

Perhaps Trump's big idea at the moment is to offer Russia entry into the lower ranks of the imperialist club. In other words, revive the G8. In return Russia would be expected to break its 'no limits' alliance with China - a Mao-Nixon rapprochement in reverse. That, maybe, is what Trump's peace plan is designed to achieve. But, let's be honest, we really don't know. Indeed it is more than likely that Trump himself does not really know either.

Geoff Raby, former Australian ambassador in Beijing, argues that China is expanding in central Asia at Russia's expense, that Russia is losing more in Asia than it could ever gain in Europe. Still, if Raby is correct and Putin sees it this way, a rapprochement with the US would, therefore, include Russia regaining influence in its central Asian near abroad.¹⁵

But Raby might easily be wrong. Does the Putin-FSB regime really resent China's growing eastern influence? Or does Moscow think it is getting a good bargain with 'Chussia'? After all, China imports all that oil and gas, which keeps the Russian economy afloat and on a war footing. Officially, the two countries are committed to developing cooperation in Eurasia, especially in central Asia, which will allow them to build what they call a fairer economic model - certainly compared to western neoliberalism. Either way, they surely have mutual or partially overlapping interests.

Leave aside Russia's relations with Xi Jinping, things point towards some kind of deal in Ukraine. Russia would at the very least see an end to western sanctions and gain some internationally recognised territory under Trump's peace plan. On the other hand, if Trump took up Zelensky's victory plan, Putin might not survive in office and the FSB regime could easily go down to a

colour revolution that ends in the break-up of the Russian Federation. Unless, of course, China came riding to the rescue.

But China will itself soon be subject to swingeing tariffs on its commodities, ranging from 10% to 60%. That promises not just extra tax revenues flowing into Washington's coffers, but, in China, the prospect of something like Japan's three lost decades (slow or negative growth rates). Moreover, a US-Russia grand deal would see China surrounded at a stroke and either forced into accepting the status of a US neocolony, having its arms industry dramatically scaled down, its big banks and companies bought up on the cheap, etc - that or face strangulation and potential state collapse. Understandably, given the historic experience of its 'long century' of colonial oppression (1839-1949) seared into its collective memory, China might well choose to resist any such outcome, using whatever means it has at its disposal.

Then again, strategists in Moscow and Beijing will be looking for ways to stop MAGA. Exacerbating cracks, tensions and divisions between the US and the EU has long been a Russian stratagem. There will doubtless be further Russian attempts to cleave Turkey, Hungary and Slovakia away from the Nato consensus.

A Christian Democrat-AfD government in Berlin would, for sure, represent a massive boost for Russia. Germany has, after all, once again become the "sick man of Europe" - no, not because the country abandoned nuclear power (an extraordinarily daft idea). It is the Ukraine war which has left it at the bottom of the G7 performance table: "Germany's terms of trade deteriorated hugely after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as the price of natural gas soared," writes the *FT's* Martin Wolf.¹⁶ Blowing up Nord Stream 1 and 2 in September 2022 amounted to rubbing Germany's face in the dirt. So, yes, Germany has an objective interest in peace with Russia. We saw that with Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* back in the late 1960s. However, Germany also has an interest in uniting around itself *Kerneuropa* (core Europe) and again becoming an imperial player in its own right. A fourth Reich!

We should certainly expect geostrategic shifts. True, the Brics+ have nothing in common - apart, that is, from chafing against US hegemony. But this does give Russia allies, or at least sympathy, amongst what it calls the "global majority". Note, amongst those who have, want to, or have been invited to join are Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Aukus has already been established and Japan and South Korea bolted on. This has broken Australia from its natural trading partner, China, and secured it firmly in the US-UK camp. The US can perhaps rely on India to be antagonistic to China, but not Russia. There is, moreover, the danger of the big powers being dragged into conflicts over Iran, Israel, Korea, Taiwan, etc, etc, with all manner of unintended consequences.

Sleepwalkers

Bear in mind, in this context, the long 'sleepwalk' towards World War I.¹⁷ Enemies became friends and friends became enemies.

The Franco-Prussian war of 1870 transformed Germany from being the fragmented and weak centre of Europe into its most dangerous power. Soundly beaten, resentful and fearful, republican France sought allies to contain the newly formed German Reich - the most obvious partner being tsarist Russia.

Their 1894 alliance committed

each side to mutual aid. True, this meant that in the event of war Germany would have to fight on two fronts. The alliance, however, was just as much directed against Britain. France and Britain were, of course, old enemies and there were bitter rivalries between Britain and Russia over Afghanistan, Persia, China and the Turkish Straits. Russia longed to gain unfettered access to the warm waters of the Mediterranean by getting its hands onto Constantinople.

And it was fear of Russia that took Britain into alliance with Japan in 1902. A few years later, in 1904, the Japanese-Russian war began and ended in humiliating defeat for Russia. British-built and British-designed Japanese battleships featured prominently. A global shock and a trigger for the 1905 revolution in Russia.

Against the Franco-Russian alliance Germany responded by tying Austria-Hungary ever more closely to itself. Because Austria-Hungary and Russia were fierce competitors in the Balkans, this committed Germany to a war with Russia that it really did not want. Germany also started an ill-judged naval race with Britain. Germanophobic scare stories were regularly promoted in the *Daily Mail* and *The Times* and featured in popular novels such as Erskine Childers' *The riddle of the sands* (1903). The German Reich came to be seen as Britain's most deadly global rival by elite and middle class opinion alike.

As Britain just managed 'a near-run victory' in the second Boer War, it felt compelled to abandon its 'splendid isolation' from continental European concerns and instead embraced its old enemy, France - an arrangement cemented in 1904 with the Entente Cordiale. France's alliance with tsarist Russia became, in due course, a triple alliance between Britain, France and Russia. Historic rivalry pitting Russia against Britain over southern Asia ended with various robber-deals, including dividing Persia into two zones of interest.

Such realignments readied the conditions needed for defeating the central powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary and Ottoman Turkey. True, the US eventually entered the war and guaranteed the outcome, and Russia was taken out of the imperial system altogether by the Bolshevik-led October 1917 revolution.

Yet, while between 15 and 22 million died, in the end, Germany was much reduced territorially, stripped of colonies and saddled with crippling reparation payments. As for the Austro-Hungarian empire, it was fragmented into a series of small, often rival, states. That left Austria as little more than a pocket-sized territory with a grand imperial capital. And, apart from Turkey itself - 'liberated' by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk - Anglo-French imperialism neatly sliced and diced the Ottoman empire into colonial or semi-colonial administrative units.

Alternative

Clearly there is more than a whiff of pre-World War I about the current situation - ie, great power military conflict seems all too possible - but with the added danger of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. However, tragically, what is lacking is a viable socialist alternative.

Despite the betrayal of August 1914, two generations of workers were educated in Marxism by the Second International and its mass parties. The working class had state power nearly within its grasp in a string of countries - itself a factor in the descent into the abyss. The ruling classes of Germany, Russia, Austria, France, Italy and Britain preferred war to revolution and socialism.

Today the general secretaries of

the countless confessional sects hold out the promise to their little band of followers that they are on the cusp of another Russian Revolution. The comforting myth is that the Bolsheviks went from nothing to everything in the eight short months between February and October 1917. Absolute and total nonsense, of course. From 1905 onwards, despite periods of severe repression, the Bolsheviks were, in fact, the *majority* party of the working class. Proved by newspaper circulation figures, workplace donations, duma, trade union and, from the summer of 1917 onwards, soviet elections in Petrograd, Moscow and other major towns and cities.

Serious business

No, we must do away with sect delusions - along with broad frontism, left Labourism, anarchism and syndicalism - and get down to the serious business of uniting in the common struggle to build a mass Communist Party here in Britain and internationally. That remains the main, the key, the abiding task.

We all know that the Bolsheviks distinguished themselves in World War I by upholding the November 1912 Basel congress resolution of the Second International and its "war on war" stance. Following in the footsteps of the Copenhagen (1910) and Stuttgart (1907) congresses, delegates in Basel *unanimously* agreed that socialists should "exert every effort in order to prevent the outbreak of war by the means they consider most effective".

The heroic stand made by August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht against the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian war - for which they served two years imprisonment - was widely cited as a shining example. The same went for the 1871 Paris Commune, the 1905 revolution in Russia and the 1910 militant strike wave in Britain.

In that spirit, the Basel congress warned: if "war should break out anyway it is their [ie, the socialist parties'] duty to intervene in favour of its speedy termination and with all their powers to utilise the economic and political crisis created by the war to arouse the people and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule".¹⁸

Lenin constantly referred back to the Basel resolution and deployed it in polemical salvos against the social-imperialists, social-pacifists and centrists alike. Social-imperialists and reformists would have to be purged, he insisted. Unity with the social-imperialists means an alliance between the working class and their 'own' bourgeoisie.

Indeed in their pamphlet, *Socialism and war*, Vladimir Lenin and Gregory Zinoviev drew a sharp line of demarcation against those reformists platonically calling for 'peace' (Keir Hardie) and the 'neither victory nor defeat' centrists, who countenanced unity with Menshevik social-traitors (Leon Trotsky). The only principled position for the revolutionary class to take was, insisted the Lenin-Zinoviev team, to "wish for the defeat of its government" in order to "facilitate its overthrow". In short the slogan: "Convert the imperialist war into civil war".¹⁹

A thoroughly realistic strategy. True, most of the MPs, trade union officials and apparatus tops had gone from tolerable(ish) opportunism to full-blown social-imperialism. But, once the reality of the war dawned amongst the broad mass of the population, so went the reasoning, the principled left would go from being a minority to a majority and could, therefore, take full advantage of the turmoil caused by the war. Coordinated revolution was a real prospect.

In all honesty, we cannot hold out such an immediate strategy today. Across the whole of the planet, there is not a single workers' party worthy of the name. There are plenty of little groups that call themselves parties, but no actual party. We in the CPGB are proud to have the name of a party, but there "exists no real Communist Party" (*Weekly Worker* 'What we fight for'). By "Communist Party" we mean part - a mass part, the advanced part - of the working class.

So, when it comes to the danger of a wider European or global conflict, "we can", as I stated in my first article on the Ukraine war, "only adopt a *moral* stance for the moment". We are, therefore, more in the position of August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht in 1870 than Vladimir Lenin and Gregory Zinoviev in 1914. Nonetheless, it is "vital that we take our stand."²⁰

There are, of course, those who fail to understand what we mean by revolutionary defeatism. Some believe, for example, that to be for revolutionary defeatism of one's 'own' side, you must, therefore, be for the victory of the 'other' side. No, there is not the slightest reason for us to urge on Russian forces to take the whole of the Donbas, Donetsk and Luhansk and then drive still further west to install an FSB quisling in the Mariyinsky Palace. That would be like urging on Otto von Bismarck and Prussia in 1870 (the position of Ferdinand Lassalle's successors).

Then there are those who universalise revolutionary defeatism. No, we are for the wars of resistance conducted in Palestine and Lebanon. That entails no illusions in Hamas or Hezbollah. We should defend ourselves against them when and where necessary, but the main enemy is unmistakably Israel.

For many anarchists, syndicalists, pacifists and left centrists too, the way to achieve peace is through sabotage, blockading arms factories, strikes on the railways and at ports, disrupting supply lines, etc. No, while we would do our utmost to support any peace demonstration, any manifestation of mass anger against what is a reactionary war *on both sides*, we will not deceive anyone that there can be a lasting peace, a democratic peace, in the absence of a revolutionary movement - crucially a mass Communist Party.

Whoever wants a lasting peace, a democratic peace, "must stand for civil war against the governments of the bourgeoisie".²¹ That is what we mean by revolutionary defeatism! ●

Notes

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GENDER

Trans liberation and Marxism

Ranging from sci-fi thought experiments to the latest theoretical disputes, Mike Macnair explains why class and building solidarity is vital

This was intended to be a discussion with Roxy Hall, but she found herself at short notice unable to attend. Nonetheless, we decided to go ahead with just me and reschedule another date with her. The original plan affects my talk. This tries not to repeat what I have already written on the issue¹ so much as to address questions that intersect with comrade Hall's *Ten theses on the gender question*, a revised version which was published in June this year, on which I wrote some comments in August.²

One of the issues raised was the question of the maximum programme. I am going to address why we should be for trans liberation in this context; secondly, why we have to address the question of trans liberation *primarily* in terms of the maximum programme rather than primarily in terms of the minimum programme; thirdly, I will give brief reasons for rejecting some theoretical arguments commonly used on the issue.

Possible future

I begin, perhaps oddly, with a science fiction story. Lois McMaster Bujold is an author who, among other things, writes space opera that plays with new reproductive and life technologies. The space opera background uses the very common science-fictional trope of the lost colony that has reverted to some sort of feudalism and is now reintegrating itself in a modernist, galactic civilisation. In the episode in question, in the book *A civil campaign*,³ Lord Ivan goes to the spaceship to meet, as he thinks, his old flame, Lady Donna. But it turns out that Lady Donna has gone off planet to have a sex change operation, and the person who arrives is Lord Dono. For the purposes of the plot it is essential to Lord Dono inheriting from his brother that he should be male, and, moreover, that he should be a fully fertile, male. The idea is to keep their cousin (who is thought to have persecuted the brother until such time that the brother died under dubious circumstances) from inheriting.

So Lady Donna/Lord Dono has to inherit, and in order to inherit, he has to have, and does have, a sex-change operation that is going to give him fully functional genitals, including fertility. The mechanism is that the off-planet doctors grow a set of male genitals for Lord Dono in vitro, using Lady Donna's genes plus genetic engineering using a Y chromosome from tissue samples from her deceased brother.

The question that is posed by this story as a thought experiment, is: would the anti-trans campaigners who say 'trans women are not women' and 'trans men are not men' still say of the character, Lord Dono, in Bujold's book, that Lord Dono is not a man, in spite of the fact that he has a perfectly functional set of genitals, and is capable of fathering children? We can equally imagine the gender reversed. In Samuel R Delany's 1976 book *Triton*, set in an early 22nd century in which humans have colonised the solar system, the central character, Bron Helstrom, has a fully effective sex-change from man to woman; but Delany, unlike Bujold, does not directly address the question of fertility.

These thought experiments are not mere fantasy, in spite of the fact that Bujold sets her story centuries in the future. In fact, growing organs outside of the body for



Maximum programme is key

transplantation purposes is present-day science. Fallopian tubes have been grown in miniature, as have testicles for research purposes. Vaginal tissue has been grown for transplantation purposes for women who have some sort of medical problem. Harvard researchers claim that they can grow ovaries. *The Guardian* reported 10 years ago that researchers were growing penises *in vitro*.⁴ Meanwhile, genetic engineering continues to advance rapidly.⁵ The techniques discussed by Bujold are not just *longue durée* future speculations, but probably decades rather than centuries away.

As to the question I posed, to be honest, I think that in reality the so-called 'trans exclusionary radical feminists' (Terfs), or alternatively gender-critical feminists, would still regard that as being problematic, in spite of the fact that, if the technology gets there, the result is going to be somebody who is fully functional for reproductive purposes, as well as for sexual purposes.

To the extent that there would still be a problem with 'Trans women are women' from the point of view of *feminism*, it is the problem identified by Naomi Scheman when in 1997 she coined the expression, "perinatally pinked", referring to the fact that there is extensive oppression of people identified as women from birth that is not shared by people who grow up as boys: boys are not taught to be quiet or neat and tidy, to be fearful, and so on.⁶ This is a real political issue. But from the point of view of the communist maximum programme, it says merely that the oppression of trans people will not be overcome without overcoming the oppression of women.⁷

It is a strength, it seems to me, of comrade Hall's theses on the gender question, and of the Marxist Unity Group's trans liberation statement,

which I discussed in my August article, that they addressed that sense of *possibility*. It will practically be possible to have what would in reality be a fully effective sex change, including fertility in the destination sex. I do not think there would be any satisfactory justification for denying that a person who was turned from a woman into a man or vice versa by such means was not a man or a woman. Such arguments ultimately rest on religious commitments: Genesis chapter 5, verse 2 - "male and female created he them"; or in a dilute form, a retro naturalism, a politics of nostalgia. The argument that what is involved is an unjustified use of medical resources plainly assumes 'austerity' in health services: that is, acceptance of the dictatorship of capital.

Binary?

There is a logic that follows from the thought experiment. Suppose that when we say a man, we *prima facie* mean a person who has male genitals, including functional testicles and the ability to engender children. And when we say we mean a woman, we mean somebody who has a vagina, ovaries and womb, and so on, capable of becoming pregnant and bearing children.

This approach is politically defensible, because in reality a lot of the discrimination that women face arises out of the risk of pregnancy and out of the primary responsibility of women for children in infancy. It is the moment at which there are children when, in the patterns of behaviour, there is a tendency for the housework, as well as for the childcare, etc to fall on the woman: the presence of children changes egalitarian male-female heterosexual relations to unequalitarian ones. And the pregnancy 'risk' is a routine ground of employment

discrimination against women.

If, however, we take this approach to the sex binary, we have to recognise that this is not a rigorous binary, because around 15% of people are biologically infertile.⁸ This is a much larger number than the 1.4% of the population in the USA who identify as trans or the 0.5% in the UK.⁹ Between 0.02% and 1.7% of the population are intersex - that is, either genetically XXY or have this or that developmental condition that results in bodily unclarity of genetic sex at birth.¹⁰ In the 2021 UK census, 1.54% identified as gay or lesbian (as distinct from 1.28% bisexual, and much smaller numbers for a variety of other options).¹¹ All these forms are - as things stand - *prima facie* non-reproductive.

That is not to say that there is no biological sex binary. But it is *something that exists in connection with fertility*, and is in this respect fairly radically imperfect.

And the gender binary (along with other gender constructs) is a cultural outgrowth on the basis of the sex binary, and in some cases actually involves an inversion of the sex binary, as Camilla Power and Ian Watts argued in 1999.¹²

I started with the possible future, and arrived at the point that there is a serious problem with rigorous biological binarism. The other side of this story is the pre-capitalist past and the period leading to capitalism. Take, for example, Dr James Barry (c1789-1865), who could be called a trans man - in the sense that Barry was a woman who lived as a man in order to attend medical school, who rose to the career height of being Inspector General of Hospitals, and was only discovered to be a woman at the point of death. Conversely, the Chevalier d'Eon (1728-1810) was a biological man who at least for a large part of their life lived

as a woman. The background was d'Eon's complicated political relationships with the French state, but cannot have been *just* that. D'Eon was argued to be hermaphrodite, but when autopsied after death proved to be biologically male.¹³

And these are people who are existing in very late feudalism, overlapping with early capitalism in the late 18th century. We can guess that the means of discovering that people were living in the opposite gender to their birth sex was more readily available than it would have been earlier. Eleanor (aka John) Rykener was busted for prostitution in London in the 1390s, and revealed on interrogation a substantial career as a sex worker, embroiderer and barmaid in London, Oxford and Burford. There are various saints' lives and other stories of people living as the opposite gender to their birth sex in medieval Byzantium, discussed in Roland Betancourt's 2020 book *Byzantine intersectionality*.¹⁴

On the one hand, the potential future pushes at the issue of the biological sex binary as determinative, since the technology is moving quite rapidly towards the possibility of full transition, including fertility and self-generated hormones, which at the moment do not exist. And the other hand, if we go back into the past before the all-seeing eye of Sauron in the shape of the capitalist state, it is really quite likely that there are significant numbers of people who just live under the radar as members of the opposite sex, and are not discovered.

On what grounds would communists wish to prohibit either? From the starting point of the maximum programme, it seems that the underlying grounds of the oppression of trans people can be made to evaporate under conditions of communism, because we get rid of both the family as an economic institution and the state as a bureaucratic and policing power standing over the society and aspiring to the all-seeing eye of Sauron and the gatekeeper of access to all sorts of benefits. Both are major drivers of the oppression of trans people.

Transition

I am not saying that *the dictatorship of the proletariat* can immediately solve this problem. Why not? The minimum programme is a programme for the seizure of power by the proletariat, and its class rule over the middle classes and the state. This will open up what will probably be a quite rapid process of socialisation at first (as 1688 opened a very rapid period of transition to capitalism), but nonetheless a *prolonged* transition to communism.

The reason why that is prolonged is because humanity has tested to destruction in the Soviet Union, eastern Europe, Cuba and China the idea of forced collectivisation of peasant property - and for that matter of small businesses. Hence, if the working class takes over political power, it will boot the capitalist class out of the means of its current means of having political power. But there will continue to be a mixed economy with a substantial market sector and a substantial petty bourgeoisie.

As Evgeny Preobrazhensky argued in the 1920s, and as Hillel Tickin has argued more recently, this period will be intensely contradictory. The economy and society will not at once be wonderful. The partial socialisation dislocates the capitalist

system of incentives; but because it is *partial*, a fully communist system of incentives does not instantaneously spring into being. So it will be a complex, conflictual and fairly prolonged process of change.

The theory of general market equilibrium is false. This is true not just of marginalist theory, but also of Adam Smith, and before him Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the bees*. The more 'perfect' the market, the more it leads to instability, which we can see every day in the wild gyrations and fluctuations of stock markets, money markets, commodity futures markets, and so on. Capitalism, therefore, automatically involves both market institutions and their opposites: at one end, the strong state; at the other, the family.

It is perfectly clear that the bureaucratic-coercive state under capitalism is massively more extensive and invasive of people's personal lives than was the case of any feudal political regime, including the church or, for that matter, the Roman empire or the ancient Chinese. The *necessity* of the strong state appears, however, as the nation - because states represent themselves as *nation-states*. Under capitalism, nationalism is therefore liberalism's necessary 'other' - and associated with purity politics and its aspiration to possess the all-seeing eye of Sauron.

The market's second necessary 'other' is the family. It is merely false that humans can comfortably live solely on the basis of market interactions - though there is greater possibility of doing that under capitalism than there is in pre-capitalist societies. Even the working singleton is in difficulty when they fall ill with something not serious enough for A&E, but for which they need practical help. Where children are involved, the problem is more acute. The family in market society - as in pre-capitalist societies - is just as significant as an economic institution as the state, and for exactly the same reason: the necessary limits of the market.

If the necessity of the strong state appears in politics as nationalism, the necessity of the family appears as traditionalist-patriarchalist politics. It does so because liberalism, with its false claims for the market, reduces state welfare provision, and in doing so *increases* dependence on the family. This logic means that liberal anti-family measures (or anti-discrimination measures that appear to undermine the family) inevitably appear as an attack on the *needs* of the large majority of the population (and especially the relatively poor) and strengthen the political weight of traditionalist-patriarchalists.

If we turn to the dynamics of *family formation* in capitalism, we lose the arranged marriage system, which is characteristic of both classical antiquity and the middle ages, and in those societies extends all the way down to the peasantry and the artisan classes. In capitalism, we lose the arranged marriage system and get instead a 'marriage mart' - a marriage marketplace, basically in the form of heterosexual cruising grounds: dance-halls, discos, clubs, dating sites ... This is a competitive marketplace. In this context appears modern competitive heterosexuality. It is the competitive formation of heterosexuality, driven by the formation of heterosexual relations through market processes, which also drives a whole variety of different forms of negations of heterosexuality. It also drives the phenomenon of queer-bashing, which is a form of the performance of heterosexual masculinity. Queer-bashing is one of the main forms of the victimisation of trans people.

I said that the bureaucratic-coercive state expands dramatically

under capitalism. The fact that this happens creates the eye of Sauron trying to look at everyone and identify which gender they are, and so on. It also creates the roles of doctors and social workers as state gatekeepers, controlling access to sex/gender transition - insofar as people do not have the money to pay for private treatment, but also by way of state regulatory operations.

These dynamics are driven by *market* society. They are already evident in the late medieval Italian city-states, early modern Netherlands and England, long before steam-driven industry. The point this poses is that the oppression of trans people is largely created by the dynamics of market society - producing both changed family dynamics and the strong state. Under the (global) dictatorship of the proletariat, the dynamics of market society will *persist*, but over time be overcome and wither away - as will the state.

It is for this reason that we need the maximum programme. But trans liberation is not the only reason we need it: the point is equally true of women's and LGB liberation. I refer to these, as distinct from other issues, merely because of the immediate connection to trans liberation. It is not good enough to have a minimum programme on its own: we need both the minimum and the maximum programme.

Minimum

I have much less to say on the minimum programme. I have argued elsewhere that the *method of approach* for this purpose needs to be to try to construct solidarity round commonalities of experience, as 'Lesbians and Gays support the Miners' in 1984 constructed solidarity round the common experience of oppression by the police.¹⁵ I have argued previously that we could usefully add to the minimum programme "Abolition of legal recognition of gender with regard to government documentation", which the Revolutionary Communist Organisation in Australia comrades propose; and building more non-gendered public toilets.¹⁶

A great many of the 'minimum programme' issues that affect trans people are shared with everybody else. Thus, for example, in relation to trans healthcare, including transition care, we want decent health services, publicly funded and controlled, free at the point of need. This, of course, poses the question of doctors as ideological gatekeepers; but it should be remembered that doctors also function as ideological gatekeepers in relation to women's health issues and as controllers to ration access to healthcare for the poor. Overcoming this problem is a matter of the ideological struggle with traditionalism-patriarchalism.

Moving onto that terrain, we want to get rid of the witch-hunting operations of the capitalist media. It is no good trying to imagine that you could overcome them in relation to trans people, while leaving them intact in relation to the fake anti-Semitism smear campaign, and any of the other such operations. The witch-hunting character of the capitalist media exists because it is an institutional arrangement under which the voice of the proprietor is amplified by advertising funding and applied for his political purposes.

The oppression of trans people in the prison system - perfectly real - is at the end of the day a branch of the generally oppressive character of the prison system, and our *Draft programme* calls for radical reduction of the use of imprisonment. These are examples.

Not useful for the minimum programme is legal gender recognition. The reality is that legal

gender recognition fails. It fails to deal with the medical aspect, but it also inherently sets up the flat conflict that the gender-critical feminists exploit because of the nature of legal gender recognition. Either trans people have to go through a whole series of hoops in order to get their gender recognition, which is violently oppressive to trans people, or alternatively there are no requirements and then it becomes a toy for the dishonest and provocateurs to play with. The problem is that the idea is premised on *accepting* the rigid gender binary, in an attempt to get unity on trans as a single issue with the liberals. The result is that you go down with the liberals, as happened to the Scottish National Party over gender recognition.

Theory

This brings me to three issues of general theory, very much in outline.

The first is against intersectionality, whose problem is that it is anti-class. It is an ultra-theorisation of the people's front policy, in the form of the Communist Party USA's version of the people's front: the race-class-gender 'trinity'. This supposed that 'class' is represented by the pro-Democrat leadership of the trade unions, but you cannot raise race or gender issues in the trade unions, because that would be disturbing the class front. Gender is represented by the liberal leadership of the single-issue women's movement, and you cannot raise class or race issues there because that would disturb the unity of the women's movement. Race is represented by whatever mountebanks hold themselves out as the representatives of the black community or of the particular ethnic minority sub-group. The upshot, as I argued in 2018, is 'Vote Clinton, get Trump', which is so self-defeating (like this year's 'Vote Harris, get Trump'). Rejecting the method of intersectionality is a necessary first step.

Secondly, reject the arguments of Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and so on. These are essentially idealistic theories, according to which we are to reject Marxist materialism, as far as it relates to sexuality (Foucault in the 1970s), or as far as it relates to gender (Butler in the 1990s, since adopted by very many left writers on trans liberation). The reality is that you cannot corral the rejection of materialism into the space of gender and not reject materialism, as far as the dynamics of the economy is concerned. If Foucault (followed by Butler and others) is right, then Marx's claims about the economy and about historical materialism and so on are wrong.

In reality, I think it is clear from the historical work that has been done since Foucault wrote that he was wrong. His historical argument for the primacy of theory and the struggle for power over untheorised practices depended on looking at French and German 'Enlightenment' developments and ignoring their untheorised Italian city-state, Netherlands and English precursors. His argument for the primacy of power grew out of the New Left's revulsion from bureaucracy and, as Daniel Zamora's *Foucault and neoliberalism* shows, moved into the neoliberal movement of critique of Marxism. These theories were to explain the marginalisation of the politics of class. But after its supposed marginalisation, class returns to political salience, but in an unpleasant form: the left having abandoned it, class becomes a trope for the nationalist and patriarchalist-traditionalist right.

Finally, let me deal with the limits of social reproduction theory, for which a significant amount of

left trans liberation writing has argued. Now, social reproduction theory is essentially a theory constructed in the 1970s on the basis of how things were in the 60s: the theory being that capitalism *as such* separates social reproduction processes from production processes - and production is masculine, while reproduction is feminine.

The empirically visible problem with this is, since the theory was constructed, we have seen a radical feminisation of the workforce - not just in the advanced capitalist countries, but globally. So a great deal of production on any terms is feminine. Going along with this development, the ideological forms have shifted. At least in the United States and Britain there is a shift from the 1950s ideological Athenian conception of femininity (in which women ought to be in the house, not outside the house, and white and soft) to an early 21st century Spartan ideological conception, in which women exercise - in the gym, running, and so on. This is a very superficial ideological form, but it reflects in an indirect way the general phenomenon of the feminisation of the workforce.

There are more fundamental problems with the theory. For Marx in *Capital*, reproduction is the element of production that is necessary for society to carry on. What goes beyond reproduction is the social surplus-producing element of production. So that reproduction is not just what women do in the home in connection with kids and housework, in the traditional family ideology: it is also the people who are digging holes in the road in order to mend water mains, who are repairing and rebuilding houses, even those who are manufacturing cars, so far as they are to replace old and busted cars. And so on across the whole of the economy.

Behind these problems, social reproduction theory was trying to give an explanation of the oppression of women in its 1950s-60s form that was not vulnerable to the academic, radical feminist, and Eurocommunist critiques of Engels. In the 1970s some Marxist feminists continued to promote Engels' narrative of the emergence of the oppression of women together with that of class. This was criticised by academic anthropologists (originally for transparently political conservative reasons).

The radical feminists argued that the oppression of women is substructural to class, which may well be true. The problem this poses is like the construction firm trying to replace the railway bridge at Oxford station, who have severe difficulties because they cannot effectively get at the substructure of the bridge without removing the bridge itself, which would involve them shutting the railway down. Analogously, to get effectively at the substructural oppression of women it is first necessary to take down the superstructural capitalist state and, below that, the order of class as such. The Eurocommunists adopted the academic and radical-feminist critiques of 'Engelsism' because these were useful sticks with which to beat the anti-revisionists, Trotskyists and so on, who kept insisting on class.

Social reproduction theory was, then, part of a larger movement to try to construct a theory of the oppression of women that would not fall into 'Engelsism', because it would not engage historical materialism, but would instead grow immediately out of the internal dynamics of *capitalism as such*.

The result is two problems. On the one hand, the theory places the oppression of women

insufficiently deep in the structure of *class* society. On the other hand, it places it too deep in the structure of *capitalist* society, so that the ability of capitalism as such to move radically in relation to the socialisation of family production, the proportion of women employed in formal employment, etc, is radically understated. The theory makes capitalism seem to need more conservatism than it actually does. The flipside of this is that feminism *as such*, but equally gender resistance *as such*, appears to strike more radical blows against the capitalist system than is, in fact, the case ●

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This is an edited version of the talk given to the November 3 Online Communist Forum. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=WV2FxAQcQ54

Notes

1. A six-part series was published in February-March 2023: 'Devolution non-recognition' *Weekly Worker* February 2 (www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1428/devolution-non-recognition); 'Clearing the ground', February 9 (www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1429/clearing-the-ground); 'Moving towards the positive', February 16 (www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1430/moving-towards-the-positive); 'Gender, class and capitalism', February 23 (www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1431/gender-class-and-capitalism); 'Effective collectivity is key', March 2 (www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1432/effective-collectivity-is-key); 'Tailism cannot deliver', March 9 (www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1433/tailism-cannot-deliver). And 'Yet more lies', April 13 (www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1438/yet-more-lies).
2. R Hall, 'Ten theses on the gender question': thepartyist.com/2024/06/02/ten-theses-on-the-gender-question-revisited. See also my comment on this and the arguments of the Marxist Unity Group, Brunnhilde Olding and the Australian Revolutionary Communist Organisation: 'Solidarity, not sectionalism' *Weekly Worker* August 29 (www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1504/solidarity-not-sectionalism).
3. L McMaster Bujold *A civil campaign* London 2000, pp128-41.
4. www.livescience.com/59675-body-parts-grown-in-lab.html; www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/harvard-researchers-help-create-technology-to-grow-living-human-ovaries; www.theguardian.com/science/2014/oct/05/laboratory-penises-test-on-men.
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8. Eg, www.who.int/health-topics/infertility; www.singlecare.com/blog/news/infertility-statistics. The NHS has 84%: www.nhs.uk/conditions/infertility.
9. williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/trans-adults-united-states (June 2022); www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/genderidentity/bulletins/genderidentityenglandandwales/census2021.
10. For the lower figure see L Sax, 'How common is intersex? a response to Anne Fausto-Sterling' *Journal of Sex Research* Vol 39 (2002); as for the upper figure: A Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the body: gender politics and the construction of sexuality* New York 2000; M Blackless et al., 'How sexually dimorphic are we? Review and synthesis' *American Journal of Human Biology* Vol 12 (2000). The difference between the figures depends entirely on what is to count as intersex.
11. www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualorientationenglandandwales/census2021.
12. 'First gender, wrong sex' in HL Moore, T Sanders and B Kaare (eds) *Those who play with fire: gender, fertility and transformation in east and southern Africa* London 1999.
13. Conveniently accessible references at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Barry_\(surgeon\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Barry_(surgeon)) and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chevalière_d'Eon.
14. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John/Eleanor_Rykener is well referenced; R Betancourt *Byzantine intersectionality* Princeton NJ 2020, chapter 3.
15. See 'Clearing the ground' (note 1 above), and 'Solidarity, not sectionalism' (note 2).
16. 'Tailism cannot deliver' (note 1); 'Solidarity, not sectionalism' (note 2).

TURKEY

His movement lingers on

Widely presented in the west as a champion of 'moderate' Islam, within Turkey he was condemned as a terrorist. **Esen Uslu** looks at the life and times of Fethullah Gülen

Fethullah Gülen, a controversial figure of Islamist politics in Turkey, died on October 24 aged 83 at his Pennsylvania retreat in the USA. In line with the sensitivities of the US public, his movement resolved not to use the *Takbir* prayer during the funeral procession, as it has also been used by Islamist insurgents as their war cry.

Indeed, that omission was actually the summary of his life and works. He was presented by his allies in the west as the leader of the progressive, liberal and 'moderate' followers of Turkish Islam. However, his own works presented him as a *wali* - a 'chosen one' in communication with his god. But, make no mistake, the movement he was instrumental in developing, managing, and sustaining over 40 years is still active after his passing.

The modern Turkish nation-state was born from the ashes of the Ottoman empire - a multi-religious, and multi-ethnic entity, where the Turks and Islam are now the ruling strata. The creation of a nation-state required uniform nationhood (Turks) and a uniform religion (Sunni-Hanafi Islam), dictated by force upon the 14 million population, which remained under the control of the remnants of the Ottoman army, trained in Prussian military style.

The Christian Armenians and Greek Orthodox Rums and Turks were massacred and dispossessed, and forced out of the country. The Turkish-speaking Muslim peasants of Balkan countries, as well as Caucasians, immigrated into Turkey. However, one of the first tasks of the nascent republic was to develop state offices tasked to organise that mass into a uniform nation.

In March 1924, the caliphate was abolished by the parliament - victorious after the Greek-Turkish war and Lausanne peace treaty. The same day, important laws were enacted. The first one abolished the Ottoman Sharia and Pious Foundations Ministry, while the Unification of Education Act closed religious schools and brought the entire education system under the control of the ministry of education. A state-controlled junior high school for boys training to become imams (prayer leaders) and *hatip* (preachers) was formed.

By pulling the carpet from under their feet, the Kemalist regime believed that they had undermined the Islamist opposition once and for all. But that was actually a forlorn hope - the various Sunni brotherhoods did not accept the dictates of state-sanctioned Sunni-Hanafi Islam, but had sufficient popular support to sustain themselves in their own world, where Kemalist ideology and officialdom failed to penetrate.

The Kemalists also expelled and expropriated the mainly Christian nascent bourgeoisie, and formed a thin stratum above the mass of a peasant society, using force to dictate their will and trying to develop a new, Turkish capitalist stratum in the protected greenhouses of the national economy. As a result, the concept of 'nationhood and secularism' remained a motto repeated every morning by the literate classes in order not to attract the lightning bolts of the state, but secret attachment to a religious order was for many the mainstay of daily life under suffocating state control.



Tentacles into police, army and whole state machine

The situation was more complicated in the Kurdish provinces, where the Naqshbandi brotherhood had been influential. The 1925 Kurdish rebellion was led by sheiks of the order, and brutal suppression by the Turkish regime left an unforgettable mark on the people's minds. The regime took the opportunity to curtail every type of opposition, and entered into a new period of oppression that lasted until the end of World War II.

Nur Jamaat

After the war, while Turkey had entered a period of two-party democracy, the Islamist movement's support for opposition to hard-set Kemalists made them more prominent. The most visible organisation was Nur (holy light) Jamaat, which was founded by the Kurdish mullah, Said of Nurs village, hence known as Saidi Nursi. The Nur Jamaat industriously hand-copied Saidi Nursi's sermons in old Arabic script and distributed it despite the state oppression. Later they managed to acquire printing presses and the *Risale-i Nur* (Collection of Nur brochures) became available for those capable of reading the Latin script.

Those years are also when the internal immigration from villages to cities gained momentum, and within a decade the village population was nearly halved. While the introduction of farm machinery pushed out peasants from their smallholdings, the developing 'assembly industries' - the subsidiaries of international big corporations operating under the export substitution policies of the state - were pulling people into the cities and as workers into factories.

The social upheaval led by the mass migration created *gecekondu* (shanty towns) surrounding the big cities, as there was no preparation led by the state on how the immigrant people as new workers were to be accommodated. While in every major industrial country such movement of the people created ample opportunities for the bourgeoisie to massively profit from developing new suburbs, the Turkish state merely looked on haplessly, while the common land was grabbed without any price being paid and

main force: the Nationalist Action Party's infamous Grey Wolves. Their most notorious action was in 1969 - the attack on leftwing university students demonstrating in Istanbul against the visit of the Sixth Fleet of the US navy, killing two under the benign gaze of the police.

In 1971 another generals' intervention toppled the government, and dictatorial rule was established which lasted until 1974. The military top brass once more believed that their government, formed by bringing 'neutral' bureaucrats together, would stop the ascendancy of the left and also suppress Islamist politics. But, as before, the Kemalist project failed dismally.

The Islamists burst onto the political scene under the guise of the MSP, the National Salvation Party - after the 1973 elections the MSP became the partner of the CHP, the traditional Kemalist party, in a coalition government, which became more popular after the invasion of the northern Cyprus in 1974. But the coalition was rapidly broken and new alliances with traditional rightwing parties were formed with the participation of the MSP. The Islamists were in the ascendancy.

During this time the old Nur Jamaat was disintegrating and groups were emerging on diametrically opposed platforms. Amid the ensuing chaos Fethullah Gülen emerged as the leader of a sizeable independent portion of the old movement and began to distance himself from the old platform. He was detained for seven months in 1974, but after his release his fortunes improved. He sought new inroads to obtain the blessing and cooperation of the military and state security bureaucracy. He put a stop to the virulent anti-American rhetoric, and obtained US blessing.

After the subsequent military takeover, he was on the run once again. The arrest warrant issued against him was only rescinded when prime minister Turgut Özal - one of his chums from the Struggle Against Communist days - intervened on his behalf in 1983.

With such high-level protection and assistance Gülen became a voluntary preacher in one of the most important mosques in Istanbul. His books, and cassette recordings of his sermons, were beginning to circulate. He started to follow the old tested paths. He formed organisations to provide grants and scholarships, as well as supplementary private teaching schools for preparing high schools students for university entrance examinations. His motto was "The universities should be open to us".

This was part of the path towards forming cadres to rise within the state bureaucracy. As his students became part of the state, his ambitions were growing. He undertook a controlling role in the Institution for Organising University Entrance Examinations, and started to distribute the questions to selected and trusted members of his movement. Gradually this control was extended to the entrance examinations of military cadet schools and police collages.

He made use of Turkish expansionist aims, and started opening educational establishments in central Asian republics after the collapse of Soviet Union, as well as in some African countries. He presented himself as the extender of soft-power Turkey, while continuing

to upgrade his role within the armed forces. He started to take over the old school Islamist organisations within the Turkish workers communities in European countries.

Erdoğan's reign

While Turkey's political scene was in turmoil, a US-sponsored political project brought Gülen's movement and the most popular remnants of electoral Islamist politics - especially Recep Tayyip Erdoğan - together in a conciliatory platform, which led to formation of the AKP (Justice and Development Party). The liberals and democrats gathered around this platform and, despite the opposition of military top brass, it was elected to form the government.

The Gülen movement began to call itself the 'Service Movement' to distinguish itself from other brotherhoods, jamaats, orders and religious centres. It equipped itself using the state's discarded armaments. As the state became more bureaucratic, the movement's appeal grew, representing the more reliable route to power and riches controlled by the state.

It started to operate banking consortiums, and organised among Islamist businessmen. It formed TUSKON, the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists. In 2005 TUSKON appeared as an alternative to the TUSIAD, the Turkish Industry and Business Association, which represented all the major companies, and to MÜSIAD, the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association - mainly supporters of old-school Islamist businessmen.

But points of conflict began to emerge between the Gülen movement and the AKP, which was unable to develop its own cadres despite being in power and was obliged to rely on Gülen's trained cadres within the bureaucracy. Gülen's forceful organisational efforts via education started to bring shame to the AKP. While it used those cadres in the police and army to curb the military tutelage, the scandals became apparent and negatively influenced the AKP's electability.

Competition came to a head when Erdoğan opted to rely on the traditional forces to curb the influence of the Gülen movement. The US-coded 'liberal, non-violent, moderate' Islam opted to use its muscle and attempted to stage a military intervention in 2016, which failed miserably. It became known as FETO, the 'Fethullahist Terror Organisation' in official parlance, and tens of thousands of its cadres were purged from influential positions, not least in the army and the police.

Gülen had been living in the USA since 2009, and many of his disciples managed to escape abroad. The Gülen movement lost out in the wheel of fortune, despite Erdoğan's unwavering support, as stated in his query, "Whatever have you asked and we have not given?" The declared aim of raising a "pious and vindictive golden generation" failed dismally.

However, the Islamist politics in Turkey's political array does not allow for a vacuum. There are many orders, brotherhoods and tariqas vying for the place left by the Gülen movement, and we must not discount the old connections of that movement in adopting itself to the new realities of Turkish politics ●

ECONOMICS

Late capitalism and inflation

Michael Roberts offers an appreciation of Ernest Mandel and takes issue with the idea that soaring prices can benefit the working class

Every year the *Historical Materialism* journal holds a conference in London. It is attended by (mostly) academics and students to discuss Marxist theory and the issues of the day. The theme this year was: 'Countering the plague: the forces of reaction and war, and how to fight them'.

The November 7-12 conference was heavily attended, with over 930 registered to discuss 800 papers submitted over four days. Also, there was a lecture from last year's winner of the annual Isaac Deutscher prize for the best book of 2023 (Heide Gerstenberger's *Market and violence*) and there were some very large plenaries on 21st century imperialism, climate and capital.

In this review, I shall concentrate on the sessions I participated in on Marxian economics (*HM* covers all aspects of the Marxist view of human society: philosophy, culture, political strategy, etc). The first was a roundtable discussion of the impact and relevance today of *Late capitalism* - a book written by the Belgian Marxist, Ernest Mandel, in the early 1970s. In my view, this was a landmark work on the nature of and trends in world capitalism in the mid-20th century. This session was called over a new edition of the book with an introduction by Cedric Durand, the French economist. There were several well-known speakers: Peter Green, Ozlem Onaran, Riccardo Bellofiore, Alan Freeman and myself.

Peter Green gave Mandel's book some pluses and minuses; one plus was that Mandel criticised the "monocausal" view of crises: ie, that there is one main cause of crises, rather than a multiplicity. One minus was Mandel's lack of support for a disproportion theory of crises. Peter was also not convinced by Mandel's support for long waves in capitalist accumulation (ie, upwards for decades and then downwards).

Mandelites

Ozlem Onaran, who ironically is (was) a member of the particular Trotskyist group of the 20th century associated with Mandel (the Mandelites), reckoned that 'late capitalism' now needed to be expanded in its scope to cover feminism, unpaid care and to find a way of "synthesising" Marxist economic theory with post-Keynesian Kalecki theory! I doubt that if Mandel had been at this session he would have agreed.

Riccardo Bellofiore went further and basically dismissed most of Mandel's approach on crises and in particular his attachment to Marx's law of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. Alan Freeman concentrated his remarks on Mandel's indefatigable revolutionary work.

I found myself pretty much in disagreement with the other speakers. For me, Mandel made great strides in explaining the long boom after World War II; and showing that 'late capitalism' was just that: still capitalism. It had not morphed into 'monopoly capitalism', 'state monopoly capitalism' or 'financialised capitalism', where profitability was no longer the touchstone of capital accumulation. Mandel continued to base himself on Marx's law of profitability to explain crises.

However, I reckoned that Mandel had weakened the strength of this theory by criticising what he called 'monocausal' explanations of capitalist crises, in particular



The importance of being Ernest

Luxemburg's underconsumption theory and Grossman's mass of profit theory. Mandel claimed instead that there were multiple causes: the falling rate of profit was the basis of the crisis in production; but there was also a 'realisation' crisis caused by a lack of demand from 'final consumers'.

I took the opportunity, somewhat tongue in cheek, to raise the banner of 'monocausality': namely that, if we accept a multiplicity of causes and those causes are different for each crisis in capitalist production, then we have no theory of crises at all. In my view, it is clear that behind crises in capitalism is the profit motive and Marx's law of profitability is the underlying (but not proximate) cause of crises. From a fall in profitability and the mass of profit comes a collapse in investment and eventually output, income, employment and consumption - not vice versa.¹

Another key part of Mandel's analysis of capitalist accumulation was his version of the long waves theory of capitalist accumulation: namely that accumulation has a period of relatively successful expansion with new technologies, but then a downward wave of relative decline, driven by falling profitability and the exhaustion of existing technologies. I think the empirical evidence for long waves or cycles is increasingly well supported and relevant to giving us a 'long view' on the state of the world economy.² Long waves indicate the objective situation from which we can draw some political strategy (the subjective).

However, Mandel in *Late capitalism* attempts to reconcile this 'endogenous' theory of economic cycles (first presented by Nikolai Kondratiev) with Trotsky's view that political factors must instead drive cycles, so he ends up with a mish-mash in his explanation. For me, the upward swing of accumulation relates to a period of rising profitability and the downward phase relates to when the rate of profit falls. Economic crises create the conditions for a new rise in profitability, based on new technologies that bring about a new upward wave.

This approach is accused of being 'mechanistic' and again at the session, I raised the banner of being a 'mechanist'. Since Mandel wrote *Late capitalism*, a pile of new empirical work has been produced that supports endogenously caused long waves. Global manufacturing has mainly moved out of the imperialist advanced capitalist economies to the periphery; the Soviet Union has collapsed and China has emerged as a major economic rival to US hegemony. Neoliberal policies have destroyed the 'welfare state' of the immediate

post-war period and ended confidence in Keynesian macro-management policies to end booms and slumps. Instead there have been sharply rising inequalities in incomes and wealth, both between and within countries. Above all, climate change from global warming, driven by profit-seeking 'fossil capitalism', has become a major existential challenge to humanity and nature. It is time for a new book on 'late capitalism' in the 21st century.

Value theory

I also participated in a session on the causes of inflation and policies to deal with it. Bill Dunn from Kingston University presented a counter-intuitive argument on the politics of inflation in arguing that price inflation is not always bad for working people. Bill reminded us that, when you have a lot of debt, you can inflate some of the debt burden away. And, in the aggregate, inflation could be conducive to faster economic growth. Indeed, when workers' demands for higher wages are met by objections that they induce inflation, labour could argue that inflation is not the terrible evil that it is painted.

I must say that I did not consider Bill's arguments for a less anti-inflation view by the left very convincing. I am pretty clear that the recent post-pandemic inflation spike in all the major economies seriously damaged the real incomes of most working class households. As a result, it was a key factor in Trump's sweeping victory in the US presidential election just before *HM* started.

Take the global 'misery index'.³ The impact of high inflation in 2021-22 drove it up to levels globally not seen since the 1970s. In my view, it is capital, not labour, that likes a bit of inflation (not too much, mind), as it provides room for capitalists to hike prices to sustain profits. Indeed, in my presentation, I showed evidence for a profit-price spiral in the recent post-pandemic inflation.

My presentation was based on joint work with Guglielmo Carchedi on the underlying causes of inflation. We argue that the mainstream monetarist, Keynesian cost push and the psychological 'expectations' theories are false. Instead, we offer a value theory of inflation.⁴ This argues that, as in Marxist theory aggregate values equal prices of production and money is a representation of that value, so *ceteris paribus*, if value grows, money supply will rise to match that value growth and so there will be no inflation in prices. However, new value growth (which we measure in hours of labour worked by the whole labour force in an economy) tends to slow relative to increased output of commodities. So

prices per unit of output should tend to fall, as less labour time is involved in the production of output.

But that does not happen. Why not? Because the monetary authorities in capitalist governments are tied to a monetarist theory that claims that, if they boost money supply, that will restore any slowdown in the growth of value. That leads to a gap between the growth in (circulating) money and new value growth. The difference between the two is the 'value rate of inflation'. Using US data, we find that over the post-war period the value rate has tended to fall. In the first sub-period up to the 1980s, the gap widened, so the value rate rose (inflation and stagflation); but in the second period after the 1980s up to now, the gap narrowed and the value rate slowed (disinflation and deflation). We found a very good positive correlation between our value rate of inflation and the official inflation (in the US), empirically supporting our theory of inflation in modern economies.

What can you conclude from this? First, our value rate of inflation is consistently higher than the official rate. That tells you that the official estimate of inflation significantly underestimates its true rate in modern economies. Second, it tells you that, if the monetary authorities boost the money supply when value growth is slowing, there will be price inflation (unless the extra money does not circulate, but goes into buying financial assets or is hoarded in bank accounts, as happened in the 2010s with so-called quantitative easing).

Interestingly, our theory has affinities with Mandel's 'permanent inflation' theory, as expounded in *Late capitalism*, where he says that if "money circulation has doubled without a significant increase in the total labour time spent in the economy, then the price level will tend to double too". And the quantity of money is "always combined with given ups and downs of the rate of profit, of the productivity of labour, of output, of market conditions (overproduction or insufficient production)".

But in our theory, we have defined much more clearly the determinate factor (value growth) and the determined or counteracting factor (money supply) in the movement of prices. As a result, Carchedi and I reckon the value theory of inflation has a better explanatory power over the mainstream theories and also offers some predictive power on the direction of future inflation ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com.

Notes

1. See here for a better explanation of what I mean: www.academia.edu/50577358/Monocausality_and_crisis_theory_a_reply_to_David_Harvey.
2. See my book, *The long depression* Chicago 2016.
3. This is an index of the unemployment rate plus the inflation rate: see [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misery_index_\(economics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misery_index_(economics)).
4. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/a-value-theory-of-inflation.pdf.

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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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Shortest of short-termist interests

Drill, baby, drill!

Trump wants to both max out oil production and pull out of the Paris Accords, writes **Eddie Ford** - bad news for a planet already experiencing record-high temperatures

There is a horrible irony to the fact that Donald Trump became president-elect in the year when 1.5°C plus looks like becoming the new temperature norm for the planet. A year that the UN secretary general, António Guterres, declared “a masterclass in human destruction”, with families running for their lives before the next hurricane strikes, workers collapsing in insufferable heat, and floods tearing through communities and devastating infrastructure. The year when developing countries at Cop29 in Azerbaijan want guarantees of \$1 trillion a year in funds by 2035 to help them cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts of extreme weather.

Yet monstrously the world's hegemon wants to *speed up* that process, not try to reverse it - a complete abdication of responsibility that will be felt by later generations, as the world becomes hotter and hotter. On the campaign trail, Trump repeatedly pledged to unleash oil production by telling stadium crowds that he would “drill, baby, drill!” - a slogan first used at the 2008 Republican national convention. But Trump has adopted it as his own with a vengeance, claiming this would see energy prices halved within 12 months of his taking office.

Executive order

As part of his assault on the planet that we all live on, the president-elect's team has already prepared an executive order that would see the US withdraw from the Paris Agreement when he returns to office in January - a move heavily symbolic, as Joe Biden signed up to the accords on his first day in office, and has frequently touted his administration's “green credentials”, spending billions of stimulus dollars on various renewable energy projects.

Grimly, there are plenty more executive orders being prepared for Trump when he re-enters the White House - such as one that would shrink the size of national parks to allow more drilling and mining, his transition team having readied proclamations that would redraw the boundaries of the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments in southern Utah. The former is a sacred site for Native Americans, who use the land for religious and cultural ceremonies, hunting, fishing, and gathering,¹ whilst the latter is among the most remote in the country, being the last to be mapped in the contiguous United States - where numerous dinosaur fossils over 75 million years old have been found, including the discovery of a new species of dinosaur.² During his first term, Trump reduced the amount of land under management by the federal government at Bears Ears by 85% and Grand Staircase-Escalante by



Burn, baby, burn

47% following an expansion under the Obama administration - with Biden restoring that territory in 2021. Trump perversely argued that the expansion under Obama amounted to “a massive federal land grab” and an “egregious abuse of federal power”, while shrinking their size would “give that power back to the states and to the people where it belongs.”

Trump is also expected to end the pause on permitting new liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports to big markets in Asia and Europe - something implemented by Biden in January in order to complete a study on their environmental and economic impact. Furthermore, he is likely to revoke a waiver that allows California to have tighter pollution standards than the rest of the country. Given that it is the most populous state in the US - and indeed the largest sub-national economy in the world, with a \$4 trillion gross state product - this decided what *America's* standards would be.

According to the most recent reports, the transition team is drawing up orders that would eliminate federal offices working on “environmental justice” - a Harris-Biden administration effort to reduce the “disproportionate impacts from climate change and pollution” on poor communities. Also being discussed is moving the Environmental Protection Agency and its 7,000 federal workers out of Washington DC, and the president-elect is planning to appoint an “energy tsar” to lead efforts aimed at promoting oil, gas and coal production and slashing regulations.

Still, all this is to be expected from a man who has repeatedly dismissed climate science as a “hoax” and unsurprisingly received \$14.1 million or more from the oil and gas industry during his election campaign, making it his fourth-biggest source of cash - though short of the £1 billion he directly requested from oil executives with promises that he would scrap environmental rules.³

It is worth mentioning that the president elect has vowed to repeal what he called the “socialist”

Inflation Reduction Act. This is a piece of legislation that has delivered an estimated \$450 billion in private investment into the US energy sector, and it has been estimated that its repeal would result in a 17% drop in new renewable capacity additions from 2025 to 2035, with offshore wind falling by as much as 45%. However, according to a *Financial Times* analysis, an estimated three-quarters of all manufacturing projects announced in the first year of the law's passage benefited Republican districts, and 18 Republicans in the House of Representatives put their names to a letter protesting against “prematurely repealing energy tax credits”.

In an ominous sign of what it is to come, this week it was announced that Elon Musk, along with ex-presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, had been tasked to lead the newly proposed Department of Government Efficiency (Doge) - a reference to the name of the cryptocurrency, Dogecoin, which Musk promotes, the value of which has more than doubled since election day, tracking a surge in cryptocurrency markets on expectations of a softer regulatory ride under a Trump administration. Despite the name, the department will not be an actual government agency - Trump has issued a statement saying that Musk and Ramaswamy will work from outside government to advise the White House on how to “drive large-scale structural reform, and create an entrepreneurial approach to government never seen before”. He added that the dynamic duo would “shock” government systems.

Baku

Last year global carbon missions reached a staggering 40.6 billion tonnes - a record that is expected to be broken by the end of 2024 - and atmospheric carbon levels are now more than 50% higher than they were in pre-industrial days. All this explains why 1.5°C has become the “norm”, though in reality it will almost certainly be far higher than that.

At last year's Cop28 summit in Dubai, it was agreed to “transition away” from fossil fuels. Incredibly, this was the first time that there had been an international commitment to tackle the root cause of the climate crisis - taking three decades of negotiations to get to the stage where this pathetically weak statement could be agreed globally. It obviously falls far short of the full-blooded “phasing out” of fossil fuels that is needed if we are to stand a chance of surviving as a human civilisation.

New data

But now Donald Trump is back and even achieving that “transition away” is in jeopardy. The new data, released at Cop29, indicates that the planet-heating emissions from coal, oil and gas will rise by 0.8% in 2024. By stark contrast, emissions have to fall by 43% by 2030 for the world to have any chance of keeping to the now doomed 1.5°C temperature target and limiting “increasingly dramatic” climate impacts on people around the globe.

Ed Miliband, energy secretary, has said that UK will lead efforts to save Cop29, following the election victory of climate-denier-in-chief Donald Trump. This requires building “vital alliances” with other countries, and Britain must become “a clean-energy superpower” to deliver climate action. In turn, Sir Keir Starmer announced new targets for the UK to cut greenhouse gases, and said he would fulfil a £11.6 billion pledge in climate finance to poorer countries made under the previous Tory government, but left hanging in the balance by Rishi Sunak. The UK, said Starmer at Baku, will now aim for an 81% cut in its emissions by 2035, updating the 78% pledge made by the Tories. He also announced a £1 billion investment in a wind turbine project in Hull that he said would create 1,300 local jobs, at a time when the world was standing at a “critical juncture” in the climate crisis.

Sir Keir insisted the government would not “tell people how to live their lives”, absolutely not - he was

not Jeremy Corbyn after all - but believed the target was vital to the UK's “future prosperity and energy security”. Starmer spent nearly two days at the talks, one of only seven G20 leaders attending the summit, with 13 absentees, including the leaders of the US, China, France and Germany (nor will Ursula von der Leyen, EU Commission president, be there). Yes, the poorer countries are hoping for a settlement in Baku that will deliver at least \$1 trillion a year by 2035, but in all likelihood the developed countries will cough up a much smaller sum - perhaps significantly less than \$400 million in the absence of the US, now that Donald Trump is back at the helm. This money, we are told, should come from public sources, such as overseas aid budgets, the World Bank and other publicly owned finance institutions. They also want large emerging economies such as China, and petrostates such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, to contribute to the funds - funds that will be endlessly haggled over at Baku until the very last minute, and beyond, doubtlessly ending up in a diplomatic fudge, as the world burns.

Yet even holding Cop in a country like Azerbaijan must be “some kind of dark joke”, as remarked by Greta Thunberg, the famous climate activist - particularly mocking the “Cop of peace” theme chosen by the authoritarian, human rights-trashing conference host.⁴ Even the national symbol is a gas flame, epitomised in the shape of three skyscrapers that tower over the city. Azerbaijan's entire economy is built on fossil fuels, with the oil and gas of the state-owned oil company, Socar, accounting for close to 90% of the country's exports. It plans to *expand* fossil fuel production in direct contradiction to the 1.5°C target and the general goals of the Paris Agreement.

The planet continues to produce more and more CO₂ every year - vast areas could be inundated like the Netherlands and whole cities like Jakarta, Alexandria, Shanghai, Dhaka, parts of London, and so on. Then there are the disastrous consequences for existing agricultural zones, maybe with the Wheat Belt in North America turning to dust. Work for some is becoming increasingly difficult, as the temperatures get higher and higher. Meanwhile Trump says “drill, baby, drill!” ●

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Notes

- [1. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bears_Ears_National_Monument](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bears_Ears_National_Monument).
- [2. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Staircase-Escalante_National_Monument](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Staircase-Escalante_National_Monument).
- [3. theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/18/election-trump-oil-gas-fundraising](https://theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/18/election-trump-oil-gas-fundraising).
- [4. theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/nov/11/greta-thunberg-cop29-authoritarian-human-rights-azerbaijan-greenwashing](https://theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/nov/11/greta-thunberg-cop29-authoritarian-human-rights-azerbaijan-greenwashing).