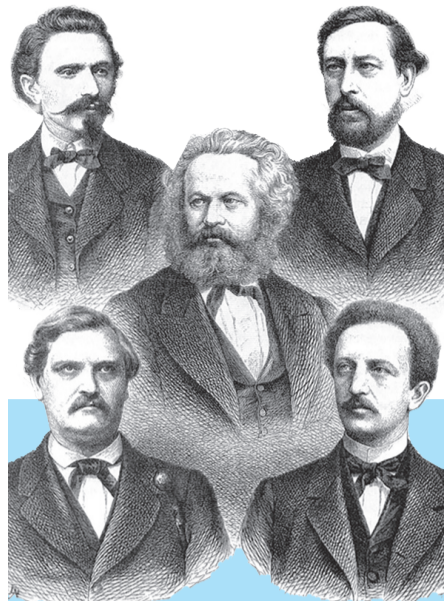


A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



**Our party and theirs: Mike Macnair sorts the good from the bad in various calls for a new party**

- Letters and debate
- Free speech and terror
- Ireland's merry-go-round
- Trump's climate picks

No 1518 December 5 2024

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

## SAUDI ARABIA SHAPES FOOTBALL IN ITS OWN IMAGE



# LETTERS



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

## Two-stages?

Comrade Conrad neatly sums up the CPGB viewpoint with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a letter on November 15: "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," he writes.

"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."

Revolution, according to Conrad, is thus a two-stage process, in which Arabs first engage in a process of national consolidation and only then set about repairing relations with non-Arab minorities within.

But this raises a number of questions. One concerns pan-Arabism itself: why should Marxists view it any less negatively than, say, pan-Slavism or pan-Germanism in the 1930s? Conrad will no doubt reply that, since Marx and Engels supported German and Italian unification in the 1850s and 60s, we should support unification too. But this is mechanistic and ahistorical. Globalisation has advanced so powerfully since the 1960s as to leave pan-Arabism, pan-Africanism and all other such grandiose third-world movements in the dust. Millions of Latin American migrants making their way north to the United States have no interest in pan-this or pan-that. Neither do millions of Africans fighting to make their way into Europe. Rather, they want freedom of emigration first and foremost, which implies integration into the

international proletariat as a whole rather than national consolidation back home.

Another question concerns the role of the Israeli proletariat. Conrad's conception relegates Israeli workers to the status of passive bystanders. First "a pan-Arab socialist republic" takes power and only then does it "offer the Israeli-Jewish working class some sort of federal arrangement" that he says Jews would be well advised to accept. Even though minorities were in the forefront in the Russian Revolution, he sees them as no more than pulling up the rear in the Middle East.

Yet Israeli workers are not some sort of comprador class. Together with Palestinian workers, they comprise the most advanced proletariat in the region - the best educated, the most technologically sophisticated, the most productive, the most democratic and the most integrated too. Admittedly, ethno-religious relations have been a bit fraught of late. But they were also fraught under the tsars. Rather than seeing such problems as an impediment to revolution, the Bolsheviks saw them as a by-product of a growing crisis of tsarism and hence the revolutionary fuel that would drive the process forward. We should see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as revolutionary fuel as well.

"The German revolution is world revolution." So Karl Liebknecht once declared. A group of heroic young Trotskyists were so impressed with the statement that they put it over the masthead of *Arbeiter und Soldat*, a revolutionary newspaper they distributed among soldiers of the Wehrmacht in occupied France in 1943. With equal justice, we might say today that the Israeli-Palestinian revolution is the revolution of the Middle East.

Conrad thus gets it backwards. Rather than ending with a Jewish-Arab settlement, the revolution will begin with it.

**Daniel Lazare**  
New York

## SuTR democracy

Stand up to Racism membership has exploded, including with their

drive into the unions, since the August far-right racist riots. But this influx has brought a drive for internal democracy. It's a confused drive, not a coherent movement (initially around the SuTR refusal to take a position on the assault on Palestine), but rapidly challenging the way decisions are made more generally.

There are several issues here. The debates on Palestine have included some important disagreements or uncertainties on Hamas, Zionism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, conspiracy thinking, etc. People feel passionately, but arguments are often comradely. Other issues have come up, from the stewarding of demos to looking at Starmer, from definitions of fascism to how or whether SuTR can promote policies to undercut racism and offer an alternative beyond 'Racism and the far right are nasty and divisive'.

In these circumstances I would argue for positive involvement in local SuTR branches and trade union groups, where much of the debate is taking place.

**Liam Byster**  
email

## Fake Koreans

Jack Conrad in his 'Notes on the war' (November 28) glibly and uncritically repeats the assertions of the imperialist mainstream media, such as "the presence of those 12,000 Korean People's Army soldiers" - and even this wild claim: "There are some 12,000 of them there at the moment and it is suggested that their numbers could eventually rise to 100,000."

Neither the Democratic People's Republic of Korea nor Russian Federation have formally confirmed that troops of the DPRK's Korean People's Army are in Russia. Of course, there has been a marked improvement in DPRK-Russia relations - largely because Putin learned the hard way that the US imperialists, Britain, the EU and Nato cannot be trusted, so has turned to the DPRK. There is military cooperation between the DPRK and Russia. There is also an agreement for the DPRK to assist in the reconstruction of the anti-fascist people's republics of the Donbass, which would involve DPRK construction workers, engineers and specialists.

The figure of 12,000 troops is ludicrous and, needless to say, can never be substantiated or verified. At no point in its history has that number of troops ever been deployed outside the country, simply because the DPRK itself is a frontline state - on the front line against US imperialism. It faces the threat of the US ensconced in south Korea, as well as the south Korean puppets and Japan. Moreover the US is trying to drag countries, such as Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and Canada, into a potential war against the DPRK. There is no way that the DPRK would send such a large number of troops abroad, as they are needed at home.

Of course, in the past the DPRK did give internationalist assistance to Cuba, Vietnam, Egypt, Syria, Zimbabwe and other countries, which involved some military support. During the Vietnam war the DPRK sent airforce pilots, as well as artillery and anti-aircraft units, to Vietnam. During the 1973 October war against the Israeli Zionists, DPRK airforce pilots assisted Egypt and Syria. Interestingly, there is a story that its special forces troops in the People's Republic of Benin actually foiled a coup by French mercenaries in 1977. However, none of these operations by the KPA

involved "12,000 troops".

So far the evidence offered by the mainstream media for the presence of large numbers of KPA troops in Russia has been shown to be based on clumsy fakes, which have been traced back to south Korea. Initially the rumour about troops in Russia was spread by the south Korean puppets and by the fascist Ukraine regime, but later whipped into a furore by the mainstream media in the west. For Zelensky the stories were another chance to play the victim and corner more military and financial aid from his masters in the US and EU.

The stories about large numbers of Korean troops in Russia are being used to further escalate the conflict and to put more sanctions on both the DPRK and Russia.

**Dermot Hudson**  
London

## Back in Berkeley

Back around 2015 we had a big problem in Berkeley, California, with fascist scum on the loose, and they were joined by outsiders.

The Revolutionary Communist Party was respected and appreciated for being in the forefront of the anti-fascist struggles. They were prominent at every demonstration (I wrote a few poems about those!). They were quite resourceful in protesting any fascist speaker on campus and I witnessed their extreme militancy; it's no wonder they were admired. Berkeley could be very proud, in that we dealt effectively with the issue of these terrorists who came with knives, baseball bats and steel knuckles. They were neutralised or driven out.

The RCP was being attacked by these fascist marauders, who would vandalise their bookstore, Revolution Books. The comrades had installed special locks, but it felt far from safe to be at the store. I felt sorry for their situation, so I volunteered when they urgently needed help moving to another space.

I would get into discussions with them about the Russian Revolution and Trotsky; I was studying him at the time - a few theories that he

developed or expanded on - but the few people I talked to didn't seem to know much about him. They knew more about Mao and Stalin - a big portrait of Stalin hugged their wall! And, of course, Bob Avakian was their leader, whose colloquial, down-home style and articulation seemed to me in stark contrast with his heady writings.

A comrade called Aaron - a long-time personal connection of mine who passed away recently - would occasionally stop by the bookstore and get into a political discourse with them. He had commented to me that he no longer saw the working class as necessarily the force to make fundamental change in the west. The RCP view is that it's the students and youth who should primarily be organised for a revolutionary movement. When I had mentioned the working class as the primary change agent, the RCP comrades offered no real response. It was hard work to help them move. But their personalities made things more than pleasant.

The RCP remains a strong presence in some areas and there are so many more stories to tell - so many traumas and struggles we all experienced or were affected by in the 1960s and 70s, from the Free Speech movement to lesbian and gay rights, Angela Davis, the Young Socialist Alliance, and on and on. This was life in Berkeley.

**GG**  
USA

## Veganuary

This is my annual call to encourage comrades to go Vegan for January 2025 (known as Veganuary).

There is no such thing as a humane slaughterhouse. They are a living nightmare for the animals, not to mention the workers who have to work harder and harder to disassociate from their labour. You don't have to take my word for it - just watch *Hogwood: a modern horror story* on Netflix, or *Pignorant* on Prime.

A better future awaits.  
**Tom Taylor**  
email

## Fighting fund

# Christmas break

Well done, everyone! Once again we went shooting past our monthly £2,250 fighting fund target in November.

Thanks in particular to comrade TT's £144 (!), not to mention other bank transfers/standing orders from AB (£20), IS, JD and MD (£10 each), plus AS (£5), we easily exceeded the target. In fact, because of two cash donations (£80 from LM and £5 from comrade Hassan), plus PayPal contributions from PE (£7) and EG (£5), our final total for November was no less than £2,402. Excellent!

But, before I go into details about the December fund, I really should remind readers that we are nearing our Christmas break. In fact next week's edition (December 12) will be the last for 2024 and we will resume publication on January 9 2025.

In the meantime though, we still need to reach that monthly target, and we've got off to a good start in the first few days of December. Thanks very much to

AC (£100), EW (£55), LC (£50), MM (£31), ST and CG (£30 each), RG (£25), DL, MS and MT (£20), OG and BG (£15), MR (£13), MM (£11), AN, CP, YM and DI (£10 each), DC and JS (£6) and DS (£5). Twenty-one donations in the first four days of the month is not bad at all! We already have £492 in the kitty.

But please let's make sure we go shooting past that target once again. Please make a bank transfer, click on the PayPal button on our website or even send us a cheque (yes, there's still time!). Go to the link below for more details of how to help us.

Please do your best and I'll let you know next week how we got on in the last issue of the year! ●

**Robbie Rix**

Our bank account details are name: Weekly Worker sort code: 30-99-64 account number: 00744310

To make a donation or set up a regular payment visit [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate)

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday December 8 5pm  
**Is Alistair Carns right? Would the British army be "expended" after six months of war? Political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee, and discussion**

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

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

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

# FREE SPEECH

## Permanent state of terror

Journalists and pro-Palestine activists are being arrested on terrorism charges. The mainstream media seems to have taken a vow of silence. So has the soft left, writes **Carla Roberts**

Under Keir Starmer, the government's use of the Terrorism Act 2000 has gone into overdrive. The previous Prevention of Terrorism Act was mainly aimed at Irish republicans and not really designed to deal with the rising number of groups and organisations abroad that were taking actions against their respective governments - and were being supported by an increasing number of migrant groups in Britain.

This was very clear to Tony Blair in the run-up to the 'war on terror'. He felt that more restrictive legislation was required to criminalise opposition to the wars against Afghanistan and then Iraq, especially in the Muslim community. Dozens of groups were outlawed in a first batch in 2001, including a few rightwing British nut outfits. The main target was, however, al Qa'eda and other Islamic groups, the Tamil Tigers and the Kurdish PKK. Hezbollah was added to the list in 2019, Hamas in 2021.

The legislation has been amended a number of times over the last 24 years to suit the changing needs of the government - most recently in 2021, when section 12 (1A) was added - clearly with the specific aim of targeting pro-Palestine supporters. It reads, in full:

A person commits an offence if the person  
(a) expresses an opinion or belief that is supportive of a proscribed organisation, and  
(b) in doing so is reckless as to whether a person to whom the expression is directed will be encouraged to support a proscribed organisation.<sup>1</sup>

This is an extremely vague formulation, particularly the second part. As Tony Greenstein quite rightly pointed out at a recent Zoom meeting featuring many of those currently prosecuted under the act:<sup>2</sup>

How would you know what the effect of anything you say or write might be on other people? This section is designed to criminalise an expression of an opinion or a belief and has absolutely nothing to do with terrorism. What you say about Hamas or Hezbollah might well be true, but because it is a proscribed organisation, it becomes a criminal offence.

This section has now become the main tool of the government to stop and intimidate pro-Palestinian activists. It is not being 'misused', but is achieving exactly what it supposed to do. Those like the Filton 10 have been held for many months, while journalists have been literally 'terrorised' by police - their property trashed and their electronic devices permanently confiscated, making it very difficult for them to continue earning a livelihood. A number of people have been stopped at ports of entry, "where the refusal to answer even one question can be interpreted as a terrorist crime", as Les Levidow from the Campaign Against Criminalising Communities explained in the Zoom meeting, "All these things clearly amount to punishments without trial".

Anybody successfully charged under section 12 (1A) could be jailed for a maximum of 14 years. This was increased from 10 years when the Counter-terrorism and Sentencing Act 2021 came into force. The government is, in effect, imposing a permanent state of terror against anyone who



One of many targets

dissents from UK foreign policy. The anti-Semitism smear campaign of the last 10 years has been so successful that there is now hardly any opposition to the use of this legislation to criminalise dozens of pro-Palestine supporters and journalists, often for nothing more than a tweet.

As Asa Winstanley pointed out, "Not a single mainstream media outlet has reported about any of that. Not a peep from *The Guardian* or the BBC." Just like during the campaign to conflate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, most of what remains of the so-called Labour left keeps its mouth firmly shut. There has been no statement from Momentum, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy or the careerists associated with the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs. Most unions too stay well clear: "The National Union of Journalists put out a statement about my case, but only after a lot of pressure from other members," said Winstanley.

### Legal action?

The question is: what can we do to fight against this draconian anti-terror legislation? A number of speakers at the Zoom event displayed a rather touching level of illusion in bourgeois law. Peace activist Natalie Strecker, who was arrested in Jersey under similar legislation, kept referring to "international law", which she thought was clearly on the side of the activists and should be appealed to.

She did not elaborate on who should be enforcing it, but would probably disagree with Lenin, who called the League of Nations, the UN's predecessor organisation, a "den of thieves". Those bodies - made up of the ruling classes globally - are not on our side, notwithstanding symbolic rulings like the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant against Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant.

While generally making good points in the meeting, Tony Greenstein himself got a little entangled in legalistically arguing the finer points of the Terrorism Act. He argued that the way terrorism is defined means it has to involve "the use or threat of action designed to influence the government". That's how terrorism is defined. But Israel is not the legitimate government of Gaza - it is illegally in occupation. That has just been confirmed by the International Court of Justice.<sup>3</sup> *Ipsa facto*, Hamas cannot be a terrorist organisation.

That is, of course, nonsense, mainly because Tony ignored the rest of section 1 of the Terrorism Act. This defines terrorism as the "use or threat of action" directed not just at "the government", but also at "an international governmental organisation or to intimidate the public or a section of the public or the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause".<sup>3</sup>

So in fact the opposite is the case: any group or organisation could be declared 'terrorist' under this legislation. As Les Levidow

argued, "This definition is so broad as to encompass the entire history of the class struggle". It does not take a genius to work out that our own working class organisations could be outlawed pretty damn quickly, once they become a threat to the ruling class.

Comrade Greenstein called for "the broadest possible alliance to defend our ancient democratic liberties like freedoms of speech and association. Those rights are part of British law. And if necessary we can take our cases in front of judge and jury and win our cases there." "Ancient democratic liberties"? If Tony means the 1689 Bill of Rights, that only guaranteed free speech "in parliament". There has been a negative right to freedom of expression in Britain under the common law, and since 1998 freedom of expression is guaranteed according to article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, as applied in British law through the Human Rights Act, but this was only implemented in Britain in the year 2000.<sup>4</sup>

The current situation shows just how fragile these "ancient democratic liberties" are and how easily the government of the day can do away with them. While some activists associated with Palestine Action or Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion might have won their cases in front of a jury in recent years, the tide is very much turning and comrade Greenstein should be careful what he wishes for.

It is no surprise that the right to trial by jury has come under attack over the last few years. Judges in cases against political protestors associated with Just Stop Oil and Palestine Action have not only restricted the defences available to them, but also limited mention of the defendants' motivations. This has led to the absurd situation where defendants are not allowed to explain that they acted in order to protest against the climate catastrophe or the genocidal campaign of the Israeli government. The retired social worker, Trudi Ann Warner, was arrested merely for holding up a poster outside a court, declaring: "Jurors you have an absolute right to acquit a defendant according to your conscience" (in the end, she was not charged).<sup>5</sup>

But there is an even bigger campaign underway against the principle of trial by jury. The government is currently considering scrapping jury trials for thousands of offenders "to reduce record court backlogs". An "intermediary court", compromising a judge and two magistrates is supposed to take over all cases "meriting no more than two-year prison sentences".<sup>6</sup> The more obvious answers - that perhaps the government should employ more people in the courts or consider options other than sending people into the overcrowded and horrific prison system - is, of course, not even up for debate. Clearly, this is a step in the direction of doing away with cumbersome juries altogether ●

### Notes

1. www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/11/section/12.
2. www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxB8LgXbN8A.
3. www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/11/section/1.
4. www.equalityhumanrights.com/human-rights/human-rights-act.
5. www.macfarlanes.com/what-we-think/102eli5/no-sign-of-contempt-the-right-of-jurists-to-vote-by-conscience-is-upheld-102j6g0.
6. www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/12/01/jury-trials-may-face-axe-under-plans-to-reduce-backlogs.

# ACTION

## Trump, Palestine and the drive to war

**Friday December 6, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, Hamilton House, 80 Stokes Croft, Bristol BS1. Andrew Feinstein and Lindsey German speak on the tasks of the anti-war movement: end the genocide and wars in the Middle East, stop arming Ukraine and counter the escalation of militarism and conflict aimed at China. Organised by Bristol Stop the War Coalition: [www.facebook.com/events/8519726311429613](http://www.facebook.com/events/8519726311429613).

## Stop arming Israel, end the war on Gaza

**Friday December 6, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, Methodist Central Hall, Warwick Lane, Coventry CV1. Speakers include Zara Sultana MP. Organised by Coventry and Warwickshire Stop the War: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events).

## Strikers! the Vale Rawlings story

**Friday December 6, 7.30pm:** Drama, Burton Town Hall, King Edward Place, Burton upon Trent DE14. The story of Vale Rawlings, who was jailed in June 1914 for allegedly assaulting a police inspector on a picket line. Tickets £11 (£7). Presented by Vale Rawlings - a 'forgotten Burton story': [www.facebook.com/events/1032746131601034](http://www.facebook.com/events/1032746131601034).

## Ukraine: step back from the nuclear brink

**Saturday December 7:** Day of action with events nationwide. The decision to allow Ukraine to fire British Storm Shadow missiles increases the risk of nuclear war between Nato and Russia. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: [cnduk.org/events/ukraine-emergency-day-of-action](http://cnduk.org/events/ukraine-emergency-day-of-action).

## Introduction to Living Rent

**Saturday December 7, 12 noon:** New member briefing, Living Rent Office, 5th Floor, 52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow G1. Living Rent is Scotland's tenant and community union. Learn about the history, vision, structure, campaigns and activities, which include securing home repairs, stopping evictions and preventing rent increases. Organised by Living Rent: [www.livingrent.org/intro\\_to\\_lr\\_dec24](http://www.livingrent.org/intro_to_lr_dec24).

## What made us human?

**Tuesday December 10, 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: 'An Xmas fairytale: the shoes that were danced to pieces'. Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.facebook.com/events/1030803608700639](http://www.facebook.com/events/1030803608700639).

## Labour's employment rights bill

**Thursday December 12, 6pm:** Online webinar to examine what is good in the bill and how to campaign on its shortcomings. Speakers include Fran Heathcote (PCS) and John Hendy KC. Registration free. Organised by Campaign for Trade Union Freedom: [www.tradeunionfreedom.co.uk](http://www.tradeunionfreedom.co.uk).

## Fenians and the 1867 Clerkenwell explosion

**Thursday December 12, 6.30pm:** Lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Local historian Mark Aston provides an introduction to the Irish Republican Fenian movement in 19th century Clerkenwell. Free entrance. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/482](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/482).

## Lajee Celtic: football, solidarity, resistance

**Thursday December 12, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, The Jago, 440 Kingsland Road, London E8. Learn about Lajee Celtic FC and its relationship with Glasgow Celtic; Gain insight into life in Aida refugee camp in the West Bank, and the vital services of the Lajee Center amidst the ongoing genocide in Palestine. Registration free. Organised by Lajee Celtic Solidarity Tour: [lajeeceltic.com/product/talking-tour-international-solidarity-resistance](http://lajeeceltic.com/product/talking-tour-international-solidarity-resistance).

## Imperialism: China versus US

**Thursday December 12, 7pm:** Online discussion introduced by Michael Roberts. Registration free. Organised by Why Marx?: [www.facebook.com/whymarxism](http://www.facebook.com/whymarxism).

## Cut the rent

**Saturday December 14, 11.30am:** Demonstration. Assemble Cavendish Square, London W1. High rents destroy communities - demand rent controls and public housing. Organised by London Renters Union: [www.facebook.com/LondonRentersUnion](http://www.facebook.com/LondonRentersUnion).

## No other land

**Saturday December 14, 4pm:** Film screening, Hebden Bridge Picture House, New Road, Hebden Bridge HX7. *No other land* follows Basel Adra, a Palestinian activist, who films his community of Masafer Yatta being destroyed by Israel's occupation, as he builds an unlikely alliance with Yuval, an Israeli journalist who joins his struggle. Tickets £8.50 (£7.50). [hebdenbridgepicturehouse.co.uk/movies/no-other-land](http://hebdenbridgepicturehouse.co.uk/movies/no-other-land).

## Jesus, the revolutionary

**Thursday December 19, 7pm:** Communist culture club online discussion, introduced by Jack Conrad. Registration free. Organised by Why Marx?: [www.facebook.com/whymarxism](http://www.facebook.com/whymarxism).

## End the genocide, stop arming Israel

**Saturday January 18, 12 noon:** National demonstration. Assemble BBC, Portland Place, London W1. End Gaza genocide, hands off Lebanon, don't attack Iran, stop arming Israel. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [palestinecampaign.org/events](http://palestinecampaign.org/events).

## 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.

**IRELAND**

# On the merry-go-round

Discontent with the government has not translated into change. In fact, what is notable is the lack of change, reports **Anne McShane**

**T**o quote from French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr, “The more things change, the more they stay the same”.

The votes have been counted and we will soon have another Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael coalition in government - this time with FF in the driving seat. In the November 29 general election it won 10 more seats, bringing it up to 48, which, with FG’s 35, leaves them just two short of a majority - and so the haggling for junior government partners has begun, as ever. There is no real prospect of Sinn Féin being able to form an alternative government with its 39 seats, as its potential partners, including People Before Profit, would add between them 25 seats at most, making 64 - far below the 88 required to form a government. There were 16 ‘independents’ elected, but they would be far more inclined towards supporting FF and FG.

The dictum that low numbers voting preserves the status quo certainly held true, with a 59.71% turnout, down from 2020 (itself an historic low of 62.7%). Voters, especially those in poor working class areas, saw little to inspire them from among the options on offer. Not because they are happy with their lot, as *Irish Times* journalists would have you believe - in fact there is immense anger and frustration directed against the political establishment. Not only has the gap between rich and poor grown even further since 2020, but homelessness is widespread, there is even less affordable childcare available and support for elderly and disabled people is in chronic short supply.

The economic boom and the ‘Apple tax windfall’ that FF and FG boast about has not trickled down - particularly not in parts of inner-city Dublin. The Dublin Central constituency, where wealth and gentrification sit alongside slum housing, had only a 52.27% turnout. Tensions have led to the targeting of migrants and scapegoating by far-right groups on social media. False claims that an asylum-seeker had stabbed children outside a school sparked race riots in November 2023. This is the patch of Sinn Féin’s Mary Lou McDonald, where her share of first preferences fell from 35.7% in 2020 to 23.3% this time round, with votes lost to Gerry ‘The Monk’ Hutch, a gangland boss from the area, who came within a hair’s whisper of a Dáil seat - much to the horror of the political elite and media.

Unsurprisingly, one of the big media debates was on immigration. McDonald had shifted her party very firmly to the right on asylum-seekers, announcing that a SF government would be far tougher on illegal migrants than FF or FG, promising more deportations and a massive increase in government bureaucracy to enforce the tougher rules.

But the governing parties were able to retain the advantage, being the ones actually imposing attacks on asylum-seekers, promising more measures by participating in the EU Pact, and refusing to bend on some of their crueller decisions. In December 2023 minister of justice Helen McEntee announced that she could not accommodate single male applicants, with the excuse is that there is nowhere for them to stay. With the country littered with empty hotels and public buildings, it is evident that there is no truth to that claim. Indeed it is an open secret that her motivation is to



**Mark Gertler 'Merry-go-round' 1916**

deter asylum-seekers from travelling to Ireland - to make it clear that ‘we’ are not a ‘soft touch’. The result is that there are now more than 3,000 male asylum-seekers sleeping in tents on Dublin streets, subjected to regular attacks and harassment from state officials, police and rightwing gangs.

In a TV debate, Sinn Féin vied with the government, rightwing independents and Aontú (a split to the right from SF) to be the most hard-line. It truly was a sickening spectacle. The successful use of these anti-migrant platforms by FF, FG, SF and Aontú meant that the legs were taken out from under far right and individual populist candidates. Their failure to get elected owes a lot more to the success of anti-migrant propaganda by government parties and SF than it does to any lessening in hostility to immigrants. The lesson needs to be learned that the main danger comes from the bourgeois parties.

## Left government

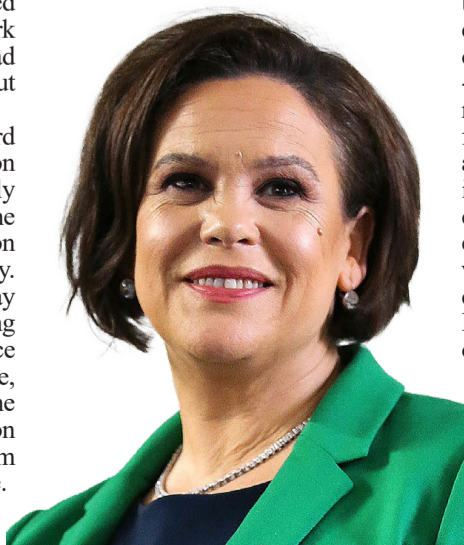
In my last article, I wrote about the debate on the call for a ‘left government’ at the national council meeting of PBP that month.<sup>1</sup> I reported on how members in the Red Network tendency and the Cork branch had asked for a review of the policy, but were unsuccessful.

In a later radio interview, Richard Boyd Barrett, official election spokesperson for PBP, successfully sidestepped a question on the opposition within his party to coalition with the ‘left government’ strategy. He continued to insist that the way forward was for the ‘left’, including SF, to come together in an alliance for government. He, of course, means the centre-left, as none of the parties he refers to have any notion of challenging the rule of capitalism in Ireland. The opposite is the case. The Labour Party has been in government with FG on seven

occasions, and once with FF. It entered coalition with FG in 2011 to impose a savage European austerity package, met by mass protests and boycotts. In 2016 Labour was punished in a virtual wipe-out, losing 30 seats.

Now Labour leader Ivana Bacik wants to try again, this time in a bloc with the Social Democrats, who split from Labour in 2015. Neither of the two wants to experience the same fate as the Green Party, the junior partner of the 2020 election, which has been reduced from 12 TDs to one - their leader, Roderic O’Gorman, in a truly humiliating defeat, having been made the fall guy for everything that went wrong by their partners in government. The Social Democrats are up for going into government with FF and FG, once their “red lines” are met. SF is too, but FF and FG have been adamant that they will not countenance it. Remarkably both Micheál Martin, leader of FF, and Simon Harris of FG continue

**Mary Lou McDonald: poses left when needed**



to insist that SF maintains close ties with terrorism and the IRA, as though the Good Friday agreement had never happened, along with decommissioning - as if SF has not shown itself to be a ‘responsible party of government’ in the Northern Ireland assembly.

In Stormont SF has acted in compliance with the directives of the British government and within budgets, leading to more austerity for the working class. PBP members facing the Six County government must have some views on the decision of the PBP nationally to include SF as one of the main components in a ‘left government’ in the republic. They know through direct experience that SF is a thoroughly bourgeois party.

## PBP

PBP itself stood 41 candidates, including its four sitting TDs. It lost one TD, Gino Kenny, and failed to get Hazel de Nortúin elected in place of Brid Smith, who had retired. Left independent Joan Collins also lost her seat, as did Mick Barry of Solidarity (Socialist Party) in Cork, but his comrade in Dublin, Ruth Coppinger, regained her seat that she lost in 2020. Clare Daly and Mick Wallace, who had been MEPs up to June, both got derisory votes. As a whole, not a good election for the left, and there are important lessons to be learned.

PBP’s 40-page election manifesto states that it “wants a 32-county eco-socialist republic, where working people control the wealth and the needs of people, and the planet comes before the profits of the few”. It then moves on to state:

The first step in bringing about fundamental change will be the formation of a left government - one that excludes FF and FG. We know, however, from the experience of other countries that such a government must be willing to take the fight to the rich and privileged. Ireland needs a party that fights for workers, the poor and oppressed with all the energy and enthusiasm that FF/FG defend the rich. Voting People Before Profit number 1 will give a strong indication that people want real change. The kind of radical change set out in this manifesto.<sup>2</sup>

The manifesto gives detailed demands for what PBP will push for or do as part of a ‘left government’. They include €300 a week for unemployed people and pensioners, and €350 a week for people with disabilities. Given that the current pension is between €266 and €276 weekly, for job seekers it is €232 and the same for disability benefit, these are utterly paltry demands. The call for a minimum “living wage” of €15 per hour is equally derisory - only €2.30 more than the present minimum €12.70 per hour. It is very far from what working class people actually need to live any kind of a life in today’s society: to pay for housing, enjoy a healthy diet, social life, travel, enjoy cultural events - all the things workers should have, but which the capitalist system says it cannot afford. I would suggest that an hourly rate of €30 is the very least needed. But what is important is your political economy behind the assessment.

The problem here and in general throughout the manifesto is that it has been budgeted for within the existing framework, with any improvement in living

standards depending on raising taxes from the wealthy and corporations - a ‘Multi-Millionaires Tax’, more tax bands for the better off, an increase in employers’ payments, and a corporation tax of 20% for large businesses. All very good, but they do not seem to have considered the possibility of a flight of those millionaires and corporations, who currently enjoy the delights of Ireland as a tax haven. Why would they stay here, when there are plenty other parts of the world willing and happy to have them? Indeed bourgeois economists and politicians are already very jittery about Trump’s plans to incentivise US corporations to repatriate production. The Irish economy is heavily dependent on these entities, with 210,000 workers employed directly, and another 168,000 in connected employment.<sup>3</sup> It is little wonder that Micheál Martin recently backed off on legislating for sanctions on Israeli products from the occupied territories, after being warned by the US ambassador that such a move would result in US businesses relocating.

SF knows how important it is to keep the US government sweet. Despite demands for Mary Lou McDonald and Michelle O’Neill, first minister in Stormont, to boycott the Patrick’s Day celebrations in Washington in protest at the US arming of the Israeli genocide, they both went and prostrated themselves before Biden. Mary Lou may have called for a left government at the 11th hour of the election campaign, but this was just her making sure of transfers from the left. She has consistently said she is open to going into government with FF and FG. She is hungry for political office - and is prepared to take those “tough decisions” to maintain profits and keep Ireland as an attractive destination for transnationals. There is absolutely no way she would be signing up to a Multi-Millionaires Tax!

In fairness, the PBP manifesto has some good demands too - the ending of deportation and for integration of migrants as equals, immediate citizenship rights for all children born in Ireland, free childcare, secular education, a national building programme of social housing, and the separation of church and state are just some.

However, in order to make sense as a political strategy for power and be in any way achievable, these demands need to be part of a minimum programme to take the working class to a position where it can take power on its own. In turn it needs to be connected to a maximum programme for communism, and be part of an internationalist strategy. In other words, it must be a programme for working class self-emancipation.

Going into government with capitalist parties - even those who say they will be ‘more humane’ - is a dead end. Once in power, the logic of the market dictates. We have learned this again and again and do not need another defeat. In fact PBP members should count themselves lucky that the ‘left government’ strategy was a failure this time ●

## Notes

1. ‘Best laid plans go awry’ *Weekly Worker* September 19; [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1507/best-laid-plans-go-awry](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1507/best-laid-plans-go-awry).
2. [www.pbp.ie/content/files/2024/11/PBP-Manifesto-GE2024-2.pdf](http://www.pbp.ie/content/files/2024/11/PBP-Manifesto-GE2024-2.pdf).
3. See [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/11/29/ireland-election-its-economic-model-under-threat](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/11/29/ireland-election-its-economic-model-under-threat).

# ITALY



Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo 'The Fourth Estate' (Il quarto stato) circa 1898-1901

# Four times in four years

Another austerity budget, another symbolic general strike. Toby Abse reports on stagnant living standards and how the centre-left is moving towards the trade union bureaucracy

**O**n November 29, two major trade union confederations, Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL) and Unione Italiana del Lavoro (UIL) called a general strike against Giorgia Meloni's third budget.

This was the fourth time in as many years that these confederations had organised such an action against fiscal measures they regarded as anti-working class and anti-union - they had struck against Mario Draghi's budget in 2021, as well as against those of Meloni in 2022 and 2023. In this context, it is worth noting that the first of these budgets (Draghi's) was approved by the main parties of the so-called 'centre-left' - the Partito Democratico (PD) and the Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S), both of which participated in Draghi's government and were therefore responsible for this round of austerity, even if the finance minister was from another party.

## Very political

In one sense then, this year's comments by rightwing politicians that the 2024 strike was 'political' - targeting an openly rightwing government in a way the unions would not have targeted a 'centre-left' one - is unfair. However, in a wider sense the strike was, of course, very political, since it objected to wage-earners and pensioners being penalised in favour of the bankers, the corporations and the tax-dodging self-employed.<sup>1</sup>

It is worth pointing out that, although there have been growing restrictions on the right to strike in Italy, and the 2024 'security' law, which will come into force shortly, makes picketing and other militant tactics either illegal or on the frontiers of legality, at least Italian labour law does not as yet make general, political or solidarity strikes illegal, in the way they have been in Britain for decades.

In case readers are wondering why the CGIL and UIL were not joined by the Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (CISL) - the second biggest union confederation, and the one that in the cold war period

was associated with the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) - the CISL, which in the 1970s was more militant than the UIL, if less so than the CGIL, has become to all intents and purposes a 'yellow union'. In practice it cooperates with the government and the employers on most occasions,<sup>2</sup> despite its general secretary, Luigi Sbarra, making more ferocious speeches at the joint May Day rallies that the three confederations still hold together every year.

This year's general strike was much more successful than last year's, since the unions called all the workers out on the same day. Last year, they had imagined that if they called it in different regions on different days, the media coverage of their demands would be spread out over the best part of a week. However, when they called a national transport strike all over Italy on one of these days, they ran into legal trouble, since transport minister Matteo Salvini - probably the most anti-union of Meloni's ministers - was able to advance a successful legal argument that a national transport strike was not compatible with a partial general strike taking place in only a few of Italy's regions.

The unions claimed that 70% of the workforce participated in the November 29 general strike, although, needless to say, the government has disputed this figure. Whilst the strike was more successful in some sectors than in others - the minister of education claimed that only 5.66% of school workers had participated and, according to the minister for public administration, the total for public employees was only 5.57% - it was sufficiently serious for Matteo Salvini, the deputy prime minister, to threaten to intervene against 15 further local or sectional strikes scheduled for December.

## Mass support

The enthusiasm aroused by the general strike amongst the more militant sections of the workforce can be seen from the fact that 500,000 people participated in the

43 rallies or demonstrations that the CGIL and UIL called all over Italy.

Such a figure shows that it was not just a question of full-time trade union officials and their friends and families being mobilised, but an event that drew in a much wider layer. The main reason for this was discontent over falling wage levels. In the 30 years between 1990 and 2020, real wages in Italy were stagnant, in sharp contrast to those in countries such as France, Germany and Spain. In 2021-23 there was 17.3% inflation, but only a 4.7% average increase in wages.

Participation in rallies was highest in the traditionally 'red regions', such as Emilia Romagna and Tuscany. The Bolognese demonstration addressed by CGIL general secretary Maurizio Landini was one of the largest, with 50,000 participants, but seems to have exceeded in size by the Florentine one, where local union officials claimed 70,000. The Neapolitan demonstration addressed by UIL leader Pier Paolo Bombardieri had 30,000 marchers, whilst the Roman - where not only PD general secretary Elly Schlein, but former 'centre-left' prime minister Massimo D'Alema were the speakers - had 10,000.

The Torinese demonstration had a respectable 20,000 marchers,<sup>3</sup> but mainstream media coverage focused on the actions of a few hundred autonomists who broke away from the main march after the rally had ended. Whilst burning pictures of Meloni, Salvini and defence minister Guido Crosetto, and attempting to occupy two railway stations<sup>4</sup> may not have been the wisest course of action (it undermined the peaceful image that Landini and Bombardieri were seeking to project), the outrage of government ministers was rather synthetic - especially since these young hotheads were met with what has become the standard level of police brutality under the Meloni administration (particularly towards anyone waving a Palestinian flag, as some of these 'incautious' youngsters did).

The small rank-and-file or

syndicalist trade unions that have challenged the CGIL from the left in recent years chose to participate in the strike, with the exception of the Unione Sindacale di Base (USB), which has called *its own* general strike for December 13.<sup>5</sup> Whilst the fact that the smaller unions were capable of forging some degree of unity amongst themselves (and of forming a sort of united front with the mainstream federations) is to be welcomed, their quarrelsome and fragmented nature means that in most workplaces serious union activists can make more impact within the CGIL.

## Rank and file

These rank-and-file unions were nonetheless able to hold 28 demonstrations or rallies in locations varying from Milan to Palermo, even if attendance at these was probably rather low. However, given that some of these fringe unions have played an important role in trying to organise workers in the logistics sector, targeting employers such as FedEx, they may have been the first to come up with the idea of striking on Black Friday, although, given the amount of publicity that this day now receives on Italian TV, as well as in both newspaper and online advertising, it is hard to believe that Landini and Bombardieri were unaware of the symbolic implications of striking on November 29.

In terms of the relationship between trade union activism and electoral politics, it is worth noting that under Elly Schlein's leadership the PD has moved much closer to the unions, especially the CGIL. During the period when Matteo Renzi led the PD, the relationship between the party and the union confederation once closely associated with the 'official communists' was one of mutual hostility, but to some extent relations then improved. However, Enrico Letta, with his dogmatic attachment to the Draghi agenda (ie, anti-working class austerity), widened the gap once again.

Whilst Schlein's leadership is constantly undermined by sniping

from the PD's right wing, which is strongly represented amongst the party's parliamentarians, she seems popular with the base, with her repeated calls for a legal minimum wage and constant demands for increased expenditure on Italy's national health service. The PD's success in maintaining its hold on Emilia Romagna and regaining Umbria from the right in the two recent regional elections probably cancels out its narrow defeat, when it stood a relatively leftwing presidential candidate, in the Ligurian regional election a few weeks earlier.

Whatever criticisms one might make of Schlein, it is hard to imagine any recent Labour leader, let alone Sir Keir Starmer, giving their backing to a general strike and addressing a rally supporting it, as she did last Friday! ●

## Notes

1. The self-employed have in recent years only paid a 15% 'flat tax' on the income they deign to declare, unless their self-proclaimed earnings reach a level way above those of most workers. Meloni's latest Budget included a 'Concordat', under which, if the self-employed agreed a set figure for their earnings over the next two years in advance, the tax authorities would make no further enquiries - a blatant invitation to tax evasion by a group which hardly needed any incentive to underestimate their income.
2. The engineering union linked to the CISL did participate, along with the CGIL's FIOM and the UIL's engineering affiliate, in a one-day industry-wide strike earlier this year. However, before the current crisis in the Italian automobile industry in general - and in Stellantis (formerly Fiat) in particular - this CISL engineering union, as well as the UIL's one, had for decades marginalised the more militant FIOM in the Fiat plants, colluding in a series of sweetheart deals.
3. The decline of Turin's traditional major employer, Fiat, now Stellantis, means that, despite the presence of the once famous Mirafiori car factory - now with a much reduced workforce, many of whom are laid off or on part-time work - the city is no longer central to the Italian class struggle.
4. Salvini had prohibited railway workers from striking, since they had been involved in a relatively successful 24-hour strike within the previous fortnight.
5. The USB seems to be the strongest of these rank-and-file unions in the Livorno area. For example, on the morning of December 2 it had some sort of picket outside Livorno's main post office, and the local paper occasionally mentions its activities amongst the Livorno dockers.

**POLEMIC**

# What sort of partyism?

Since September a range of left groups have put forward 'pro-party' arguments. Mike Macnair explores the good and the bad

What follows was triggered by Archie Woodrow's letter in last week's *Weekly Worker* ('Party press' November 28), responding to my article, 'What sort of party?' (November 21), which was written in the first place in response to *Prometheus* magazine's invitation to submit articles on the party question (and published there).<sup>1</sup> Comrade Woodrow comments at an early stage of his letter:

Macnair's claim that an online publication cannot be agenda-setting seems self-refuting - his own article was written as a response to a call-out by an online publication! And there are plenty of other examples - during the Corbyn years, online publications such as Novara Media or Skwawkbox at times had significant impact in setting the agenda for the left. Meanwhile, online rightwing publications, such as Guido Fawkes, have often had enormous effects on setting the agenda for mainstream media.

Comrade Woodrow here displays one of the fundamental common errors of the British left: the confusion between *taking initiatives*, on the one hand, and *setting the political agenda*, on the other. Working backwards, Guido Fawkes has produced a great many stories. Among these, it is only those, many fewer, stories that were *picked up* by the Tory daily press that became politically agenda-setting. Secondly, but slightly differently, Novara Media and Skwawkbox also produced a wide range of stories with ephemeral excitement around them: but the whole political agenda of the Corbyn years continued to be framed by *Britain's road to socialism* and the ideas and methods of the *Morning Star*.

(I should add in this context that the political approaches of both the Socialist Party in England and Wales and its splinters, and the Socialist Workers Party and its offshoots, are *also* framed by the political agenda, the ideas and methods of the *Morning Star* - in particular, by Georgi Dimitrov's conception of the united front, in which unity in action requires suppressing or toning down political differences.)

And, thirdly, I submitted my piece to *Prometheus* because, that online magazine being *in some respects* politically close to the CPGB, it seemed worthwhile to do so. But it is not *Prometheus's* initiative that has put the 'party question' on the left's agenda, but the election of a Labour government and the fact that the rumours of Jeremy Corbyn and others taking the initiative in starting a new left party have now largely died down.<sup>2</sup>

Socialist Alternative already published in September a pamphlet, *The new left party we need*. 'Pelican House' in Bethnal Green hosted a series of meetings called 'Party time' in September-November, with the usual bureaucratic format of 'left celebrities' discussing the party question.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, RS21 has some members involved with *Prometheus*; but its response to *Prometheus's* call seems to have been not to join up or propose a common discussion, but to issue *its own* call for discussion of the issue on the RS21 site.<sup>4</sup> Initiative thus calls forth counter-initiative to block any agenda-setting effect: a pattern that has characterised the French and



Harry Pollitt, CPGB general secretary, speaking to a rally outside the British Museum in support of the Russia aid fund, 1941

British far left since the 1970s, though this time on an unusually small scale.

I can welcome *Prometheus's* call, and offer a contribution, without in the least imagining that it is agenda-setting for the left. (I would remind the *Prometheus* comrades that an earlier small-group initiative some of them were involved in, the 'New Anti-Capitalist Initiative' of 2012, completely failed to set the agenda for the left.)

What follows is, then, my attempt to survey some of the written contributions to this discussion to date. I begin with the Socialist Alternative pamphlet, which in some respects is the most developed argument. I move from there to the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (better called 'Atlanticists for Workers' Loyalty'), calling for left unity in response to the election of Donald Trump (November 13) and reprinting their own ideas about left unity from 1988 (November 20), most recently their editorial, 'Unity: an open letter to the left' (December 4).<sup>5</sup> Next comes Dave Kellaway's 'Debate on the left in Britain - towards a new broad left party' from Anti-Capitalist Resistance November 19.<sup>6</sup> These three will be covered this week.

A second article next week will start with RS21's call and 'We like to party: a contribution to "Party time"' by Tomi A, Harry H, Lotta S and Tassie T (November 25) - out of chronological order, but representing forces on the same scale as the AWL and ACR.<sup>7</sup> Finally, I will come to the *Prometheus* contributions other than my own: comrade Woodrow's own 'There are parties and then there are parties' (November 22)<sup>8</sup> and Lawrence Parker's 'The communist party: yesterday and tomorrow' (November 29).<sup>9</sup> With

this, I will also return briefly to the more substantive arguments of comrade Woodrow's letter.

## SocAlt

Socialist Alternative (SocAlt) is the British section of International Socialist Alternative (ISA), which appeared as a result of the 2019 split in the Committee for a Workers' International, the oil slick international of the Socialist Party in England and Wales. In that split the SPEW leadership asserted what may roughly be called 'founders' rights' of the CWI secretariat to expel the majority of the CWI international executive committee (and probably the majority of the CWI's membership). The underlying political dispute concerned 'socialist feminism' and its promotion by the Irish section of the CWI.<sup>10</sup> Since then, the ISA experienced a split in 2021 of its Greek, Turkish and Cypriot sections, over 'centralism' versus 'federalism' and over 'safeguarding' policy.<sup>11</sup> And it has now experienced further splits in the US over perspectives and internal democracy,<sup>12</sup> and the disaffiliation of the Irish section over 'safeguarding' issues.<sup>13</sup>

Naturally enough, the British SocAlt is a much smaller group than SPEW: the apparatus control of information flows, in groups that separate internal discussion from public discussion, naturally produces national baronies within international organisations, and premature splittism (whether from majorities or minorities) leaves political debates underdeveloped and weakly understood in the ranks.

I refer to this history for two reasons. The first is that, because SocAlt is a lot smaller than SPEW, it is probably less familiar as a group to readers of this paper. The second is that SocAlt's pamphlet correctly makes a good deal

of the importance of democracy to any new left party. But the history of SocAlt/ISA itself implies that without an explicit, public, self-critical balance sheet of its own history, we should *prima facie* expect that what SocAlt would actually promote would be bureaucratic centralism in the standard style of Trot groups.

SocAlt's pamphlet is actually the most developed argument of those I plan to discuss - unsurprisingly, since it occupies 67 pages (albeit small and heavily illustrated), nine chapters plus a foreword and introduction. Chapter one gives the usual argument for broad-leftist projects, that Labour has decisively ceased to be a workers' party. Chapter two offers a negative balance-sheet of Corbynism, seeing it as defeated by clinging to the idea of Labour as a 'big tent'. Chapter three tells us that the Greens lack "organic links" with the trade union movement, are shifting right (ditching their historic opposition to Nato) and do not "offer a sufficient vehicle for pushing forward and developing the political struggle against this rotten system" (a considerable understatement).

Chapter four, 'An organisation of struggle', expresses the standard far-left idea that (as it is put in one of the subheads - p31) "Struggle starts outside of parliament". We are told (falsely) that "this is how the Labour Party itself broke through the 'glass ceiling' of the British two-party system, then dominated by the Tories and Liberals" (p32). Chapter five, 'A mass party rooted in the workers' movement', celebrates the anti-war independents, while rejecting "small parties such as Transform" and George Galloway's Workers' Party of Britain. A party would, then, be based on the trade unions (pp37-38); "social movements" meaning "activists organising round the climate,

Gaza, LGBTQ rights and other movements" (p38); and "smaller left campaigns in recent elections, as well as a variety of socialists" (p38).

This issue of the potential social base is mixed in the chapter with issues of democratic functioning: that party members should be activists and the party must actively organise its members (pp36-37); that "all participating groups should have the right to put their own points of view forward and exist openly within the party" (p38); and that the party would need regular local meetings, and elected officials should get no more than an average workers' wage and be recallable (p39).

Chapter six, 'Lessons from around the world', argues that new mass left parties have been created elsewhere. But SocAlt correctly points out that Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, the Left Bloc in Portugal and the Party of Socialism and Liberty in Brazil have all been drawn into the coalition game and as a result defeated (pp41-42). They go on to argue that the problem was "working to change the capitalist institutions from within" (a very imprecise formula) and that "The best, and only effective, way to win lasting reforms in parliament is to win them first of all in our workplaces, on the streets and in our communities, where the class balance of forces is really expressed" (p43).

They go on to argue that "half measures will not do" (subhead, p43). The content of what they counterpose to "half measures" is "a clear programme of socialist change" - expropriations and "massive taxes on the super-rich", together with (undefined) "democratic structures" (p44). That is, a kind of "socialism in one country", which fails to address the impact of capital flight and the need for planning *in natura* - of physical production - to address the resulting dislocation of the economy; or, in consequence, the level of integration of individual countries in the world economy.

## SDF

Chapter seven, 'Lessons from Labour's formation', gives a standard 'New Left Trotskyist' narrative of the origins of the Labour Party, starting with Chartism (downplayed), omitting the role of British trade unions in the First International in 1864-70 and the suffrage campaign in the 1860s leading up to the Second Reform Act, and repeating Engels' illusions in the failed 'Socialist League' project of William Morris and Ernest Belfort Bax (1885-87, when it became an anarchist formation) at the expense of the longer-lasting Social Democratic Federation - British Socialist Party. Omitted are the successes of socialist groups in local election campaigning in the 1890s. Equally omitted is the role of *agreement with the Liberal Party* in Labour Party electoral successes in 1906. And Labour only became a contender to serve in government, rather than a small third party, as a result of the extension of the vote in 1918 - itself a response to the Russian Revolution.<sup>14</sup>

This 'standard narrative' represents the Labour Party as growing immediately out of a radicalisation *in the trade union movement*, and leaves out of account European influences (the rise of the SPD and Second International; the Russian Revolution), the growth of left groups (SDF as well as ILP), the counter-

manoeuvres of the Lib-Lab wing, and the result: a 'Labour Party' that was from the beginning committed to voting with the Liberals on questions of defence and foreign policy. It thus imagines a *past* Labour Party more democratic, and further left, than was ever true.

Chapter eight, 'Lessons from recent history', covers Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Alliance (and briefly the more recent 'Left Unity', the Scottish Socialist Party, Respect and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition). The narrative here shows that you can take the SocAlt boy or girl out of SPEW, but it's not so easy to take SPEW out of the boy or girl. It is entirely a SPEW-self-serving narrative: in particular, defending SPEW's decision to split the Socialist Alliance in defence of federalism against 'one person, one vote'. The comment on Left Unity (pp52-53), claiming that this group was "predominantly made up of small sects", shows plain ignorance: few of the left groups went into Left Unity, which was mainly composed of 'independents'. And what brought LU down was (like Tusc) the Corbyn movement.

## Programme

Chapter nine, 'What should a new party stand for?', is a more or less standard outline Trotskyist 'What we fight for'. It begins with economic demands (pp58-61), including the indexation of wages (p58), which if it is to be effective requires worker control of the 'basket' of goods indexed, and as a result amounts to the abolition of money and introduction of rationing. And it includes, contradictorily with this proposal, the delusive demand to "tax the rich to fully fund all these services" (p61) - which requires not only the continuation of money, but also the continued exploitation of the world by the City of London.

'Genuine democracy' (p62) starts well with calling for the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. But it goes on to call for nationalisation of media, including printing presses, "open to all allocated on the basis of public support". This policy is in practice likely to mean bureaucratic control, with a threshold of 'social weight' for access: why should a group like SocAlt get access to printing? The section calls for the abolition of "repressive laws", unspecified; and "a reorganisation of the police force, under democratic community and trade union-led control": why not the abolition of the mercenary/volunteer police force, along with the standing army, and their replacement by people's militia? On the national question, the text seems to call simultaneously for independence for Scotland and for a federation: which? (In chapter eight it appears that they are for Scottish independence.)

Beyond this point, 'No to racism' (p63) makes the standard demands. 'Defend trans rights! For a socialist feminism' (pp64-65) is weirdly skewed, making the defence of trans rights (for a very small percentage of the population) primary and the liberation of women (the majority) secondary. Disabled people are then tacked on to the end of this section. 'Climate' (p65) is insubstantial. 'Internationalism' (p66) rightly opposes imperialism and Nato, and military expenditure. 'Socialist change' (pp66-67) calls for the need to prevent 'capital strikes' and urges that "to prevent this, it will be necessary to take the banks and the top 150 corporations that dominate our economy into democratic ownership and control" - a traditional *Militant*/SPEW slogan, which, as with the discussion in chapter six, assumes the practicality of socialism in a single country.

The programme is rightly presented as an example of what is

needed, not an ultimatum (p57). But it has to be said that it is fundamentally marked by the problems of the method of the 'transitional programme': preponderant economism, fashion-following, inability to draw clear lines on the question of state power, and reduction of 'socialist change' to nationalisations in one country.

SocAlt's pamphlet has real strengths. In particular, it repeatedly emphasises the importance of democracy in the party, and makes a limited attempt to address the question of democracy in the state. At the same time, however, as I said at the outset, the *assessment of SocAlt's own history in Militant*, SPEW-CWI and ISA is insufficient to give any confidence that what is being proposed is not merely to repeat this tendency's prior mistakes. On the contrary, the pamphlet *defends* these mistakes in chapter eight.

Equally, it is a strength of the pamphlet that it does not merely see the need for a new party in terms of the immediate political conjuncture, but looks back at the history of the movement, including both that of the Labour Party and of recent attempts. But it displays the usual problem of such Trotskyist histories, that the old 'official' CPGB is treated as marginal, and the way to a new party is imagined to lie through the trade unions and initiatives from some 'official lefts' (p52), without addressing the problem of the disunity of the *Marxist* left.

## AWL

The AWL is a social-imperialist organisation, which has now for decades been campaigning in indirect support of US and British foreign policy objectives and military operations, by promoting 'non-condemnation' and 'anti-anti-imperialism'. It was a pioneer of the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign that was later deployed against the Corbyn movement from 2015 and that has now become a more generalised regime of speech control. It is different from the ex-leftist 'Eustonites' and 'Spiked' only in that it still falsely claims to be a part of the Marxist left. It is thus an exact equivalent of HM Hyndman's and HG Wells's 'National Socialist Party' in 1916-22.

The AWL's 'Open Letter' (December 4) argues:

- The left must explore additional ways to unite in practical activity;
- Where we disagree socialists should attempt to spell out clearly and honestly our differences, so that political lines are clear. We should debate differences;
- The creation of single-faction, pseudo parties on the left, in which debate is stifled, is debilitating and counterproductive.

And a fourth we would like to raise now, which is connected with the rejection of the defensive, sealed-in sect politics of much of the Marxist left: the need for the socialists to orientate outwards, to the existing labour movement, with the intention of helping to transform it into a movement capable of fighting for the interests of the working class.

On its face this appeal appears sensible. The left *does* need unity in action. It *does* need openly identifying differences. The restriction of left groups to single factions based on *theoretical* agreement is "debilitating and counterproductive".

There are two basic problems, however. The first and most trivial is that the group round Sean Matgamna, of which the AWL is the latest incarnation, has a long history (going back to the 1970s) of *dishonestly* claiming to seek unity and open debate; but then after a sort of unity is achieved - one which leaves the Matgamna-ites in control

of the apparatus and finances - the Matgamnaites use salami tactics and spurious claims of indiscipline to drive out opponents and *prevent* open debate. Thus with Workers Power; thus with the 'Socialist Organiser' Labour left paper; thus with the fusion with the Workers Socialist League. Thus, at a lower level, in various Matgamnaite campaign fronts since then. Without an explicit self-criticism of this conduct from the Matgamnaite core, any unity with them for more than strike support or such-like activities will certainly lead to united formations bureaucratically stitched up by that clique.

The second and far more fundamental problem is that, given the role of the AWL in promoting the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign, political unity with it has the exact same meaning for the Marxist left that the unity of the Corbynistas with the Labour-right witch-hunters had in 2015-19: setting yourself up to promote your enemies and the supporters of the capitalist (imperialist) state.

Associated with this is the grave ambiguity of the AWL's fourth point, "the need for the socialists to orientate outwards, to the existing labour movement". The reality is that a great many socialists have been expelled from the Labour Party under witch-hunting operations round the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign. The AWL *pro forma* opposed the expulsions, but continued - and continues - to promote the 'anti-Semitism' smear. (It also continues to promote US security apparat 'news' lines on Ukraine, Georgia, Hong Kong, Xinjiang...). "The existing labour movement" here cannot mean the trade unions: beyond small 'left communist' groups, *the whole left* participates in the trade unions. It means a commitment to the *Labour right*.

We need more than a variety of left unity 'campaigns' and 'blocs'. We need a *party*. A large left organisation that had clear public anti-imperialist commitments and anti-imperialist campaigning activities could accept the existence of the AWL as an opposition *faction* - though, like the SPD before World War I, we would need to prevent the pro-imperialist opposition from controlling the party press (as in the *Vorwärts* affair in 1904-05) and deselect those voting for their line in parliament (as in the cases of Paul Göhre and Max Schippel at the same period).<sup>15</sup> The left today is in a different situation. A small new party or proto-party formation, which included the AWL on the basis of some sort of negotiated agreement with them for united action, would discredit itself among the broader left.

## ACR

Anti-Capitalist Resistance is the British section of the Mandeliste Fourth International: formerly 'Socialist Resistance', before that 'Socialist Outlook' and the 'International Socialist Group', which was the largest of the fragments of the old International Marxist Group (renamed 'Socialist League' in 1982) after it broke up in 1985-88. The Mandelites have a history going back at least to the 1980s of advocating the creation of 'broad front' parties "not programmatically delimited between reform and revolution".<sup>16</sup> The policy has, in fact, been strikingly unsuccessful. In a variety of broad-front parties, the Mandelites have played the role of left flank guards for their bureaucratic/'official left' leaders against Trotskyist and other opponents. But they invariably get dumped by these leaders sooner or later.<sup>17</sup>

In 2013, I thought that the Mandelites had to some extent drawn a self-critical balance-sheet of these disastrous operations. This, however, seems to have been ephemeral: the effect of the French Ligue Communiste

Révolutionnaire's decision to launch the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste as an openly anti-capitalist formation. Since then, the NPA was defeated as an attempt to seize the initiative by the counter-initiative of Jean-Luc Mélenchon splitting from the Parti Socialiste to form the Parti de Gauche (2008) and has failed more generally, ending in a stupid split in December 2022. Dave Kellaway's article for ACR shows a move to the *right* as a response to this failure.

The first two-thirds of comrade Kellaway's article is merely the usual analysis of the outcome of the general election, followed by a brief and ill-informed discussion of the history of Trotskyist entry in the Labour Party, with the usual Trotskyist habit (as with SocAlt) of ignoring the influence of the old 'official' CPGB.<sup>18</sup> The last third consists of a series of numbered points, some of which are good and others disastrous.

Good is number 1, "A top-down party directed by personalities or a cartel of existing left currents is not a recipe for success.", with a hat-tip to Harry Holmes's useful article, 'Revenge of the network left' - though Kellaway's point is marred by a complete failure to take a *self-critical* attitude to his own tendency's work *enabling* the 'Galloway cult'. So too number 2, "Any fake democratic structure where leaders use internet/referendum systems should be avoided." And the *first sentence* (only!) of number 7, "Any new party should allow tendencies to exist and have the right to express their opinions openly, including in any press." Number 9 - "While the strategy of a new broad party means confronting Labour in elections, this does not mean taking a sectarian line against the remaining Labour left MPs, such as John McDonnell, Diane Abbott or Zarah Sultana" - expresses a sound general principle.

Numbers 10-12 are merely 'motherhood and apple pie': the new party should aim to build inside the trade unions (as I said above, the existing left routinely does so); it will need to prioritise recruiting youth and bringing them on to leadership; it "should be intervening culturally too". So too number 5, "eco socialism": real issues, but not addressed effectively by tailing the greens; and number 8, "Whatever happens, we need to be modest and cautious".

Ambiguous is number 3, "Caucus rights for LGBTQ and black, women and disabled members should be recognised". The *right* to caucus is merely a necessary consequence of the right to form tendencies or factions. *Compulsory* caucuses or caucuses with 'official standing' are disastrous - as we already saw in Left Unity and have seen many times before.

Bad are number 4, "The programme and policies of the new party should reflect a broad class struggle party and not a revolutionary Marxist one." And, going along with it, number 6:

A flexible approach to international issues like Ukraine or Palestine will be necessary if we want to be broad-based. Solidarity with Palestine against the Israeli state and a right to resistance, an end of occupation and the right to return would need to be the minimum basis. But a new party could remain open about a two-state or one-state solution. On Ukraine we would need to agree on Russia withdrawal, a ceasefire and self-determination, but leaving the arms issue for further debate.

A party that was pro-Ukraine would be pro-Nato, pro-US and pro-British imperialism.

Equally disastrous is the rest of number 7:

However, we would have to encourage currents to not pre-

caucus every decision and policy. Once the basic principles were agreed, debate going beyond that - the sort of discussions a revolutionary Marxist party would have needs to be set aside. Otherwise you have a continual debate like we had in Left Unity around programme and workers' militias. This is one of the most difficult things to manage. If you have an open, democratic party, it is difficult to stop revolutionary currents joining, but how do you stop their 'raids' and endless propagandising? I think you have to make sure there is enough of a genuine mass base and healthy local groups that have a majority who are not already members of organised groups.

This proposal is, in substance, to deny the possibility of the new party being politically democratic. Suppose you exclude the groups. The reality is that the issues of difference will arise *among the independents themselves*. It is just the same as Jim Sillars purging the Trots in the Scottish Labour Party in the 1970s, or Arthur Scargill's successive purges in the Socialist Labour Party in the 1990s. This sort of control would in practice sterilise any new party. It would also *guarantee* the repetition of the pattern of Mandeliste failure in 'new parties of the left' ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1516/what-sort-of-party; and prometheusjournal.org/2024/11/26/why-a-party-and-what-sort.
2. See, for example, Carla Roberts, 'Whimpering out of existence' *Weekly Worker* November 14: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1515/whimpering-out-of-existence.
3. www.tickettailor.com/events/pelicanhouse/1390711.
4. revsoc21.uk/2024/11/25/is-it-time-for-a-new-left-party-in-britain.
5. Issues available at www.workersliberty.org/index.php/solidarity-all.
6. anticapitalistresistance.org/debate-on-the-left-in-britain-towards-a-new-broad-party.
7. See above, note 4.
8. prometheusjournal.org/2024/11/22/there-are-parties-and-then-there-are-parties.
9. prometheusjournal.org/2024/11/29/the-communist-party-yesterday-and-tomorrow.
10. Covered by Paul Demary in this paper (articles at weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/categories/socialist-party-in-england-and-wales).
11. www.internationaliststandpoint.org/why-we-disaffiliate-from-the-isa-open-letter-by-the-isa-sections-in-greece-turkey-and-cyprus.
12. www.documentcloud.org/documents/25041448-why-were-launching-revolutionary-workers-leaving-socialist-alternative.
13. www.socialistparty.ie/2024/07/a-marxist-international-must-be-socialist-feminist.
14. On the defects of the standard leftist history see my own review of Graham Bash's and Andrew Fisher's *100 years of Labour in Weekly Worker* September 27 2006: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/642/100-years-hard-labour/, and for some *possible* theoretical underpinnings my 2009 'Labour Party blues' (July 22 2009): weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/779/labour-party-blues; and 'Making and unmaking Labour' (July 29 2009): weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/780/making-and-unmaking-labour.
15. B Lewis, 'Sources, streams and confluence' *Weekly Worker* August 25 2016: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1119/sources-streams-and-confluence.
16. In fact, this policy goes back substantially further, at least to broad-front operations in the Belgian Socialist Party in the early 1960s and in the British Labour Party in the later 1960s. It may have its roots in the role of Pierre Frank, who was a broad-front advocate and operator in the 1930s in the reconstitution of the Fourth International in Europe from 1945.
17. See M Macnair, 'The Fourth International and failed perspectives' *Weekly Worker* June 6 2012: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/917/the-fourth-international-and-failed-perspectives; and 'Strategy and freedom of criticism' (June 13 2012): weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/918/strategy-and-freedom-of-criticism; also 'Broad parties: theories of deception' (June 20 2013): weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/967/broad-parties-theories-of-deception.
18. For a little more depth, see M Macnair, 'In, out, shake it all about' *Weekly Worker* October 28 2010: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/839/in-out-shake-it-all-about; 'Entries and exits' (November 4 2010): weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/840/entries-and-exits; 'Dances with scabs' (November 11 2010): weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/841/dances-with-scabs.

**COP29**

# Planning, not pricing

As Cop29 demonstrated, the world's states have no solution to climate change. Michael Roberts shows the danger now that global temperatures will head to 2°C and way beyond, with disastrous consequences

There was a tortuous and painful end to Cop29, the international climate change conference held in oil-rich Baku, Azerbaijan from November 11-22.

The main issue was how much the rich countries would hand over to the poor countries to pay for the measures to mitigate global warming and handle the damage caused by rising greenhouse gas emissions. The finance target set was for more than \$1.3 trillion a year by 2035, but the final deal was based on just \$300 billion in actual grants and low-interest loans from the developed world. The rest would have to come from private investors and perhaps levies on fossil fuels and frequent flyers - the details of which remained vague.

The offer from the 'developed' countries, funded from their national budgets and overseas aid, is supposed to form the inner core of a so-called 'layered' finance settlement, accompanied by a middle layer of new forms of finance, such as new taxes on fossil fuels and high-carbon activities, carbon trading and 'innovative' forms of finance, and an outermost layer of investment from the private sector, into projects such as solar and wind farms. This was a 'Cop-out' from providing real money transfers.

At Cop29, there was no further talk of "the transition away from burning fossil fuels", as pledged by leaders of the world's nations just a year ago, with 2024 on track to set another new record for global carbon emissions.

## Emissions

The latest data indicate that the planet-heating emissions from coal, oil and gas will rise by 0.8% in 2024. In stark contrast, emissions have to fall by 43% by 2030 for the world to have any chance of keeping to the 1.5°C temperature rise target set by the Cop Paris agreement. That target is dead and the planet is heading fast towards a 2.0°C rise (and above) compared to pre-industrial times. Indeed, current policies put the temperature on track for a 2.7°C rise. The expected level of global heating by the end of the century has not changed since 2021, with "minimal progress" made this year, according to the Climate Action Tracker project.<sup>1</sup>

Changes in average global temperatures that sound small can lead to massive human suffering. Last month, a study found that half of the 68,000 heat deaths in Europe in 2022 were the result of the 1.3°C of global heating the world has seen so far. At the higher temperatures that are projected for the end of the century, the risk of irreversible and catastrophic extremes is also set to soar. Researchers warned that their median warming estimate of 2.7°C by 2100 had a wide enough margin of error that it could translate into far hotter temperatures than scientists were expecting. "There is a 33% chance of our projection being 3°C or higher, and a 10% chance of it being 3.6°C or higher," said Sophia Gonzales-Zuñiga of Climate Analytics. The latter would be "absolutely catastrophic", she added.

And it is not just carbon emissions. The fossil fuel industry emits dangerous amounts of its methane emissions - the most damaging of the greenhouse gases. While it may not persist as long in the atmosphere



Prime ministers, presidents and ministers: photo op in Baku

as carbon dioxide, over a 20-year timescale methane is 80 times more potent at trapping heat. It has been responsible for an estimated 30% of the world's warming since the industrial revolution.

Methane emissions are rising at a record rate, according to a study published in September in the journal *Earth System Science Data*. Over the past two decades, they have increased by around 20%. Atmospheric concentrations of the gas are now more than 2.6 times higher than in pre-industrial times - the highest they have been in at least 800,000 years. Fossil fuel air pollution is already responsible for one in five deaths worldwide - roughly the population of New York. In the US, 350,000 premature deaths are attributed to fossil fuel pollution. Mainstream economics has failed to recognise the scale and impact of greenhouse gas emissions on the world economy.

William Nordhaus was awarded a Nobel prize in economics in 2018 for modelling the costs and benefits of acting on climate change through limiting emissions - he pioneered the mainstream economic analysis of climate change.<sup>2</sup> Nordhaus constructed so-called integrated assessment models (IAMs) to estimate the social cost of carbon (SCC) and evaluate alternative abatement policies. IAMs attempt to model the incremental change in, or damage to, global economic output resulting from one tonne of anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions or the equivalent. These SCC estimates are used by policymakers in cost-benefit analyses of climate-change mitigation policies. But, because the IAMs omit so many of the big risks, SCC estimates are often way too low. The values often depend crucially on the 'discounting' used to translate future costs to current dollars.

These discount rates are central to any discussion. Most current models of climate-change impacts make two flawed assumptions: that people will be much wealthier in the future; and that lives in the future are less important than lives now. The former assumption ignores the great risks of severe damage and disruption to livelihoods from climate change. The latter assumption is 'discrimination by date of birth'. It is a value judgement that is rarely scrutinised, difficult to defend and in conflict with most moral codes.

The discount rate used to calculate the likely monetary damage to economies is arbitrary. If we use a 3% discount rate, that means the current

rise in global warming would lead to \$5 trillion of economic damage (loss of GDP), but the cost in current money of global warming would be no more than \$400 billion. So, on this discount rate, global warming causes little economic damage and thus the SCC is only about \$10/ton and mitigation action can be limited. This is what Nordhaus used in his model.

Nordhaus's IAMs have flaws that make them close to useless as tools for policy analysis. They struggle to incorporate the scale of the scientific risks, such as the thawing of permafrost, the release of methane, and other potential tipping points. Furthermore, many of the largest potential impacts are omitted, such as widespread conflict as a result of large-scale human migration to escape the worst-affected areas. IAMs do not account for risks and uncertainty. These models estimate damages each year by some damage factor  $x$ , multiplied by  $T^2$  that year - meaning the very simple damage function is a gently upward-sloping line.

Recently deceased climate economist Martin Weitzman, a colleague of Nordhaus, disagreed with this approach to 'discounting' the future. Weitzman pointed out the tremendous uncertainty in the forecasts of climate impacts, including tipping points, large error bars and 'unknown unknowns'. In economics-speak, he characterised this as an enormous "downside risk", including a potentially small - but fundamentally unknown - chance of total human annihilation.

Econometric calculations based on past behaviour ignore not only the 'tipping points', like methane releases from the melting permafrost, but also the ones that are far easier to see, like the Great Salt Lake running dry. Society, too, has tipping points; infrastructure has breaking points; ecosystems have thresholds; after some level of temperature rise, crops do not lose productivity - they just die (it is the same with humans).

## Market 'solutions'

Despite the huge flaws in IAMs, they continue to have influence on policy - in particular to advocate 'market solutions' to climate change that do not require public investment in climate control or public ownership of the fossil fuel industry.

Nordhaus's IAMs assume that the world economy will have a much larger GDP in 50 years, so that, even if carbon emissions rise as predicted, governments can defer the cost of mitigation to the future.

In contrast, if you apply stringent carbon abatement measures - eg, ending all coal production - you might lower growth rates and incomes and so make it more difficult to mitigate in the future. Instead, according to Nordhaus, with carbon pricing and taxes we can control and limit emissions without reducing fossil fuel production and consumption at source.

This is the tobacco/cigarette pricing and taxing solution. The higher the tax or price, the lower the consumption, without touching the tobacco industry. Leaving aside the question of whether smoking has really been eradicated globally by pricing adjustments, can global warming really be solved by market pricing? Market solutions to climate change are based on trying to correct 'market failure' by incorporating the nefarious effects of carbon emissions via a tax or quota system. The argument goes that, as mainstream economic theory does not incorporate the social costs of carbon into prices, the price mechanism must be 'corrected' through a tax or a new market.

## Global market

Countries agreed a deal at Cop29 on rules for a global market to buy and sell carbon credits that proponents say will mobilise billions of dollars into new projects to help fight global warming. Yet carbon credits have proved to be faked.<sup>3</sup> This approach is hopelessly inadequate and unworkable. The world's clean energy plans (and they are only 'plans') still fall almost one-third short of what is needed to reach that figure. And to reach the necessary level of investment, climate finance will need to increase to about \$9 trillion a year globally by 2030, according to the Climate Policy Initiative. The \$1.3 trillion target set by Cop29 (and not met anyway) is miles short.

Why is the climate target not being met? Why is the necessary finance not forthcoming? It is not the cost price of renewables, which have fallen sharply in the last few years. The problem is that governments are insisting that private investment should lead the drive to renewable power. But private investment only takes place if it is profitable to invest.<sup>4</sup>

Profitability is the problem. Average profitability globally is at low levels and so investment growth in everything has similarly slowed. Ironically, lower prices for renewables drag down the profitability of such investments. Solar panel manufacturing is suffering a severe profit squeeze, along with operators of solar farms. This reveals the

fundamental contradiction in capitalist investment between reducing costs through higher productivity and slowing investment because of falling profitability.

Market solutions will not work, because for capitalist companies it is just not profitable to invest in climate change mitigation. As the International Monetary Fund itself put it,

Private investment in productive capital and infrastructure faces high upfront costs and significant uncertainties that cannot always be priced. Investments for the transition to a low-carbon economy are additionally exposed to important political risks, illiquidity and uncertain returns, depending on policy approaches to mitigation as well as unpredictable technological advances.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed: "... there is not only a missing market for current climate mitigation, as carbon emissions are currently not priced, but also missing markets for future mitigation, which is relevant for the returns to private investment in future climate mitigation technology, infrastructure and capital." In other words, it ain't profitable to do anything significant.

A global plan could steer investments into things society needs, like renewable energy, organic farming, public transportation, public watersystems, ecological remediation, public health, quality schools and other currently unmet needs. And it could equalise development the world over by shifting resources out of useless and harmful production in the north and into developing the south, building basic infrastructure, sanitation systems, public schools, healthcare. At the same time, a global plan could aim to provide equivalent jobs for workers displaced by the retrenchment or closure of unnecessary or harmful industries.

In other words, planning, not pricing. But Cop29 offered nothing like that! ●

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

## Notes

- [1. climateactiontracker.org/publications/the-climate-crisis-worsens-the-warming-outlook-stagnates](https://climateactiontracker.org/publications/the-climate-crisis-worsens-the-warming-outlook-stagnates).
- [2. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2018/10/09/climate-change-and-growth-nordhaus-and-romer](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2018/10/09/climate-change-and-growth-nordhaus-and-romer).
- [3. time.com/6264772/study-most-carbon-credits-are-bogus](https://time.com/6264772/study-most-carbon-credits-are-bogus).
- [4. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/06/23/fixing-the-climate-it-just-aint-profitable](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/06/23/fixing-the-climate-it-just-aint-profitable).
- [5. www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/001/2019/185/article-A001-en.xml](https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/001/2019/185/article-A001-en.xml).



USA

# Let them drink dirty water

Eddie Ford looks at the environmental disaster that threatens with the appointment of climate deniers, cronies and billionaires committed to ending what they call ‘excessive regulations’

Donald Trump’s cabinet picks are unquestionably a bunch of freaks and weirdos, if not the positively unhinged - the name Robert F Kennedy Jr immediately springs to mind. But, though they are an eclectic - possibly combustible - bunch of characters with a cult-like devotion to the president-elect that matches many of those who voted for him on November 5, a unifying theme has emerged. That is, climate denialism and staunch support for fossil fuel industries, or Big Oil, that shows a chilling disregard for the natural environment.

We should not be surprised, of course, as Trump has promised to “drill, baby, drill” and infamously said that climate change is a “hoax” just like the Covid virus. Three years ago he told the Fox Business Network that “you have a thing called weather, and you go up, and you go down” - saying that, if you go back to the 1920s, “they were talking about a global freezing” and “then they go global warming”, before coming to the inevitable conclusion that “the climate’s always been changing”.<sup>1</sup> The same logic that says if climate change is real, then why did I have to scrape ice off my car this morning?

Then there is a variation on that theme that denounces climate policies as a “green new scam” - something reflected in his selection of people to run major governmental departments relating to the environment. People like Lee Zeldin, chosen as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administrator, Chris Wright as energy secretary and Doug Burgum as interior secretary, which you could characterise as the victory of the far-right Christian-nationalist Project 2025 or even the blueprint for Trump administration 2.0.<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, Trump claims not to know who is behind Project 2025, despite the fact that in July a CNN review found at least 140 people who worked for him are involved - including more than half of those listed as authors, editors and contributors to ‘Mandate for leadership’, the project’s extensive 900-page manifesto for overhauling the executive branch. Indeed, about 20 pages are credited to his first deputy chief of staff!

## Rolling back

When P2025 is not rolling back the long march of “cultural Marxism” through US institutions, and taking on the federal government in general (a “behemoth weaponised against American citizens and conservative values”), it wants to eviscerate environmental and climate protections through a massive programme of deregulation - particularly public enemy number one, the EPA, which is undoubtedly regarded as a leftwing menace due to its role in enforcing and regulating laws on air, soil and water quality, among other crucial environmental and health issues. P2025 does not just want to scrap Joe Biden’s executive orders on climate change, as part of its campaign to “eradicate climate change references from absolutely everywhere”, on the grounds that it is a sinister government plan to “control people”: rather, it proposes abandoning strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, such as abolishing the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, because it is “one of the main drivers of the climate change alarm industry”.

P2025 is especially gunning for the EPA’s office of environmental



There will be opposition

justice and external civil rights - which it wants completely closed down - and the organisation’s 7,000 staff, including the science advisory board, selected on the basis of “managerial skills” rather than scientific qualifications. If the project gets its way, states will be prevented from adopting stricter regulations on vehicular emissions, as California has (and is already preparing to challenge Trump’s policies), and restrictions on oil drilling imposed by the Bureau of Land Management will be removed. Of course, last month Trump announced that he had chosen Elon Musk, along with Vivek Ramaswamy, to co-lead the planned Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which will make recommendations such as slashing “excess regulations” and cutting “wasteful expenditures”.

In a perverse parody of the Marxist notion of the withering away of the state, Musk declared that DOGE will “delete itself” when its work is complete - which apparently will happen by July 4 2026, which is undeniably ambitious.<sup>3</sup> Scarily, the certifiably lunatic representative for Georgia, Marjorie Taylor Greene, who has ranted about Jewish “space lasers” setting off wildfires, has been removed to lead a yet-to-be-formed DOGE subcommittee in the House of Representatives, which will focus on plans to ‘streamline’ the government workforce.

## Flunkies

Lee Zeldin, the new EPA administrator and a former New York congressman, is a typical Trump flunkie, who echoes everything said by his mentor. In 2014 Zeldin said he was “not sold yet on the whole argument that we have as serious a problem, as other people are”, with global heating - adding, four years later, that he did not support

the Paris climate agreement, from which Trump will almost certainly withdraw the US once again.

When he ran for New York governor in 2022, losing out to Kathy Hochul, he constantly attacked her “far-left climate agenda” and assailed Democrats for “forcing people” to drive electric cars. Writing on X, Zeldin promised, or threatened, to “restore US energy dominance”, “revitalise our auto industry to bring back American jobs” and “make the US the global leader of AI” - merely regurgitating a Trump statement days before about how he will slash “totally unnecessary regulation”, “drive US energy dominance which will drive down inflation”, “win the AI arms race with China (and others)”, and “expand American diplomatic power to end wars all across the world”. No mention, of course, of the climate crisis or the need to move away from fossil fuels.

Now the energy secretary, Chris Wright, is a very similar creature - he is chief executive of the Colorado-based gas drilling company, Liberty Energy, but with no government experience. However, he has the virtue of being a major donor to Trump’s campaign and has frequently appeared on Fox News and various podcasts to extol the use of fossil fuels. In a video posted to LinkedIn last year, he told his viewers that “there is no climate crisis, and we’re not in the midst of an energy transition either”.<sup>4</sup> Like climate-sceptics all over the world, he has denied that extreme weather is worsened by rising global temperatures and stupidly argues that any impacts are “clearly overwhelmed by the benefits of increasing energy consumption”. He has suggested that “carbon pollution” and even “clean energy” are “nonsense terms” that have been “made up by alarmists”.

Proving that he was totally sane (!), in 2019 he drank fracking fluid to demonstrate that it was not dangerous, and proclaimed that the environmental movement around the world was “collapsing under its own weight”.

Then we have Marco Rubio, nominee for secretary of state, who thinks that policies to lower emissions are symptomatic of “the left’s climate-change alarmism”, and Pete Hesgeth - lined up to be head of the Department of Defense (itself one of the largest polluting entities in the world), who is opposed to the “religion” of climate change. Meanwhile, another Fox personality, the former Republican congressman and star of MTV reality shows, Sean Duffy, looks set to become secretary of transportation, despite having no prior experience in an arena that produces more emissions than any other in the US. He pondered last month on Fox: “If you say the climate’s changing, is it coming from CO<sub>2</sub> or is it coming from the sun? Why is the climate changing?”

As for Doug Burgum, the potential interior secretary, he is touted by some as a ‘moderate’, compared to the other picks, but that only shows how crazy they are. He is a keen enthusiast of oil and gas drilling, with his family leasing 200 acres of farmland in North Dakota to energy company Continental Resources, run by another major Trump backer in Harold Hamm - the plot thickens. Burgum, along with Hamm, helped set up a Mar-a-Lago dinner between Trump and oil executives, in which the president-elect asked for \$1 billion in campaign donations, while vowing to gut environmental regulations if elected. Burgum has been a vocal supporter of carbon-capture pipelines, going so far as to allow three natural gas companies to use *eminent domain* (compulsory land acquisition) to seize

land and install pipelines. At a rally in Iowa, he insisted, using some twisted logic, that carbon capture was “good” for the economy and the environment, as it would allow the use of traditional internal combustion automobiles indefinitely.

## Water wars

But the likes of Zeldin and Burgum have clear directives to oversee rampant deregulation and expedite extraction on public lands. Though billion-dollar weather and climate disasters are obviously on the rise, Trump has a history of stalling in the aftermath of natural disasters. For example, following the wildfires during his first term, he threatened California and other Democratic-majority states with delayed or withheld funding to punish them for their political transgressions.

Quite rightly, many fear that Trump administration 2.0 will reduce the amount of aid provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (Fema). Project 2025 has called for a shift in emergency spending, putting the “majority of preparedness and response costs to states and localities instead of the federal government”, urging Trump to remove all unions from the department and only give Fema grants to those localities and private organisations that “can show that their mission and actions support the broader homeland security mission”, including the deportation of undocumented people. Clearly, this approach could hamper both preparedness and recovery from wildfires and other disasters, especially in high-risk blue states, such as California and others across the west.

Trump’s allies have already begun to attack the EPA and rules protecting US drinking water.<sup>5</sup> In a letter to the current EPA administrator, Michael Regan, the Republican House leadership trained their sights on the agency’s scientific integrity policies that are designed to insulate scientists from political pressure. At the same time, the incoming chair of the Senate environmental committee has promised to target the regulation of new perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) put in place over the last year - a top priority, of course, for Trump’s chemical and water utility industry allies. PFASs are a group of synthetic organofluorine chemical compounds and there are *seven million* such chemicals - the EPA has found that virtually no level of exposure is safe to humans.

After years of industry efforts to cast doubt on the science used to establish PFAS regulations, they are being fully targeted, now that the Grand Old Party is fully in control. If unchallenged, the Trumpites and those they service could literally poison our water ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

- forbes.com/sites/markjoyella/2022/03/21/on-fox-donald-trump-calls-climate-change-a-hoax-in-the-1920s-they-were-talking-about-global-freezing.
- project2025.org.
- indiatoday.in/world/us-news/story/doge-department-of-government-efficiency-expiry-date-delete-itself-elon-musk-vivek-ramaswamy-2643915-2024-12-03.
- linkedin.com/posts/chris-wright-b8370a17b-energysobriety-activity-7021514919787319298-xpzQ.
- theguardian.com/environment/2024/dec/02/trump-allies-attack-epa-drinking-water-rules.

**FOOTBALL**

# Rules of the game

As Fifa waves through the Saudi bid for the 2034 World Cup, Paul Demarty asks what it tells us about football - and global politics



**More than MBS 'sportswashing': Saudi team before 2018 Fifa World Cup opening match**

This week, the international football association, Fifa, released its technical assessment of Saudi Arabia's bid to host the 2034 World Cup - one really wonders why they bothered.

After all, to give Mohammed bin Salman a failing grade would have been bizarre, given that Fifa - whether by collusion or incompetence - organised the bidding in a way that ensured the Saudis were unopposed. It would have raised considerable questions about the internal functioning of Fifa - even more than usually haunting its senior executives.

Even so, the thing is a whitewash. Somehow the Saudi bid came out with a higher score than the US-Mexico-Canada bid for 2026, despite the fact that there are not yet even enough stadiums in the kingdom. Thanks to recent attempts to turn the Saudi Pro League into a hot international property, basically by way of throwing infinite money at ageing star players, they are at least further ahead than the Qataris were 10 years before their own World Cup back in 2022. We expect that they will get it done - by the usual means of large-scale migrant slave labour.

This thoroughly expected news followed months of desperate lobbying by various NGOs, from the International Trade Union Confederation (successor to the old CIA-backed International

Confederation of Free Trade Unions) to Amnesty International, begging Fifa to decide that Saudi Arabia was unfit to host a major sporting competition of this nature. Their complaints will need little introduction to readers of this paper, I expect - the aforementioned slave labour looms large for the ITUC, as indeed it does for Amnesty, whose Steve Cockburn denounced Fifa's "astonishing whitewash of the country's atrocious human rights record... There are no meaningful commitments that will prevent workers from being exploited, residents from being evicted or activists from being arrested."<sup>1</sup>

Amnesty also noted that Fifa has finally snuck out a long-delayed independent report into the abuses of workers in relation to Qatar 2022. The report finds that it is liable for compensation to workers super-exploited - in many cases to their death - in the construction of stadia and related infrastructure. But it was published two days after Fifa announced all its "legacy" funding, none of which includes any such compensation. Nicely done!

One has to admire the likes of Amnesty, at least for its tenacity in the face of surely insuperable odds. Like a plucky League Two outfit drawing Manchester City away in the cup - at least, before City's current wobble - they get on the team bus with fire in their bellies and a song in their hearts,

before dutifully getting skinned alive. The prospect of denying MBS his big football party was already lost years ago, when indeed it proved impossible to stop the Qatar train from reaching its destination. Qatar's award set important precedents, for holding the tournament in mid-winter, for accepting that all the infrastructure can be built after the fact. It was also felt keenly by the Saudis as an insult, as they and the Qataris compete for influence in the region and beyond. MBS was not to be denied, and no kind of resistance could be expected from the stupendously corrupt clique that runs Fifa.

## Political economy

This tells us two stories, really, about the political economy of football itself, and about the development of world politics, as it is projected onto the sport - though there is, of course, no Chinese wall separating the two.

On the football side, it is increasingly clear that the dominant forces in the sport are nation-state actors. The major clubs are divided in their ownership between fan/membership models (Barcelona, Real Madrid, Bayern Munich), private equity and friends (Liverpool, Manchester United) and state actors (Manchester City, Paris Saint Germain, and more to follow). In that sphere, the state actors are still fairly well matched by alternative ownership models, but it is states that

are best placed to influence bodies like Fifa and its European equivalent, Uefa, as well as national governing bodies like the Football Association in England.

This is, in the end, because states are playing by different rules to either 'normal' capital (like the private equity people) or consumer cooperatives (the member-owned clubs). As I have argued before, it is wrong-headed to say football is being ruined by profiteering - certainly profiteering has ruined *individual clubs* who have fallen under the ownership of extractive financiers, but the sport *as a whole* is being ruined by the fact that it is *not* terribly profitable, and moreover has major owners, like the Saudis, Qataris and, until recently, well-connected Russian billionaires, who simply do not care about making a profit at all.

We got to this point in stages. Football was governed largely by a pyramid of gentleman's agreements until relatively recently. It was a professional sport, but bore the marks of the old amateur ethos of the English elite that codified many popular sports in the 19th century. Different leagues were largely separate from each other; international player transfers took place, but were rare. In some leagues, including the English, there was a strict salary cap for wages. There were mechanisms for redistribution between clubs (again in England, it

became the norm that 20% of gate receipts would go to the away side, somewhat softening the gap between big city sides and teams from smaller towns with less built-in revenue). It was a delicate balance, and had its own corruptions and defects, but it succeeded in keeping the game competitive for a long time.

Deregulation took place in lockstep with the wider victory of neoliberalism. With the rise of pay TV at this time, suddenly the money theoretically available to clubs skyrocketed. Then, in the 1990s, a series of court cases - most importantly the Bosman ruling of 1995 - made it much easier for players to move between clubs, and much harder for clubs to hold onto them. The result over time has been that vast revenue has flooded into the game, but also that costs have shot up, most especially on player wages, which now run into the hundreds of millions of pounds annually for the top clubs.

The fact that oligarchs and state owners can just plough endless money into clubs has accelerated this process, and led to a series of rule changes, especially in Europe, intended to force clubs to run at something resembling a profit. Such sustainability rules have, on the whole, proven laughably ineffectual at disciplining the state-owned clubs, though they have spread merry chaos among the lower-ranked, who get

# 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.

The *Weekly Worker* is licensed by November Publications under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence: [creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode). ISSN 1351-0150.

Subscriptions: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/subscribe](https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/subscribe)

a little out over the skis. It seemed, for a moment, that Uefa might have managed to nail Man City's Emirati owners for disguising direct investments as sponsorship deals with businesses that just happened to also be owned by Abu Dhabi - but that ruling was struck down by the European Court of Arbitration for Sport. The Premier League is going after them for similar offences right now, but it is difficult to see the club suffering any serious penalty when the legalities finally play out.

The friction nevertheless further incentivises the state actors to curry favour among the regulatory bodies. Though the governing bodies often clash and to some extent compete - especially Uefa and Fifa - neither have shown any real willingness to obstruct the subordination of the game to state interests. In an interesting interview with *The Guardian* earlier this year, Aleksander Čeferin, the president of Uefa, dismissed the reporter's concerns about creeping state ownership of clubs:

I'm not worried about state-owned clubs, as long as they respect the rules. I'm more worried about hedge-fund-owned clubs. With hedge funds, you never know exactly who is behind them. It's very hard to know because they are, many times, managing money for investors. Where I see a big difference - and maybe this is a bit simplistic - is that state-owned clubs want to win. Whether it's also for name-washing or not, I don't enter into this. But they want to win. With purely financial funds it's important to get money and winning is not the main goal.<sup>2</sup>

There is a certain grain of truth to this. Čeferin's crisis as Uefa boss came in 2021 when the superclubs came out with their proposal for a European Super League. Uefa and mass fan revolt between them saw it off, but the picture was interesting, if one looked a little more closely. These clubs clearly intended to impose a salary cap as part of their proposal; by doing so, and by creating a sort of shared franchise structure, they would make a real dent in the overweening power of the state-owned clubs. The enthusiasm of the latter for the league was tepid at best, which made them natural allies for Čeferin. His attitude signals to states with a substantial war chest to spend it on football: Europe is open for business.

## Why?

This seems the moment to introduce the obvious question: what is in it for MBS - or Qatar, or indeed the US? *Why* spend vast scads of money hosting short-lived tournaments, or bankrolling superclubs? The conventional view that one would get from an outfit like Amnesty is that this is 'sportswashing': investing in sport as a way of cleaning up a dirty reputation. As Adorno wrote of the Hitler regime's various cultural extravaganzas, "The more torture went on in the basement, the more insistently they made sure the roof rested on columns."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in the case of the Saudis, there would seem to be plenty of mess needing to be cleaned up, between the monarchical and religious tyranny, the recent belligerence towards its neighbours, the regrettable habit of chopping journalists to pieces in its embassies, and so on and so forth. According to the 'sportswashing'

theory, magicking a league out of thin air and buying a World Cup from Fifa is a way of providing welcome distraction from all that wickedness, as would be the creation of the breakaway LIV golf tour and other such endeavours.

The problem with this theory is that, if 'sportswashing' is indeed the intent, it clearly does not work. Those who take the money from unpleasant regimes like the Saudis often defend themselves by saying that sport will actually draw attention to the problems, so we shouldn't worry about it. On the face of it, this seems to be true. How many people had heard of the kafala system<sup>3</sup> before Qatar was awarded the 2022 World Cup? How much of that competition's early days were dominated by desperate attempts to manage the objections of gay rights groups, and then the unconscionable decision to ban booze?

It is better to think about this kind of investment as 'soft power'. Owning a premiership club is a kind of foreign direct investment with a great deal of cultural cachet attached to it. Hosting a World Cup in the end means inviting hundreds of thousands of people to your country and turning it into a great flashing billboard for your current national myth. Both are opportunities to make friends in the bureaucracies of other states, and to increase the cost of alienating the owner/host country.

For the gulf states in particular, there is the imperative looming over them to find some *other* role in global affairs than merely providing hydrocarbons. Different leaders have different ideas. MBS has his utopia of ultra-high-tech smart cities, so far including the 'Neom project' and the even weirder 'Line' (each of which are to have a World Cup stadium). The Emiratis and Qataris seem rather to fancy themselves as new-model merchant republics (albeit *not* republics ...), and are competing with other great powers for influence in Africa and elsewhere. For both strategies, football (and sport in general) slots in nicely: it becomes a shop window for the new-model gulf state.

## Geopolitics

Here we have arrived at the plain questions of global politics. And what is notable about these three modernisation projects is how none of them make any pretence of democratisation.

There used to be a story that would be told by western politicians when they cosied up to the likes of the Saudis - that, sure, there were problems with these regimes, but the best way to liberalise them would be to build up trade links and engage with them (for whatever reason, this logic did not apply to Saddam Hussein!). Indeed, the regimes would often promote that idea about themselves. Saif Gaddafi joked about the progress still to come in a speech to the London School of Economics; Bashar al-Assad, for a time, sold himself in the west as a liberal reformer.

All of this rhetoric is notably absent today. MBS has, it is true, loosened some of the restrictions on life for women in Saudi Arabia, and in doing so asserted the crown's power over the clerisy. There is no question of his loosening the power of the crown itself, which he has centralised by repression of junior members of his own family. The high-tech mumbo-jumbo he comes out with is very similar to the big thoughts of a certain Anthony Charles Lynton Blair, who - now that he no longer has to bother with elections - does not pretend any more that he thinks democracy is a good idea either.

There is periodically talk about (in the words of the leftwing podcast *Aufhebunga Bunga*) "the end of the end of history", which is to say, the

definitive end of the triumphant period of American power and the assumption that the revealed default state of human civilisation is the liberal state ruling over a free market economy - the thesis most famously associated with Francis Fukuyama. There was a bit of this talk after the 2008 crash, and more of it after Brexit and the 2016 US election, and now there is more of it again with Trump's imminent return to the White House.

This talk is usually focused on the economic side of the 'end of history' thesis - neoliberalism and its often-announced demise. Yet it seems far clearer that the 'political' side - the supremacy of political regimes based on human rights and the rule of law - is at death's door. The Chinese state is the sole potential peer rival of the US, and has found its dictatorial structure no obstacle. Twenty-five years ago, Bill Clinton scoffed at the Chinese "great firewall"; today his political heirs panic that they do not have one of their own to protect America from "misinformation". The similarly populous Indian state has been, for some time now, under the control of the pogromist-sectarian Hindutva movement. The Putin regime sharply turned away from liberalism in Russia.

All these regimes (and, of course, the gulf states for that matter) can cheerily point to western hypocrisy - after all, our oh-so-liberal states, with their invincible respect for human rights and the rule of law, are currently bankrolling a genocide. It has never been more obvious that the vaunted 'rules-based international order' has only one real 'rule' - pay respect to the boss. They can also point to the scoreboard, so to speak; look at the attempts at liberal nation-building, in Iraq and Afghanistan, or in Libya. Is this something to aspire to?

All of this is downstream of the relative decline of US power, the ever greater exertions required to keep the top spot. In a sense, Fifa was way ahead of the curve on this. When Fifa president Gianni Infantino denounced human rights-based attacks on Qatar as a matter of European neocolonialism, he was essentially continuing the policy of his predecessor, Sepp Blatter, who strengthened the organisation against its great rival, Uefa, by currying favour with all the other regional football federations. This involved stupendous corruption, but gave the Fifa leadership clique a power base against the domestic leagues of Europe and the entitlement felt by the main imperialist countries to host the major tournaments.

They could only do it, however, if they were prepared to dispense with the hot air about human rights that was *de rigueur* in global civil society at the 'end of history'. As they did so, smug journalists in the west accused Fifa of being dinosaurs - a weird clique of old men still putting the fix in, as if it were the 1950s. In truth, they were miles ahead of the curve ●

[paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk](mailto:paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk)

## Notes

1. [www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/mens-world-cup-fifa-produces-astonishing-whitewash-saudi-arabias-human-rights-record](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/mens-world-cup-fifa-produces-astonishing-whitewash-saudi-arabias-human-rights-record).
2. [www.theguardian.com/football/2024/jan/27/aleksander-ceferin-interview-uefa-europe-football](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2024/jan/27/aleksander-ceferin-interview-uefa-europe-football).
3. See [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kafala\\_system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kafala_system).

Sign up to CPGB news




bit.ly/CPGBbulletin

Friday January 17 to Sunday January 19

## Online Communist University Winter 2025



### War and peace

**Friday 5pm**  
War is the continuation of politics/policy by other means  
Speaker: Mike Macnair



**Saturday 11am**  
Workers' militia, people's militia, weapons of peace  
Speaker: Jack Conrad



**Saturday 4pm**  
Israel's warmongering and how to respond  
Speakers: Moshé Machover and Yassamine Mather



**Sunday 11am**  
Aukus and the coming war with China  
Speaker: Marcus Strom



**Sunday 4pm**  
Revolutionary defeatism  
Speaker: Lars T Lih



Organised by CPGB and Labour Party Marxists  
Free registration for all sessions at [communistparty.co.uk/cu](https://communistparty.co.uk/cu)

# Regional causes and effects

Civil war has erupted once again in Syria. Turkey is clearly a prime mover, but what about Israel? Then there is Russia and Iran. **Yassamine Mather** investigates what is a tangled web

On November 27, rebel forces launched the biggest challenge to the Syrian government in recent years. Within three days, they had gained control of large parts of Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city. Now there is an advance on Hama. This surprise offensive prompted Russia to conduct airstrikes on Aleppo for the first time since 2016, while the Syrian army hurriedly withdrew.

The takeover of Aleppo was led by the Islamist group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which has a long history in Syria's civil war. HTS was initially founded in 2011 under the name Jabhat al-Nusra, as a direct affiliate of al Qa'eda. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the so-called Islamic State, also played a role in its formation.

At that time, al-Nusra was considered one of the most effective and deadly groups opposing Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. However, its main driving force was not revolutionary aspirations, but a thoroughly reactionary Islamism. This led to conflicts with the main rebel coalition fighting under the banner of the Free Syrian Army.

In 2016, the group's leader, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, publicly severed ties with al Qa'eda, dissolved al-Nusra and formed a new organisation. A year later, this new entity merged with several similar groups and adopted its present name, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

## Control

So who controls Syria today? Over the past four years, its civil war seemed to have ended. Assad's government faced little opposition in major cities, though some areas remained outside his control - including predominantly Kurdish areas in the east, which have largely been outside Syrian government control since the early years of the conflict.

However, in the south, where the uprising against Assad began in 2011, sporadic but limited unrest continues. In the vast Syrian Desert (Badiya), remnants of IS remain a 'security threat', particularly during the truffle-harvesting season, when locals venture into these areas in search of the lucrative fungi. Meanwhile, in the north-west, the Idlib province remains under the control of extremist Islamist and rebel groups, who were driven there during the peak of the civil war. The dominant force in Idlib was HTS.

Until last week's attacks, HTS had shown little sign of attempting to revive Syria's civil war. The group had long consolidated its power base in Idlib, effectively running the local government. However, its efforts to gain legitimacy have been hindered by allegations of human rights abuses. Since breaking ties with al Qa'eda, in its official propaganda HTS declares its goal of establishing a fundamentalist Islamic state in Syria. It no longer seeks to create a broader caliphate, as IS once aimed



Improvised artillery in Aleppo

to achieve.

Over the years, Idlib has remained a battlefield, where Syrian government forces have tried to regain control. However, a ceasefire brokered in 2020 by Russia (a key Assad ally) and Turkey (a supporter of the rebels) has largely held. Around four million people live in the region, most of whom are displaced from areas recaptured by Assad's forces during gruelling and deadly battles.

Aleppo was one of the bloodiest battlegrounds in Syria, marking one of the biggest defeats for the rebels. Assad's victory relied heavily on Russian airpower and Iranian ground forces, mainly via Iranian-backed militias, including Hezbollah from Lebanon.

## Conflict

After 14 tumultuous months in the Middle East, the Islamic Republic of Iran and its allies face challenges not only in Gaza and southern Lebanon, but now also in Syria. Alarm bells are ringing in Tehran, as the regime's leaders see this as part of Israel's long-term plans to redraw the map of the Middle East, after attacking Iran. The Assad regime is at its weakest, mainly because over the last few months Israel has managed to eliminate dozens of senior Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps commanders in Syria, considerably weakening IRGC power in the area. After months of Israeli attacks, Hezbollah is not in a position to help the Syrian army (and here we should not forget last week's ceasefire deal between the Lebanese Hezbollah and Israel). All this has paved the way for this latest attack.

Of course, Iran has other allies in the region and by December 2

pro-Iran Iraqi militia forces were reportedly being deployed to Syria to support Assad's government forces in northern areas. According to Reuters, citing Iraqi and Syrian sources, hundreds of fighters from Iranian-backed Iraqi militias entered Syria overnight.

Two Iraqi security sources told Reuters that at least 300 fighters, primarily from the Badr Corps and the Islamic Resistance Movement of Nujaba, crossed into Syria on Sunday night, using dirt roads and unofficial routes. Separately, a senior Syrian army source confirmed that dozens of fighters from the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), aligned with Iran, entered Syria through a military crossing near Al Bukamal. The source noted that these reinforcements included members of the Iraqi Kata'ib Hezbollah and the Afghan Fatemiyoun Division, who were sent to bolster northern front-line defences.

Two other Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada and Ansar Allah al-Awfiya, announced their readiness to join operations in Syria, further highlighting the escalation in regional involvement. As far as Iran and its allies are concerned, the issue is not so much defending Assad as making sure there are no threats to Iran. They remember very well the IS slogan, 'Damascus today, Tehran tomorrow'.

This time the threat is more serious, as everyone in the region detects Israel's role in all this. I am not aware of proof of a direct connection between the Syrian jihadi groups and Israel. However, after 14 months of genocide in Gaza, there have been no demonstrations or protests in support of the Palestinians in areas under

the control of the jihadi groups. In fact, the only notable public event last year was their celebration of the assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

On December 1, Mehrdad Farahmand, an analyst of Middle East issues, told a TV channel:

It is not a coincidence that this war started after the ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel. Arming these groups and their supplies is done by Turkey, and perhaps Israel is involved in the coordination between them. In the past the wounded of these groups were treated by Israel, and I had personally prepared a report about this.

However, it is important to note that the attempt to stabilise Bashar Assad's regime has not worked. He was never going to be an effective ruler - he was hardly the heir apparent of Hafez al-Assad's Ba'athist reign, but the death of his brother propelled him to the top. His failures are also a reflection of the basic fact that in these difficult turbulent times in the region, Ba'athist nationalism is no longer a serious political force.

## Shifting alliances

Turkey, which has supported anti-Assad rebels over the years, has been implicated in the latest developments in Aleppo. While the current offensive is officially attributed to HTS and other Islamist groups, and reports suggested the involvement of Turkish-backed militias based in Idlib, the main issue for Turkey remains its Kurdish PKK and YPG opponents.

There have been clashes between the Syrian army and the Kurdish-led coalition in Syria's Deir ez-Zor province. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan says he will prevent affiliates of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) from exploiting the ongoing developments in Syria, but denies any involvement in recent events. According to Russian media, Vladimir Putin emphasised in a phone call with Erdoğan "the need for a swift end to the terrorist aggression by radical groups against the Syrian government".

On December 2, president Assad met with Iranian foreign minister Abbas Araghchi to discuss bilateral relations and regional developments, according to Iran's state news agency, IRNA. Ahead of the meeting, Araghchi stated: "I am heading to Damascus to deliver the Islamic Republic's message to the Syrian government. We strongly support Syria's army and government." He further emphasised that Iran sees "no distinction" between Israel and "Takfiri [unbelieving] terrorists", claiming that these groups are part of efforts to destabilise the region following the perceived failure of the Zionist regime.

Iranian president Masoud Pezeshkian also called for Islamic nations to address Syria's crisis, warning against potential

exploitation by the US and Israel. At the same time White House spokesperson Sean Savett denied any US connection with HTS, asserting that the US is closely monitoring Syria's situation and maintaining communication with regional allies.

There can be no doubt that the fall of Aleppo has divided Arab supporters of Palestinians. In the Syrian civil war, Hamas sided with the Syrian opposition - Iran, Assad and Hezbollah were the enemy. However, nowadays Hamas's only serious allies are the Axis of Resistance. Over the last 14 months, Iran's Islamic Republic has waged a successful campaign in Arab-speaking social media, presenting itself not as a Shia state, but as the only Muslim country defending Palestinians and all the "oppressed" Arabs. So, if Israel was hoping that the recurrence of the Syrian civil war would divide the Arab streets' support for Palestine or the Axis of Resistance, this was a miscalculation. By December 1 Arab social media was flooded with a short video of the "martyred" Hamas leader, Yahya Sinwar, recorded before his assassination, calling Iran, Hezbollah and Syria Palestine's best allies.

Despite the immediate military focus on Aleppo, Iran's capacity to maintain its regional influence faces significant challenges. Even if Assad succeeds in the short term, Iran's strategic ambitions in the Mediterranean appear increasingly tenuous, particularly with Donald Trump returning to power.

It is in this light that we should read Javad Zarif's latest conciliatory article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* (former Iranian foreign secretary Zarif is currently vice-president for strategy).<sup>1</sup> In the article, Zarif writes that Iran's president Pezeshkian faces many challenges, highlighted by the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh on Iranian soil during his inauguration. Despite this, Pezeshkian envisages a flexible, post-polar foreign policy focusing on "diplomacy, regional stability and economic growth". He plans to improve ties with Arab neighbours, while maintaining a firm stance against Israeli aggression and pursuing nuclear deal negotiations with the west.

According to Zarif, the Pezeshkian administration emphasises reducing foreign interference in the Persian Gulf and fostering regional cooperation through treaties and policies similar to the Helsinki process. Iran also aims to leverage its shared stance with Arab countries on Palestinian rights to build stronger regional alliances. The article criticises western "maximum pressure" strategies, arguing they have backfired by accelerating Iran's nuclear advancement.

Clearly, we live in dangerous times ●

## Notes

1. [www.foreignaffairs.com/iran/how-iran-sees-path-peace](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/iran/how-iran-sees-path-peace).